

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MIGRATION AND REPUTATION IN KINSHASA

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MIKILISTE, MABANGA

In 2005 Wenge BCBG gave a concert in Dublin. The concert attests to the growth of the Congolese community in Ireland, but many patrons of the *orchestre* had also come from the UK. As is the custom at such concerts, many fans came on stage and pressed banknotes on the musicians, giving above all to J. B. Mpiana, the *président d'orchestre*. The previous year Wenge BCBG had released the album *Anti-Terro*, on which a song, 'Nungu Nungu', had been dedicated to (that is, bought by) a patron called Kazadi. During the concert the band started to play 'Nungu Nungu' and, in response to this, Kazadi strode on stage and began pressing fifty pound notes on J. B. Mpiana. This act of pre-emption continued for a quite breathtaking length of time, until the sum appeared to total in excess of ten thousand pounds. Eventually J. B. himself declared, 'Ekoki!' ('Enough!') – a comment that has contributed to the mythology of the event, for, as a *président d'orchestre* and as a Luba (an ethnic group associated with particularly voracious financial 'appetite'), J. B. is seen as being all but insatiable in his desire for money. In 2007, Kazadi paid for another song from J. B. Mpiana, which appeared on Wenge BCBG's most recent album. I met up with the *orchestre* while they were recording this album at RTNC studios in Kinshasa where, excited about the song for Kazadi, they were especially impressed that he had managed to pay for his song despite having been in prison for over a year, serving a sentence for his part in a UK-based syndicate involved in identity fraud. Kazadi was released from prison in 2008 and returned to Kinshasa with a Mercedes Jeep, to shower cash on musicians and admirers. The song, and the largesse, has made Kazadi one of the biggest stars in contemporary Kinshasa.

Kazadi is an example of the *mikiliste*,¹ a *bon vivant* who lives in, or travels frequently to Europe, wears designer clothes and associates with musicians. Several other terms – *sapeur*, *parisien*, *miguel* – are also used by Kinois to refer to aspects of this cultural icon, but *mikiliste* is preferable because it encompasses the

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¹There are female exemplifiers of the *mikiliste* mode of success – for example, the nightclub owner Josée Kongolo, who is a member of an exclusive band of patrons close to Papa Wemba known as the 'jet set' – but the choices and dynamics that face women participants in this *demi-monde* are distinctive, and I consider them elsewhere. This article thus concentrates on male *mikilisme*.

meanings of the other terms, and because it stresses the aspect of travel along with access to a highly mythologized West – both central to this mode of success. Etymologically, Gondola (1999: 28) is probably correct in linking *mikiliste* to *mokili*, the Lingala word for ‘world’ – hence someone who travels the world. More directly, however, *mikiliste* relates to *mikili*, a term which denotes not the entire world but rather the collection of *vrai mboka* – ‘real countries’ – that constitute the rich and, to the Kinois, desirable part of the world. Yet, for all the obsession with the rich North, and despite the fetishistic desire which drives so many Kinois to do almost anything to get there, it seems that, in the final analysis, access to Europe is valued for the success it allows in Kinshasa. For what has emerged from this research is that, ultimately, the real theatre of social reproduction for the Congolese is Kinshasa. This is not to downplay the role of Europe in these transnational performances, nor to diminish my debt to fieldwork in Paris and London. But what is striking is that for *mikiliste*, while so much of the resource gathering and even performance is undertaken in Europe, yet it is almost all intended for or directed towards a Kinois ‘stage’, either in the form of a triumphant return, or, increasingly, by having their exploits recorded by Kinshasa’s burgeoning television industry (see Pype 2009).

Kazadi’s behaviour at the concert is encompassed by the word *mabanga*, which has come to refer to a complex of patrimonial practices of music-related prestation. The main connection with the word’s literal meaning, ‘stones’, appears to be the idea of ‘throwing’ a stone: a musician who cites a patron is said to ‘throw’ – *kobwaka* – him (White 1999). But certain informants also linked *mabanga* to the idea of ‘breaking stone’ – *kobeta libanga* – a phrase denoting work but also hustling and the ideology of amoral resourcefulness which Congolese have elevated to a kind of credo as the state has fallen away around them (see Bilakila 2004: 20). And indeed *mabanga* is typical of patrimonial practices in Congo which emerged from or were transformed during the collapse of the post-colonial state in the 1990s,² when more diffuse and unstable political arrangements arose which, though still unequal and violent, were also based in much more open forms of clientelism.

This essay will ask questions about the intersection between performance, aesthetic production and political-economic power. Drawing on fieldwork in France, London and Kinshasa I attempt to trace the historical trajectory of the *mikiliste* from 1980 until the present. Gondola (1999) has written that *mikiliste* practices constitute a ‘hidden critique’ of the powerful, while Bazenguissa-Ganga and Janet MacGaffey (2000: 3) likewise describe transnational Congolese traders, a group partly continuous with the *mikiliste*, as ‘resisting the hegemony’ of various states. Here I argue that the *mikiliste* sensibility was a bid for status by an initially marginal group and that the movement was about escaping, in a fairly transient way, the psychological stress of being an ‘empty’ or ‘insignificant person’. To the extent that the *mikiliste* did embody wider social ambitions, these were more often about breaking into existing hierarchies than aspiring to

²Pressing bank notes on the foreheads of performing musicians was already common in the 1970s, but earlier prestations were less theatrical, involved small sums of money, and were not connected to citations. People are cited in earlier records and no doubt money did often change hands, but this is clearly not the formalized transaction denoted by *mabanga*.

revolutionary change. My argument is closer to that of Gandoulou, who said the Brazzavillois *sapeur* movement was 'by its nature anti-authoritarian [*contestataire*] yet is, at the same time ... about acceptance within the social system as it currently exists' (1989a: 174, my translation). Many *mikiliste* practices, which focused on bars, music, women, and a rather fetishized idea of 'European' modernity, recapitulated the free-spending behaviours of the Kinshasa elites who took power at independence (see Biaya 1996; La Fontaine 1970). But the wealth which supported the largesse of the political class was not (initially) available to a younger generation, and thus they were obliged to show considerable ingenuity, using migration to Europe and various clandestine sources of income connected to this to underwrite their lifestyle. While they drew on earlier models of success, the *mikiliste* were able to create and control access to a 'threshold' around designer clothing and music patronage. This threatened established elites' control over social reproduction, and presented a challenge which these elites took some time to accommodate. As this implies, what was once a chic but disreputable sub-culture has migrated from the margins to the centre of Kinshasa social life, and there has been a gradual adoption of *mikiliste* practices by the ruling class. In return some *mikiliste* have been able to use their cultural virtuosity to access the resources of this class. But most *mikiliste* have been unable to integrate with elites in Kinshasa and find themselves trapped within a collapsing economy of fraud in the diaspora, where lavish spending is still the primary source of prestige and yet the funds are no longer available to sustain such spending. As we investigate towards the end of this essay, it is in the context of this recent exclusion that many former *mikiliste* have embraced forms of violent nationalism.

