ESSAY: JOSEPH KIWELE IN ÉLISABETHVILLE (1946-1961) AND THE BIRTH OF AN URBAN CULTURE IN THE COLONIAL ERA.

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An enactment of the play *Chura na Nyoka* by Joseph Kiwele.

Where does it come from, this emotion that grabs us before the display of the glowing red copper flows of Katanga, rippling like strange reptiles in the Gécamiens warehouses filmed by Sammy Baloji in *Tales of the Copper Grass Garden. Episode 1*? This freshly processed material seems to reverberate with the copper songs sung by the children of the Copper Cross choir, echoing a childhood chipped away over the years.

Joseph Kiwele's music and plays resonate with us today in both an unusual and intriguing way. Kiwele was both an effective intermediary for the colonial government and a prolific and talented creator very much appreciated at the time – by the authorities and the public alike – and his works are still as original as they are inventive and sensitive.

I — Joseph Kiwele and his works, between propaganda art and artistic indigenism

Joseph Kiwele was born in 1912 in Baudouinville (now Moba) in north-eastern Katanga, on the shores of Lake Tanganyika. He studied philosophy and theology at the Grand Séminaire (theological seminary) and spent a year in Liège, Belgium, in 1940, to study harmony and the organ at the music academy. Upon his return, he was in charge of general education and music at Institut Saint-Boniface school in the district of Kamalondo, the first black town in the 'Centre extra-coutumier' (centre not subject to customary law) of Élisabethville (now Lubumbashi). He became the assistant organist of the director and founder of Saint-Boniface choir, Father Anchaire Lamoral, whom he would succeed in 1950. He continuously composed songs with the children's choir to meet various commissions, such as the jubilee of the priesthood of the Catholic curacy in honour of Mgr de Hemptinne in 1951. This experience would lead to the creation of *Missa ya Jubilé* released in 1952 by Decca éditions in Paris.[1] Thanks to these musical releases, his music was exported well beyond the borders of the Congo, although the choir was never permitted to give concerts abroad.[2]

Joseph Kiwele is still mainly known for his religious music, symbolic of the phenomena of the inculturation of Christian art, in other words the Christianisation of African arts in the colonial era,[3] but his works show a variety that reflects his many artistic collaborations. For example, he set the music to *Le sergent De Bruyne* by Auguste Verbeken, which is named after one of the heroes of the Belgian colonial conquest in the episode of the fight against the 'Swahili-Arab' slave drivers. This play, which was published in 1932 in the weekly *L'Essor du Congo*, was produced in 1946 under the direction of the author. It featured three Europeans in the roles of De Bruyne and his acolytes, while the 'Swahili-Arabs' were played by the members of the dramatic arts department of the Foyer Social Indigène (Native Social Club) and by pupils of Institut Saint-Boniface. This play was the first instance in Élisabethville of a show that featured black and white actors on the same stage, an eminently symbolic

co-presence, as it consisted of re-enacting the colonial conquest on the winners' side. He also composed the music of a song in honour of the Martyrs of Uganda, the Christians killed by those close to Mwanga, king of the Kingdom of Buganda, after they had actually been authorised to carry out the mission. They were asked to renounce their faith, and their refusal was fatal. This story, recounted in the song written by the first Congolese abbot, Stefano Kaoze, and adapted by Kiwele, inspired the play *Katikiro. Prémices sanglants de l'Afrique (Katikiro. The Bloody Beginnings of Africa) (1926)*[4] written by a Jesuit priest based in the Congo, Polydor Meulyenzer.

In short, by casting characters as heroic as the Martyrs of Uganda or the valorous Sergent De Bruyne, Kiwele contributes towards writing an imperial mythology. What's more, he also wrote songs praising Belgium, including *Hymne à la Belgique* composed for King Baudouin's visit in 1955 and the song paying tribute to governor Pétillon.[5] He also wrote *La Katangaise* in 1960, which became the anthem of the secessionist state of Katanga.

Joseph Kiwele was among the first 'evolué'[6] Katangans – along with the students of Pierre-Romain Desfossés' indigenous art studio, the Atelier du Hangar – who were encouraged, in spite of the French state's assimilationist policy, to draw from the ancestral sources of the region's cultural heritage in order to 'regenerate' and avoid acculturation. The latter was seen as the symbol of 'perdition', as Lamoral explains so well:

'It would be disastrous, for black Africa's musical future, to want to ignore a past that is rich in traditions. [...] The civilising mission is above all an adaptation mission, often arduous, always slow and progressive, making the best use of the natural qualities of the primitive peoples. [...] It is doubtless because it understood this, that the Chorale indigène d'Élisabethville became a true focus of musical renewal in the south-east of our colony: because if we want beautiful Negro-inspired music, we have to supply the natives with the weapons – these perfected laws of our art – and let them fight their own battle in a field that is absolutely their own.'[7]

II — *Chura na Nyoka (The Toad and the Snake)*

Chura na Nyoka is a 1957 musical play by Joseph Kiwele (see page 17 for the full text). It was played out for the first time on 9 March 1957 at the Cercle Saint-Pierre in Élisabethville by the Scout Unit of Institut Saint-Boniface, as part of the 'Challenge perpétuel d'art dramatique du Katanga' (Katanga Permanent Theatre Challenge) organised by Governor Paelinck. Beyond the great success it experienced during the Challenge, it's an important play in the literary and theatrical history of the Congo, as it was the first play to have been published in book form in two different editions – first in the Congo and later in Belgium[8] – three years even before the publication in Léopoldville of the first plays by Albert Mongita, an 'évolué' who is considered a pioneer in the field of theatre.[9]