We will see that within this political economy a considerable 'wealth in things' (Guyer 1993) circulates in the systems of transnational exchange examined here – designer clothes, dollars, cars, et cetera. But while much of this 'wealth in things' has been successful as a medium of exchange, it has been less successful as a store of value. Banking was a largely alien concept to almost all of my informants. The period under discussion also saw the complete collapse of the Zairian/Congolese currency and of the banking system (Jewsiewicki 1992; de Herdt 2002). Wealth in things – including large stockpiles of dollars (held by diamond dealers, for example) – have not 'played a role in the credit and debit systems which underlie capitalism' (Guyer 1995: 9; see also Ferguson 2002). Local moralities of exchange often place importance on ideas of 'capture' and 'division' derived from the hunt, and relate wealth to ancestral or occult 'blessings' which are situated within the body of the successful individual (Guyer 1993; De Boeck 1999). The considerable wealth in things appears, in the final analysis, as a kind of prop – essential but nonetheless an adjunct – to performances designed to establish the rank and value of persons, and it is persons who act as the primary 'asset' (see De Boeck 1999).

This broaches a familiar theme in studies of Central African modernity: local forms of social distinction rely on exogenously sourced prestige goods and so necessitate a connection with capitalist modes of production. Yet those who effect this articulation use their 'wealth' within a set of political-economic arrangements which are not themselves capitalist. As we will see throughout this essay, practices inimical to the capitalist allocation of credit and investment, and to the inculcation of capitalist forms of time discipline, were central to popular modes of success in Kinshasa.

Underlying this analysis is the notion of ‘articulation’ and ‘reproduction’ used in neo-Marxist anthropology, notably by Dupré and Rey (1980).³ In these studies, control of exchange in imported prestige goods gave control over the reproduction of lineages. The argument of Dupré and Rey was that it was control of reproduction, rather than production, which granted control of surpluses in these agrarian societies. My essay argues that Kinshasa, in its articulation with various ‘elsewheres’, presents a political economy that is at once post-traditional and at the same time non-capitalist, where ‘reproduction’ is still dominant. Paying attention to continuities and discontinuities between the present and the ‘lineage mode of production’, my essay will attempt to examine how access to resources, exchange and social reproduction might be linked in this modern African metropolis.

RANK AND REPUTATION

Mikiliste acts of largesse like Kazadi’s are linked to popular notions regarding the individual’s value and rank within an ‘economy of prestige’. There is abundant local discourse about gossip (*koloba pamba*, *bilobela*, et cetera). It is the power of talk, in its capacity to belittle or bring down the individual, which is most often invoked – *kofinga* (to insult), *koseka* (to laugh at) – but a corollary to this is the importance of reputation and of a ranking of persons in the local ideology. Complaints such as ‘*bamoni ngai pamba*’ (‘they saw me as of no worth’) or ‘*bamoni ngai zero*’ (‘they saw me as nothing’) are frequent, while social inferiors may be classed as *niama* (livestock). These distinctions relate to one between ‘big’ and ‘empty/insignificant’ persons – *mutu munene* and *mutu pamba* – which forms a central axis of meaning in Kinshasa and has clear echoes in the past. Being a *mutu munene* in contemporary Kinshasa, as in pre-colonial Central Africa, is closely tied to the consumption and dispersal of prestige goods, most of which are imported (Dupré and Rey 1980; Ekholm-Friedman 1991).

In particular a kind of potlatch seems to dominate the Kinois imagination (De Boeck 1999). The term potlatch is used here, following Mauss, to indicate a form of exchange with a strong antagonistic element, where honour is linked to prestation. It is important to note that the potlatch does not simply, or even primarily, involve the destruction of goods⁴ (Boas 1916; Mauss 1924/1990; Roth 2002; Grumet 1975; de Heusch 2002; De Boeck 1999). Here the term potlatch most often refers to forms of distribution characterized by recklessness and public drama. It is common to see *mikiliste* returned from Europe throwing handfuls of dollars at street children, while wild generosity, often involving money or designer clothes, is a common way to initiate or cement relationships with women,

³Riven by scholastic wrangles, this body of literature is now widely considered passé. I hope to demonstrate that it still contains at least some explanatory force (see Nugent 2007).

⁴The destruction of goods appears to have been rare in the Tsimshian potlatch (Grumet 1975); Boas (1916: 537) says of the Tsimshian potlatch that it is a form of ‘ceremonial distribution’.

musicians,⁵ or politicians (see Trapido 2010; White 2008). Nevertheless, a logic of destruction is present in such exchanges.

Some such events have passed into popular legend. One famous London-based *mikiliste* bought a Jaguar, known as an *ngubu* (hippopotamus) by the Kinois, and had it shipped to Kinshasa. On learning that a rival already had such a vehicle, he took a large rock and beat his car with it, implying that it was nothing to him, whereas his rival would not dare mistreat his car this way. Another *mikiliste* took to letting his Rolls Royce be used as a taxi. Taxis are the cheapest form of transport in Kinshasa and the majority are dilapidated old bangers, so the implication was that a Rolls Royce was a thing of no account to a man such as himself. These stories mark extreme and possibly apocryphal instances, but such logics of theatrical destruction are fairly widespread. It is common at concerts and bars for individuals to remove expensive jackets and throw them on the floor. The reasoning here, recounted to me on several occasions, is that the jacket is *eloko pamba* – a worthless thing – to ‘one such as myself’.

What is the relationship between such events and politics more conventionally defined? Certainly, in the Central African *longue durée*, forms of potlatch event do appear to be politically important. While classic works like Bohannan (1959) or Meillassoux (1960) concentrated on bridewealth exchanges as the primary site of social reproduction, there is considerable evidence that the much wilder and more theatrical forms of exchange, for example those surrounding funerals, were just as important in reproducing the social order. The joyous consumption, distribution and destruction of property (especially of prestige goods obtained from coastal trade), dancing to costly musical troupes, and casting slaves into the grave with the deceased all established a connection between temporal authority and the legitimating dead (Dupré 1985; MacGaffey 2000; Laman 1953–68). The emphasis on music, the night, on ecstatic states, wild prestations and ludic abandonment are all suggestive, and it seems reasonable to conclude that the forms of largesse connected to the world of popular music are in part the product of ‘long-standing moral matrixes’ (De Boeck 1999: 201).

Yet clearly something new has emerged from the colonial and post-colonial context. The forms of potlatch which dominate Kinshasa take place primarily outside of the lineage. In the more diffuse notions of retinue and ‘wealth in people’ which have emerged, the spaces of popular music, the bar, and (though it is beyond the scope of this essay) the church have become crucial loci of social and political-economic activity, spaces Joseph Tonda (2005) terms ‘*les non lieux lignagères*’ – the non-places of the lineage. What is striking is the political importance of potlatch behaviour in the politics of Congo-Kinshasa. Most of the key figures in the post-independence state spent extraordinary amounts on partying. As accounts by T. K. Biaya (1996) and Jean La Fontaine (1970) both show, this *bon vivant* life – passed in a folly of beer, women, song and *ambiance* – was about reproducing power as well as enjoying it. The rituals of the *mikiliste* were clearly a variation on this earlier theme, yet because the *mikiliste* came of age in the 1970s and 1980s and were excluded by their elders, their largesse suggests imitation, not membership, of the ruling class. At the same

⁵Relations with musicians are often a good way to cement relationships with politicians.

time the *mikiliste* use of music and designer labels did contain elements of innovation, and their bid for status had political-economic implications, intended or otherwise.

Most notable among the early *mikiliste* was Adrien Mombele, also known as Stervos Niarcos, who was famed for his elegance and his friendships with musicians – it is around him that much oral testimony I collected was clustered. Born Adrien Mombele, he became Mombele Ngantshie around 1973, when Zaïrians were pressured into adopting ‘authentic’ names, under the strictures of Mobutu’s programme of cultural nationalism known as *authenticité*. By the late 1970s he had already taken the name Stervos Niarcos, adapting it from that of the Greek shipping magnate Stavros Niarchos. The Congolese Niarcos and his admirers often retained the ‘Ngantshie’ and he is frequently hailed on record as ‘Stervos Niarcos Ngantshie’. The significance of this is that Niarcos’s father really was the *Ngantshie*, which is to say a member of the area’s pre-colonial Teke aristocracy. Niarcos was part of the first generation of Kinois who grew up in the post-colonial context, emerging into adulthood as the state entered into an ever-worsening crisis from which it has yet to emerge. Thus Kinois who reached maturity in the late 1970s and 1980s found their prospects far worse than those of their parents (Young and Turner 1985).

Niarcos’s strong associations with Brazzaville can be ascribed, in part, to his ethnic origins. As a Teke he would have had significant kin networks in Brazzaville, but he was not the only one spending long periods of time there. With the growth in the informal economy in the late 1970s, new pathways were carved out, old trading routes were revived and cross-border smuggling with Brazzaville expanded dramatically (see Bazenguissa-Ganga and MacGaffey 2000). It appears that Stervos Niarcos and many of his associates were involved in this trade and made connections with underworld figures in Brazzaville. They also picked up the cult of designer clothing which had developed among the youth there (see Gandoulou 1989a; 1989b). Even as a teenager Niarcos seems to have exhibited delinquent tendencies. Friends remembered him smoking and selling marijuana in Livulu, close to where the Stade des Martyrs now stands. At some point things became more serious. According to an informant who had been his close friend, Niarcos was involved in a series of robberies on banks and cash deposit boxes in Brazzaville. In 1979, Niarcos came to France, where he worked as a heroin dealer and trafficker.

Niarcos and his associates appear to have come from relatively privileged backgrounds, but one of the social tendencies which gathered weight as the 1980s progressed was the migration of the inhabitants of Tshangu, known as *bana Tshangu* (children of Tshangu; the singular is *mwana*). Composed of the communes of N’djili, Masina and Kimbanseke, Tshangu is the largest and most crowded of Kinshasa’s poorer outlying areas. The largesse of *bana Tshangu* in Europe gave a certain inflection to existing social hierarchies. Several informants from more affluent backgrounds remember going to Tshangu before important social events and making cash offers to people in the street who were wearing the designer clothing sent by their relatives. An informant whose father was in the diplomatic corps in the 1980s remembers stopping his car in the middle of the street and trying to haggle a *mwana Tshangu* into parting with his Jean de Marithé et François Girbaud jacket. Fairly soon migrants from more affluent backgrounds also began to send designer clothes home to their families. One

informant who was studying in Brussels and being heavily subsidized by his father said:

I used to go to Matongé [in Brussels]⁶ and buy clothes for my sisters, who were still at school [in Zaïre]. And I can say that they were at school with the children of generals and cabinet ministers but they were better dressed than all of them. (Interview, London 21 February 2008)

This underlines a further point: the Congolese elite in Europe began to seek out the *mikiliste*, following them into areas like Matongé in Brussels and Château Rouge in Paris – for it was the *mikiliste* who had access to *kula*,⁷ as these networks of stolen designer clothes were known. This drew many children of the elite into the milieu of the *ngandas* (Bazenguissa-Ganga and MacGaffey 2000: 137–65) – the small, frequently illegal bars where musicians, *mikiliste*, famous courtesans and others of dubious provenance hung about. Clearly, this implied that the *mikiliste* controlled the terms of access, which drew the rich kids further into accepting the forms of subjectivity that the *mikiliste* embodied.

FORMS OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Jane Guyer (1993; 1995; 2004) has argued persuasively that the absence of central financial institutions has led to an extraordinary instability in African monetary and political history.

[There was]...a multiplicity of control and access mechanisms [yet]...all control, however apparently effective, was partial, provisional and ephemeral. People could move in and out of the value register in new ways: insert new products, convert old ones.... The interval gaps had to be maintained against the brilliant manoeuvre.... The conversion of intervals into the qualitative thresholds...was a major political achievement. (Guyer 1993: 252)

The *mikiliste* use of designer clothing can be understood in these terms: a manoeuvre moved a set of objects into a new kind of value register, where they acquired both an easily quantifiable value and a central place in the reproduction of social dominance. Yet such ‘brilliant manoeuvres’ cannot be spun from

⁶Area near the Porte Namur in Brussels which is full of Congolese bars and food shops and very different to the posh suburbs where Mobutiste cadres took houses. It is named after the original Matongé in Kinshasa, which was formerly the main entertainment district.

⁷They really are called *kula*. One Congolese friend who had studied sociology made a link with Malinowski, which is I think highly unlikely. There is a tempting set of connections to be made with various words in the region. The primary meaning of (*n*)*kula* is as a word for red in kiKongo and related languages. Red, hence physical strength. The colour red marks the beginning of a female’s cycle symbolizing womanhood. It also used to mark young men’s acceptance into warriorship, thus signifying adulthood in traditional society. In all these circumstances and other ritual contexts *kula* (red substance like clay or camwood paste) is used to be applied to the skin: red on the left side of the body, white kaolin (*lupemba* – see footnote 21) on the right (this gloss is adapted from Filip De Boeck, private communication, 2010). Other less likely candidates include *Koola* (the mystic river of origin for the Lunda elite); or a type of prestation, including raffia cloth, offered to a divination among the Yaka (Devisch 1993); or the Nkula cult among the Ndembu (Turner 1968); or a number of *fétiche* known as *Kula* among the Bakongo. I have no direct evidence for any of these!

straw—a certain political economy underpinned this phenomenon. *Mikiliste* were able to control access to circuits of designer goods, but how did they do this? In one sense the answer is simple: they stole them. In the early 1980s a great many Congolese specialized in various forms of shoplifting. As one informant remembered, ‘If you were going back to Kin, people would go shoplifting for months. There would be one person who would just spend weeks stealing [designer] socks. Imagine, weeks all day just on socks. Well, then they would arrive in Kinshasa and [making a throwing gesture] it would be like “*Parisien aye*” [(the) *Parisien* has come]’ (Interview, London—interviewee had previously lived in Paris and Brussels—21 February 2008).

Paris was the centre of this operation. The large number of pieces put into circulation, and the growing connoisseurship among Congolese, led to a system in which the equivalence of clothing with conventional currency became semi-regularized. Most people did not steal clothes themselves but, then as now, clothing was hawked ever more widely between *ngandas* and within *mikiliste* social networks. A degree of haggling was involved in the selling of items, but this was mainly to catch the uninitiated, since an underlying agreement meant prices were effectively set at half the retail cost.⁸ The knowledge of clothes and prices became a serious social advantage and many Congolese would scan catalogues and trawl shops to obtain the required information. This cultural virtuosity, with its system of cash equivalence, made prestations of clothing, including those used as payment for musical patronage—*mabanga*—a far more quantifiable kind of transaction.⁹

Stealing clothes was far from the only criminal activity undertaken by the *mikiliste* and designer clothing was progressively integrated into a wider criminal economy. Drugs were (and are) an important part of this economy, with migrants acting both as dealers and mules.¹⁰ Probably the most important aspect, however, was cheque fraud, or *chekula* as it is known in Lingala. As one former *bon vivant* put it, ‘*Ezalaka facile, ofungoli compte, ozwua chéquier*’—‘It was easy. You open an account. You take a cheque book’ (Informant, Paris). And, as he might have added, you start issuing cheques. Initially this seems to have been the most common form of cheque fraud. One would open an account in a false name, using an item of fake identification. Later, in the 1990s, cheque books and cards were obtained or stolen using a variety of expedients.¹¹ Sometimes the identification

⁸‘All stolen goods are sold at half the legal price.’ ‘*Toute marchandise volée, est value pour moitié prix. Kula bon, soki mutu ayibi eloko, akoteka yango na moitié prix*’ (Interview, Paris, 14 July 2007).

⁹‘You see the Congolese generally speaking will go every week or every fortnight to take a look at what has arrived and to compare prices. They will also get catalogues to show their friends, “No, I am up to date!”’.

(‘*Omoni Congolais, généralement parlant ... Congolais ... akendaka chaque semaine, ou une fois les deux semaines kotala ba arrivages et kocomparer ba prix. Bazwui pe ba catalogues pona balakisa ba camarades ... non! Je suis à la page!*’) (Interview, Paris, 14 July 2007).

¹⁰Historically, locally grown marijuana was taken in. These days Congolese are more likely to be mules for cocaine from South America which is shipped to West Africa, to be taken on to Europe.

¹¹‘A kid called me. He tells me. He says, “As you do deliveries, don’t they ever give you cards? If they give you cards ... [section I don’t follow] ... we can ‘cooperate’. I will give you money.”’ (‘*Garçon abengi ngai, ayebisi ngai, alobi: “Yo osala courrier est que bapesa yo ba cartes te? Soki*

was produced in Europe. More often it would be the product of craft expertise in Kinshasa, where international vaccination cards or student cards were particularly economical and popular choices.¹² From the 1990s onward credit card fraud¹³ also became extremely important, with the credit card itself known as a *minduki* – or gun – because, in the words of one informant, it was like a gun: ‘Whatever you want it will do for you’ (Informant, Paris, 28 July 2007). A great deal of the money raised by these means went into the remittance economy, thereby staving off disaster in Kinshasa. Much of it was also spent on music patronage – *mabanga*. Informants made clear that through the 1980s *mabanga* became an increasingly monetized and formalized transaction. Many musicians were vague about prices at this period, but one confirmed that in 1989 a *dédicace* – where the patron is sung as the object of desire in the romantic narrative of a love song (see Trapido 2010) – cost around \$4,000, a figure not so far removed from today’s prices of \$5,000–\$6,000 from a top musician.

bapesi yo ba cartes ... [section I don't follow] ... to coopérer, ngai na pesi yo mbongo.’) (Interview, Paris, 21 July 2007).

¹²‘Even today, if I call my uncle – Uncle I need something – he will send me an identity card. If I need a passport he will send it’.

(*‘Ata lelo oyo, soki na bengi oncle na ngai na N’djili; Tonton, ngai naza na besoin ya eloko boye. Ezala ata carte de citoyen, akotindela nga. Soki nazali na besoin ya passeport pe akotindela ngai.’*) (Interview, 22 July 2007).

‘Fake papers are made all over the place. If you have your money you go’.

(*‘Mikanda ya monyato esalemaka na ba zones nyonso, soki kaka ozali na mbongo na yo, ekoya na ngo.’*) (Interview, 21 July 2007).

‘The person who does that, they ask their family or their friends, “Send me” It was very often identity cards, vaccination cards. It is student cards. At the time way back, there was no need for loads of proofs (of I. D.). If you took them a vaccination card, they see the photo, they see the stamp, they were happy. Today the matter has changed. They have got smart’.

(*‘Mutu asala bongo, mutu azali awa, a sengi na famille na ye, ba camarades na ye, “Tindela ngai” Ezalaki mingi mingi ba cartes de citoyen, carte ya mangwele. Ezala pe carte d’étudiant. A l’époque, na kala ezalaki na besoin ya ba preuves ebele te. Soki omemeli bango carte ya magwele bamoni foto bamoni na cachet basepeli. Lelo makambo echangé. Bazwui mayele.’*) (Interview, 21 July 2007).

¹³‘The person who steals cheque books . . . and credit cards, he doesn’t have the courage for the work. He goes to look for a person who knows how to go into a bank. Also to go into a shop . . . it is two kinds of arrangement. First arrangement is that that man pays cash and the credit card or cheque book becomes his and he will work with it how he wants. The second arrangement is that this man takes the card. He goes and steals things in a shop, which is to say he buys them saying that this card is his, so when he gets this stuff he goes back (to the syndicate) and they divide it.’

‘They have a relationship?’

‘Exactly – the one needs the other. Before he steals he needs something to steal with so it’s a gun. The gun it’s the card It’s a way of talking. If you have a gun you can go into the bank and rob it, no? It’s a metaphor – the card is a gun. Whatever you want it will do for you!’

(*‘Mutu oyo azali koyiba chéquier na carte bleu, azali na courage ya mosala te, akei koluka mutu ayebi akotaka ba banques pe akotaka ba magasins . . . eza deux sorte ya arrangement. Arrangement ya liboso eza que mutu apesi ye mbongo na carte bleu ou chéquier ekomi ya ye, akosala yango ndege alingi. Deuxième arrangement eza mutu azwui carte akei ayibi biloko na ba magasins, c’est-à-dire asombi biloko na ba magasins, soit disant que carte wana ezali ya ye, alors tango akozwua biloko azongi bakaboli.’*

‘Baza na relation?’

‘Mais justement – l’un a besoin de l’autre. Avant ayiba, il faut apesa ye eloko akoyibela: donc minduki. Minduki c’est la carte. Eza façon ya koloba. Soki oza na minduki okoti bank oyibi te? Eza métaphore – carte eza minduki. Qu’est que tu veux, ekosala!’) (Interview, Paris, 28 July 2007).

An important new destination for Kinoin, fleeing economic collapse and an upsurge in political violence, was London. A further reason of undoubted importance was the ease of identity fraud in the UK. The period stretching roughly from 1990 until 2000 is obliquely referred to as *le temps de l'argent facile* – the time of easy money. The universal perception among informants, many of whom had lived in France or Belgium prior to coming to London, was that fraud had been considerably easier and more lucrative in the UK than in other European countries. The UK appears to have been slower to address the weak points in its banking and benefits systems, leading to a period of 'easy money' which lasted considerably longer than in other European countries. Britain was also later than France and Belgium in introducing fingerprinting for asylum claims, something which allowed the practice of routine multiple applications to continue for longer.¹⁴

As in France, *chekula* was the most widespread form of fraud. In the UK, syndicates working out of the post office were central. During the service-sector boom of the 1990s work in postal sorting offices was easy to secure. The *mikiliste* in the sorting office would throw aside anything that looked like a chequebook. These cheques would then be made out and signed, after which likely locations for cashing them were sought.¹⁵ Often a syndicate would have a specialist who would spend all his time driving around post offices and small bank branches in the regions, cashing cheques. Another common strategy was to make use of *bureaux de change*, even on occasions striking a deal with the owners for sharing the profits.¹⁶ Soon certain Congolese from London started using this wealth in

¹⁴That is true, the easy money lasted a really long time here compared with the other countries of Europe'.

(*C'est vrai l'argent facile a duré super longtemps ici comparé aux autres pays d'Europe.*) (Interview, 13 February 2008).

'Even here if you go to claim asylum they take your prints ... that all started about 2000 [in London]. Before, people would go and come back, go and come back [make multiple claims]'. (*Ata awa soki okei kobwaka bazwui ba empreinte ... ebandi vers 2000. Kala batu bakei, bazongi, bakei bazongi ...*) (Interview, 13 February 2008).

¹⁵Everyone working at the post here was thieving? Is that the question? No, not necessarily, but as you know the majority of Congolese ... the man who takes a job at the post has got a friend. His friend is interested. "If you want a little *kula* and we have an understanding".

(*Bato nyonso basalaka na poste awa bayibaka? C'est ça la question? Non pas nécessairement mais neti oyebi la plupart ya ba congolais ... mutu azwui mosala na poste aza na camarade. Na ye camarade na ye aza intéressé. "Soki ozwui mwa kula otie ngai na temps."*) (Interview, London, 15 February 2008).

'First it was the dodgy people looking for people at the post office, but after a time people came to understand that, no, in fact at the post you will open up things [wealth?]. You will get easy money, so the dodgy people start to look for work at the post office. If I go they will pay me at the end of the week and in addition I will steal. I will steal cards, I will steal cheques. I will supplement my salary easily'.

(*Liboso ezalaki batu ya kop bazoluka batu ya Poste mais après tango sik'oyo bato baye ko comprendre que non en faite na Poste okofongola masolo [mosololwealth?]. Okozwua mbongo ya facile alors bato ya kop bakoluka mosala ya Poste. Soki na kei na poste bakofuta ngai na suka semaine en plus nakoyiba. Cartes nakoyiba ba chequier nakobakisa salaire na ngai facilement*). (Interview, London, 13 March 2008).

¹⁶If they do not do that [buy *kula* with cards or cheques], many went to bureau d'échange. At the bureau de change he gives the card. They "pull" the money and they divide it up'.

(*Soki basali biloko wana te, mingi mingi bakei na bureau d'échange. Na bureau d'échange ba pesi carte, babendi mbongo, bakaboli.*) (Interview, London, 13 March 2008).

extravagant ways, attending concerts in Paris, and decisively outdoing their rivals, as they dressed in fantastically expensive clothes and showered money on musicians.

BANA MAGIE, BANA LONDRES, BANA LUNDA

The wealth of the Congolese in London, the *bana Londres*, was also a key factor in a further development of *mabanga*. This step was taken by Koffi Olomide when recording his 1993 album *Magie*. Advances in recording technology meant that by the 1990s, in well-equipped first world studios, upwards of forty musical lines, or *pistes*, could be recorded separately and mixed onto the same song. Overwhelmed with requests for *mabanga* by Congolese in the diaspora, above all from London, Koffi Olomide devoted a separate track just to reading off names at any point where a space in the music would allow it. Early on in the record, Koffi acknowledges the provenance of much of this new support, saluting the '*bana Magie oyo ya Londres*', literally 'children of Magie, those ones from London'. From this moment *mabanga* came to be the principal source of revenue for most musicians. It was also around this time that *mabanga* shifted more perceptibly from the margins to the centre: what was once a practice associated with a chic but disreputable sub-culture would soon become a central aspect in the expression of power relations for the political elite. The presence of migrant capital, above all *bana Londres* capital, was and remains extremely prominent in Kinshasa. It can be seen in countless building projects, vehicles and, above all, in the theatrical potlatch-like forms of consumption undertaken when London migrants return to Kinshasa.

The *bana Lunda*, the name given to Congolese who went to Lunda Norte Province in Angola in search of diamonds, were another important vector of migrant capital. In the 1980s, significant deposits of high-quality diamonds were discovered in northern Angola, but civil war meant that large amounts of artisanal extraction took place (De Boeck 1999; Monnier, Jewsiewicki and de Villiers 2001; Mbiki 2008),¹⁷ in which a massive influx of Zairians from across the border participated. The majority of the migrants had roots in Bandundu, a province with historical and geographical ties to northern Angola, and by the early 1990s these *bana Lunda* had acquired a distinct identity in Kinshasa, spending dollars gained in Angola on the kinds of potlatch with which we are now familiar. Much of this money was spent on *mabanga*, with musicians in Kinshasa mythologizing the *bana Lunda* in similar terms to the *mikiliste*. Typical examples include the songs 'Didi Kinuani' by Reddy Amisi (on the album *Ziggy*),

¹⁷The town of Cafunfo at the centre of the region changed hands several times, but the surrounding country was controlled for most of the period by Unita, rebels backed by the West (and their proxies in Zaïre and South Africa) for their opposition to the pro-Soviet MPLA government. The export of these diamonds via Zaïre onto the world market, in flagrant breach of a UN embargo, propped up the Mobutu regime and prolonged the conflict in Angola greatly. Initially this was an aim of US foreign policy which sought to keep various counterinsurgencies 'off balance sheet'. Later it was an inconvenience as they sought a rapprochement with the oil-rich MPLA.

'Tshatsho Mbala *le Monde est Méchant*' (Werrason 1996) or J. B. Mpiana's '*Bana Lunda*' (Mpiana 1996).¹⁸

Among the most prominent diamond dealers in Kinshasa today is Didi Kinuani, self-proclaimed *sauveur de l'humanité* – saviour of humanity. Like many *bana Lunda*, Didi was born in Kikwit. His main business is still in Cafunfo (the capital of diamond mining in Lunda Norte) though he is frequently in Kinshasa. When in Kinshasa Didi is famed for his acts of largesse. One informant remembers a social occasion to which he was invited. He was called over to the main table, given a handful of dollars and instructed to give each guest at his table \$200, then to take \$300 for himself. When Didi had done the same for all of the tables, he took his briefcase and went outside where a crowd of street children were waiting in the hopes of a few dollars. He opened his briefcase, throwing \$5,000 over the throng.

While the lion's share of wealth from artisanal mineral extraction has been made by expatriate-owned (often Lebanese) *comptoirs*, local *diamantaires* are often significant points of linkage between such resources of the interior and the Kinshasa-based political elites. Another wealthy *mwana Lunda*, Tshatsho Mbala, became wealthy by cultivating strong relationships with UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi and with various *grands* of the Mobutu regime like Honoré Ngbanda and Kongulu Mobutu, both of whom ran airlines to Lunda Norte, ferrying diamonds and supplies in defiance of a UN embargo (Mbiki 2008). Tshatsho, too, is known for his acts of conspicuous consumption and for his extensive music patronage.

The *bana Lunda* mode of success closely resembles that of the *mikiliste*. This is hardly surprising in that the *bana Lunda* seem to have very consciously set out to imitate the *mikiliste*. Indeed, a great many informants have used Angola as a springboard to European migration, and informants close to Didi Kinuani and Tshatsho Mbala said that initially both had intended to use Angola as a way to raise capital for journeys to Europe. *Bana Lunda* expenditure on *mabanga* and potlatches was also an imitation of the *mikiliste* sensibility. Both modes of course draw to an extent on common predecessors, but *bana Lunda* forms of production display far more material similarity with the economies of the Central African past than do the *mikiliste*. The *bana Lunda* economy, based on violence, primitive accumulation and external demand for a raw commodity, shows a striking similarity with the economies of the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the region, organized around the violent appropriation of such items as slaves, ivory or rubber (see Vellut 2004; Harms 1981). Even so, the imaginative and emotional universe of the *mikiliste* has brought about a similarly unstable political economy. For although recent immigrants are commonly involved in crime, and although Congolese were far from being the only ones involved in benefit and cheque fraud, the logic of potlatch meant that, unlike other migrants, they rarely accumulated capital. As one London-based informant put it, 'The Indians and Jamaicans they were all doing it too, but they started shops. We spent it on shoes.' For the *mikiliste*, banks were places to defraud rather than places to keep money; a culture of keeping money in banks is almost as absent among *mikiliste* in Europe as it is for the Kinois, where the banking system has collapsed. A great many

¹⁸The text of this song was published and translated in Filip De Boeck (2001).

informants in any case have terrible credit ratings arising from unpaid overdrafts, as well as convictions for fraud, making banking difficult or impossible.

Even in the field of criminal endeavour, the short-term nature of the *mikiliste* search for fame seems to have left him behind. The incompetence and lack of ambition of many Congolese criminals in Europe are often satirized by the Congolese themselves. One Paris-based drug dealer is so often in gaol that he is referred to by one and all as ‘Mandela’ and Papa Wemba gave him the praise name of *bakanga ba cracra balemba* – ‘they tired of putting handcuffs on him’ – under which name he has received several shouts on record. Even Stervos Niarcos, in many ways the model of a *mikiliste*, died in prison in the mid-1990s. It is common to hear *mikiliste* speak in awed tones about Nigerian gangsters or Cameroonian *feymen*; many of the more profitable scams brought to my attention in recent times were efforts coordinated by Nigerian or Cameroonian gangs in which a *mikiliste* had played a peripheral role.¹⁹ Increasingly draconian immigration regimes throughout the 1990s have also meant that being caught carries with it the threat of expulsion, while their lack of involvement with the formal economy makes acquiring permanent resident rights difficult. The dilemma of being trapped between the potlatch and the police in this declining economy is well evoked by Papa Wemba in his song ‘*Kaokokorobo*’:

<i>Babukaki ligal ya Calugi</i>	They broke open the Calugi shop
<i>Na ya Comme</i>	and of Comme ²⁰
<i>Ba plan il fallait na telema na yango</i>	The gear I should have worn
<i>Na ndule wana</i>	At that gig.
<i>Mbila amina palain</i>	The police had encircled the house,
<i>Masta batindika ye</i>	Friend got sent [back to Congo]
<i>Petite abendana</i>	The girlfriend moved on
<i>Uta azwua lupemba</i>	She got lucky/was blessed ²¹
<i>Azwua kiboba,</i>	She took the house,
<i>Ba Tshatshe, ba Miyake,</i>	[and the] Versace, Issey Miyake
	[i.e. all the clothes in the house].
<i>Influence ya coup d'oeil</i>	The way to make an impression
<i>... Petite alobi na ngai nayebi</i>	The girlfriend says I'm not hip
<i>movement te</i>	[now he has lost everything].

(Wemba 1995)

¹⁹Some of this also reflects the respect and gentleness of the Kinois. Thugs rarely carry guns in Kinshasa and violence against strangers is uncommon – in strong contrast to Nigerian gangsters, and also to second-generation Congolese in Europe who are often ‘Zoulous’, wild violent products of the French *banlieue* who cause fights, especially at concerts – during my time in Paris I saw several fights and one of my informants was stabbed to death. In Congo itself, the mafias are most often coordinated by outsiders. In Brussels, although not Paris or London, more organized gangs of Congolese such as the *New Jack* have operated in the fields of racketeering and drugs.

²⁰Comme (Comme des Garçons) signifies a Japanese label, Calugi an Italian one.

²¹Translating *lupemba* as luck, blessing or success is somewhat reductive. It is a term related to a dense field of pre-colonial meanings – white clay, the land of the dead, the male principle, ancestral/occult blessing, et cetera.

DECLINE IN THE *MIKILISTE* ECONOMY

As the new century has progressed, *le temps de l'argent facile* has come to an end. While the criminal and informal economies are still important in the community, increased security – police raids, video cameras installed in postal sorting offices, and tighter controls on benefit allocation in France, Belgium and the UK – has meant that simple forms of identity fraud, so often practised by the *mikiliste*, are barely worth the risk. ‘*Monde wana esili*,’ as many informants commented – that world is finished. The larger numbers of Congolese now in Western Europe mean that the total amount of remittance money being sent home is almost certainly more significant than ever, although exact sums are hard to calculate (Sumata 2002), but patterns of spending have changed radically. Deprived of the income from cheque and other fraud, and of the freedom it gave to spend long nights hanging out in bars with other *mikiliste*, all forms of potlatch expenditure by migrants appear to have declined.

Divergent trends have emerged among the *mikiliste*. The first trend is an integration into the political system, with certain *mikiliste* drawing on their cultural virtuosity to instruct members of the political elite in the arts of *ambiance*, at the same time becoming part of the political elite themselves. These figures managed to shift their source of finance from the dying migrant criminal economy to the rent-seeking of the rulers – a successful transformation of status into something like class. Jean,²² a native of Bandal, one of Kinshasa’s liveliest districts, is a good example. Jean became a *mikiliste* and *tata ngulu* (people smuggler) in the late 1980s. Around 1993, he used his contacts forged with musicians to become an employee of *Yosshad* productions, a production company run by the son of the President, Kongulu Mobutu (also known as Saddam). After the fall of Mobutu, Jean again used his contacts to befriend key members of the regime’s inner circle, many of whom liked to hang out in the bars in Bandal, living the good life and listening to music. The nightclubs of Bandal were Jean’s natural habitat, and he took the opportunity to make contact – bringing with him gifts of designer clothing, using his sense of style and his access to the circuits of *kula* to help the former guerrilla fighters who did not know their *Comme des Garçons* from their Yohji Yamamoto. The connection was extremely useful to Jean, who moved into several import/export activities, undoubtedly with powerful help. During the elections of 2006 he stood as a candidate for the presidential party, the PPRD (Partie du Peuple pour la Reconstruction et la Démocratie)²³ in the national elections and is now a deputy in the national assembly.

A second, much larger group of *mikiliste* were unable to integrate themselves into the political system, and, as the economy which had underwritten their former largesse was eroded, feelings of financial exclusion began to feed into a new kind of Congolese nationalism. Since the 1980s the opposition to Mobutu among the Kinóis and Kinóis migrants to Europe had been led by the UDPS (Union pour le Démocratie et Progrès Social), which was one of the few political groups with a pedigree of integrity and non-violence. After the fall of Mobutu the new regime

²²A pseudonym.

²³A party formed in office by Joseph Kabila and containing a largely Katangese elite.

fairly quickly alienated a large section of the Kinois population (and by extension much of the Kinois diaspora in Europe), offering little by way of material improvement in their lives and often seeming to imply that the Kinois had been complicit in Mobutu's rule. Despite this a succession of strategic errors by the UDPS – above all its refusal to participate in the peace accords of Sun City, or in the elections of 2006 – probably misread the popular mood and certainly left the party excluded from sources of patronage. At the same time oppositional political networks associated with former Mobutistes were extremely active – associating themselves via the media with ideologies about the Congolese war which combined anti-imperialism with stridently xenophobic narratives. Chief among these was the MLC (Movement du Libération du Congo) a rebel movement backed by Uganda which took part in the transitional government established by the Sun City agreement and also participated in the elections of 2006. It was led by Brussels-educated Jean Pierre Bemba, the son of Bemba Soalona, a wealthy member of Mobutu's inner circle.²⁴ Also significant was APARECO (Alliance des Patriotes pour le Refondation du Congo), an extreme nationalist party based in Europe and led by Mobutu's close ally and ethnic confrère Honoré Ngbanda. The diaspora in Europe in particular was a centre for the dissemination of stridently racist narratives, which drew on the same kinds of 'hamitic hypothesis' which had been a factor in the Rwandan genocide (see Taylor 1999).

Since the ADFL/RPA (Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour le Congo/Rwandan Patriotic Army) takeover of Congo in 1997 there had been growing popular resentment at the quasi-colonial behaviour of Kagame's Rwanda. Kinyarwanda speakers living in the DRC were subject to harassment and pogroms and an ideology emerged, heavily indebted to colonial racial theory, which opposed noble 'bantus' (here applied to Congolese) to jealous 'nilotiques' (here applied to Rwandans), who were in league with Westerners in their quest to pillage the Congo.²⁵ Once he had broken with his RPA minders, Laurent Kabila and his entourage certainly used anti-Rwandan feeling to their own ends as did Joseph Kabila, especially while the Rwandan-backed rebel movement/political party RCD-Goma appeared to be his principal political rival. But perhaps the most energetic exponents of this rhetoric were the ex-Mobutistes. In the aftermath of M'zee Kabila's assassination the emblematic allegation was that Joseph Kabila was not really his father's son but rather a Rwandan Tutsi called Hippolyte Kanambe.

At the same time as this, the politics of post-Laurent Kabila Congo came to revolve around a split between Lingalaphone 'westerners', who were mostly hostile to Joseph Kabila and his newly minted party the PPRD, and

²⁴He ran sanctions-busting planes between northern Angola and Zaïre in the 1990s (Peleman 2000). Jean Pierre Bemba's sister is married to Mobutu's son Nzanga.

²⁵Kinois versions of this ideology clearly draw on the 'Hamitic hypothesis', but do little to differentiate between Hutu and Tutsi. Like all the most dangerous tales of national grievance there is an element of truth in this account. 'The West' has clearly backed Joseph Kabila and turned a blind eye to terrible crimes committed by, amongst others, Rwanda. That said, the narrative contains some pretty crude conspiracy theories, while many of those who propound these theories – Ngbanda, Bemba, and others – are in a position of extreme hypocrisy. Bemba as guerrilla leader was backed by Uganda and almost certainly also 'took his dossier' to Rwanda (Prunier 2009: 204); Ngbanda was a central figure in the late Mobutu regime, and a huge trafficker with UNITA. Zaïre's part in the Angolan war fits far more neatly into the 'Western stooge' category.

Swahiliphone ‘easterners’, who were mostly supportive. Those in the west were reluctant to believe, as the census seemed to imply, that the Swahiliphones were more numerous. Some I talked to even suggested that the Rwandans/‘nilotiques’ ‘began at Kisangani’, the Congolese town which straddles the border between Lingala and Swahili as the main vehicular languages. As the media presence of the above-mentioned ex-Mobutiste political networks grew, and as the narratives they championed gained purchase, they increasingly came to replace the UDPS as the primary opposition, and the most popular political movement for the Kinois and the Kinois diaspora in Europe.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of this has been a series of attacks on prominent individuals associated in some way with the current regime. In 2004 a press conference with Vital Kamerhe, then PPRD secretary-general, was attacked in Paris by the aforementioned APARECO. In 2006, Shé Okitundu, then cabinet secretary to Kabila, was assaulted, stripped naked and filmed on a mobile phone during a private visit to London between the first and second rounds of the Congolese election campaign. As this shows, politicians have been targeted, but more often this violence has expressed a distinctively *mikiliste* set of priorities. Most attacks have been directed against musicians and celebrity journalists – individuals who had lived hand in glove with the *mikiliste* and had previously relied on their patronage. The motive for such attacks by *mikiliste* against their erstwhile colleagues was the support shown by these figures for President Joseph Kabila.

After a period of relative austerity post-Mobutu, the regime in Kinshasa began to offer increased financial opportunities to popular *orchestres* and others in the public sphere. This increased largesse coincided with the collapse of the *mikiliste* economy in Europe. In the build-up to the elections, eventually held in 2006, the PPRD, violently unpopular in Kinshasa and the Lingalaphone west of the country, invested ever more heavily in musicians. This included payment for *mabanga* on record, but also offered other opportunities. During 2006 several of the major *orchestres* – among them Quartier Latin, Wenge Musica Maison Mère, and Wenge BCBG – all performed at the wedding of Joseph Kabila to Olive Lembe, receiving unspecified amounts of money to do this. Finally, many of the country’s most prominent artists performed songs in support of Kabila’s election campaign, for which the *présidents d’orchestres* involved are alleged to have received \$20,000 each. Most of these musicians would have faced severe difficulties had they refused these monies. Also, these payments came along just as the terminal decline of the *mikiliste* economy was taking place, on which prominent musicians had so relied – though the acceptance of the money in itself hammered another nail into the coffin.

Wenge BCBG were based in London for much of 2005–6, and a few days after the attack on Shé Okitundu a crowd of Congolese advanced on the boarding house where they were staying. According to several reports given to me, the intention of the crowd was to beat and strip naked the *président d’orchestre*, J. B. Mpiana, as it had done to Okitundu. I was told by several *orchestre* members that a tip-off had been given and J. B. had arranged for a number of hired ‘Jamaïcains’²⁶ to act as bodyguards.

²⁶That is, black Anglophone Caribbeans. The term is used by UK Congolese as a byword for delinquent.

During the same period in 2006, several informants reported that Koffi Olomide was shown a gun when he arrived in London, and told never to return. Such confrontations also occurred in France and Belgium. In July 2006, at the Elysée Montmartre in Paris, Papa Wemba performed to a virtually empty concert hall. From October to December 2006, Wenge Musica Maison Mère was in Europe but was prevented from performing any of its scheduled concerts because of threats from, and confrontations with, migrants. Eventually Werrason did face down the crowd to perform in front of a packed hall in Paris. But death threats continued, with London as the primary source. In 2007, Kester Emeneya, then in Paris, received a telephone call threatening him with death if he set foot in the UK. But, while members of several prominent *orchestres* confessed to me that they were too frightened to visit the UK, trips to Paris and Brussels continued without significant incident. Since completing my fieldwork, attacks appear to have once again increased in intensity. In 2009, Tshala Muana, a Luba folksinger associated with the regime,²⁷ was attacked in Brussels.

These developments were not separate from events taking place in Kinshasa, where the public sphere, ever more polarized between the stations favourable to the opposition MLC and those favourable to the government, itself became a zone of violent contestation. It is striking that in an election campaign marked by arson and the violent contestation of the media, the first sites to be attacked were the large open-air bar, the Samba Playa, owned by Werrason and the home of his *orchestre* Wenge Musica Maison Mère, and the church of Sonny Kafuta, a Pentecostal pastor who, like Werrason, was a prominent supporter of Kabila. These sites were set on fire during a march led by the main opposition leader, Jean Pierre Bemba.

What is noticeable about this violence is how it drew upon, yet inverted, the logic of the *mikiliste* exchange. Until recently the *mabanga* transaction had incorporated the patron into a narrative in which love, transnational flows and material abundance were entwined. Now, ritualized, often ludic violence sought to close these channels by specific attacks on musicians and on points of access to the public sphere. It is also notable that several of the most prominent figures among the attackers, latterly known as *les combattants*, had been enthusiastic participants in the *mikiliste* economy of largesse. Just as in earlier times the *bana Londres* had been the most excessive participants in the *mikiliste* potlatch, they now became the most implacably hostile, issuing death threats and banning musicians with even the most tangential connection to the regime from performing in London.²⁸ According to several reports given to me recently by contacts in Kinshasa, this has been reciprocated, with police and officials at N'djili Airport allegedly subjecting *bana Londres* to intense scrutiny. So we see that, while the exchanges of money and music were undertaken within an ideology which saw access to Europe and Kinshasa as central to social

²⁷Something of a sex symbol in her day, she is alleged to have been the lover of Laurent Kabila.

²⁸The manager of the Double Club, a Congolese themed bar in London, was prevented from having any prominent Congolese artists perform at the venue. At one point he tried to book the singer-songwriter Lokua Kanza, an artist living in Europe with no regime connections. *Les Combattants* told him that this would not be acceptable, because Kanza had performed a 'featuring' on the song *Diabolos* on the most recent album by Koffi Olomide.

reproduction, the exchanges of violence and intimidation have reversed this logic, as their aim is to restrict access by enemies to the sources of social reproduction.

CONCLUSION

The *mikiliste* potlatch started as a somewhat marginal youth movement, developed by a generation who came to maturity as the monetary underpinnings of the economy were stripped away. Drawing on earlier models of success they were able to create and control access to various forms of social reproduction. Over time, however, their access to the material base on which their largesse relied was undermined, and a political class underwritten by access to the resources of the interior came to dominate the potlatch, although this was at times a highly contested process.

We have argued that articulations with other political-economic systems, notably that of Western Europe, are still crucial to processes of social reproduction in Kinshasa. We have also shown that those who, at various levels, are able to effect this articulation reproduce a set of political-economic arrangements which are not themselves capitalist.

While we have argued for the significance of recording continuities with a lineage-based mode of production, there are clearly considerable discontinuities concerning social reproduction. The incredible emphasis on potlatch in Kinshasa today is perhaps even more striking because the 'other half' of the Meillassoux/Rey model has fallen away. The big man looks to the Kinois retinue for adulation, but he has little real interest in exploiting its labour. Perhaps linked to this, ideologies of marriage and the lineage appear to have weakened somewhat and more diffuse notions of 'wealth in people' have gained a certain prominence (Tonda 2005; De Boeck and Plissart 2004). This is not to say that in a broader frame of analysis the appropriation of surpluses has suddenly become irrelevant to the ruling class. Kinshasa is a crucial site of articulation through which all sorts of resources from the interior pass. Control of this node requires access to violence and to economic power more conventionally defined, but performative largesse has an important role. I do not think it unduly conspiratorial to assert that the recurrent potlatch expenditure by elites in Kinshasa and the appropriation of *mikiliste* rituals by this elite is related to the strategic importance of the city. Likewise the concentration by enemies of the current regime on musicians and journalists appears less outlandish in this context.

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ABSTRACT

This essay presents a history of the *mikiliste*, the high-living *bon vivant* who travels to Europe and is a central figure in Kinois urban mythology. It looks in particular at the highly theatrical exchanges engaged in by the *mikiliste*, which relate especially to music patronage and to designer clothing. I show how these exchanges have evolved over time, both shaping and being shaped by the political economy of Kinshasa. The essay shows how such aesthetic performances should not be discussed in isolation from wider political-economic considerations. Those who participate in economies of prestige must be connected to a material base, and the ruling class, with their access to the resources of the interior, have become ever more important participants in the *mikiliste* rituals of largesse. Recently, the violent contestation of *mikiliste* exchange, both in Europe and in Kinshasa, indicates that such moments of largesse may be involved in reproducing political-economic relations in the Congolese capital.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet essai présente une histoire du *mikiliste*, le bon vivant qui mène la grande vie durant ses voyages en Europe, personnage central de la mythologie urbaine kinoise. Il s'intéresse en particulier aux échanges hautement théâtraux auxquels prend part le *mikiliste*, qui ont trait notamment à son goût pour la musique et les vêtements de grandes marques. Il montre comment ces échanges ont évolué au fil du temps, tout à la fois façonnant l'économie politique de Kinshasa et façonnés par elle. L'essai montre en quoi ces interprétations esthétiques sont indissociables, dans leur analyse, de considérations politico-économiques plus larges. Ceux qui

participent aux économies de prestige sont forcément connectés à une base matérielle et la classe dirigeante, parce qu'elle a accès aux ressources de l'intérieur, participe plus que jamais aux rituels de largesse du *mikiliste*. Récemment, la contestation violente de l'échange *mikiliste*, tant en Europe qu'à Kinshasa, indique que ces moments de largesse contribuent peut-être à reproduire les rapports politico-économiques dans la capitale congolaise.