1) Synopsis

Chura na Nyoka is the story of a toad who wants to make friends with a snake, ignoring the warnings of his brothers, who caution him about the dangerousness of the snake. He does what he wants and 'to a very lively theme' (preface), he offers to host the snake at his village to share some palm wine. The toad has trouble following the shrewder snake, who then offers the toad to hold his tail, so that the snake can pull him along the road. When they arrive at their destination, the snake is first politely welcomed. However, when he is asked to fold up and sit like a toad before he can quench his thirst, something he is unable to do, he is booed by the choir of toads. Naturally the snake's physique does not allow him to do this, which leads to mockery and jeers. The snake, furious and injured, leaves with his desire for vengeance provoked. He now maliciously invites the toad, who is welcomed to the snake's village by a menacing choir of snakes who promise to bite him, which, of course, they do. The toad's death is celebrated in a melancholy mourning song, the *kilio*.

2) An intermedial, linguistic and semantic mille-feuille

Chura na Nyoka is an operetta, in other words a performance made up of texts, mimes, music and dance. This series of 'layers' was orchestrated, meaning: the choir was at the back of the stage, the dancers in the middle of the stage and the 'storyteller' and soloist Prosper Kabangu, playing the toad, at the front of the stage (see page 16). This orchestrated intermediality in the form of a stage with multiple backgrounds was common practice for shows in the colonial era, with the layers embodying interculturality (although at the time it was referred to as a 'mix/dialogue of races'). The show presented a juxtaposition of the theatrical devices accompanied by an intermediary invested with the power of moving across them and organising them, giving them a meaning, an interpretation. This intermediary, in this instance Kiwele, is not always on stage, but by taking on the role of adaptor ('adaptation' was the key word in colonial shows), he becomes the intermediary between the Congolese and the Europeans. This is a function that 'évolué' Congolese like Kiwele, even those placed centre stage, promoted to the rank of conductor, can only take on thanks to a higher authority that allows the show to be put on and thus makes it legitimate. In this operetta it is first Father Anschaire Lamoral, choirmaster, under whose direction Kiwele officiated (until the latter's death in 1950), then another priest, Father Dom Thomas More Weitz, who wrote the first version of *Chura na Nyoka* whilst explicitly attributing authorship to Kiwele in the preface and the commentary introducing the opera libretto.

The play is also layered in a linguistic sense. The multilingual text of *Chura na Nyoka* (Swahili title) presents itself as a superimposition of fragments of texts in three languages which share the same space on the double page: the opera libretto part is in French and Swahili while the words of the play are in Swahili, and sometimes in Kiyeke (see page 20, 21).

2e ÉPISODE (SCÈNE III).

LAKINI MZEE CHURA AKANYWA MALOVU HATA TONE LA
MWISHO LA KIBUYU ALICHOLETEWA. —
NDUGUZE WAKAMLETEA MZEE NYOKA KINGINE —
LAKINI WAKAMPA NA SHARTI —
KAMA NYOKA KWA KUWÈZA KUNYWA, SHERTI AKAE NAMNA
WAKAAVYO VYURA —
NI YAKINI KAMA HAITAWEZEKANA KUNYWA. —
VYURA VYOTE PIA VIKAMCHEKELEA SANA, KWANI ALISHINDWA
KUKETI KAMA WAO. —

Tandis que compère le crapaud vide jusqu'à la dernière
goutte la calebasse qu'on avait apportée, ses amis en pré-
sentent une autre au serpent.
Mais pour la boire, ils mettent une condition: Le serpent
devra pour y porter les lèvres, s'asseoir à la manière des
crapauds!
Il lui est donc impossible de se désaltérer... pauvre serpent...
Et les crapauds s'amusent à ses dépens et se moquent
de lui!

LIVRET

Messire serpent... notre vin ne goûtera
  que s'il s'assied à la mode des crapauds!
— Mais pour moi, c'est impossible!
— Allons plie-toi, donc, replie-toi!
Idiot, Imbécile!
— Allons... vas-y... replie-toi donc!
— Allons... retourne donc chez toi... sans
  boire! puisque tu n'es pas des nôtres!
Pars!

2e ÉPISODE

An excerpt from a multilingual theatre text book for *Chura na Nyoka.*

Le voilà brûlant, rouge, rutilant. Il coule,
ce cuivre, vers son sort : croisette des an-
ciens, croix de cuivre des plus jeunes, scin-
tillant sur leurs vibrantes poitrines ils te
chantent " ô cuivre'' dans ton pays un
hymne reconnaissant. Maintenant tu ser-
pentes docile au lamineur ; tu te durcis au
tréfilage ; mais à la fonderie tu vas... tu
t'abandonnes, dompté par ce maître qui te
modèle. De son creuset ta lave rouge cou-
le vers son destin. Le cuivre brillant,
d'un flot vivant se déverse sans arrêt chez
STAQUET. ✖✖ ✖✖ ✖✖ ✖✖ ✖✖ ✖✖

A 'copper song' composed by Kiwele.

kudi kinongo

LE MINERAI EST PORTÉ AU LIEU CHOISI POUR
LA GRANDE OPÉRATION DE LA FUSION. LES
FOURNEAUX SONT CONSTRUITS EN BLOCS
DE PETITES TERMITIÈRES. LES «SOUFFLEURS»
CHANTENT L'EXPÉRIENCE DU FONDEUR QUI
POSSÈDE L'ART DE CONDUIRE LE FEU ET D'AR-
RIVER A LA FUSION. LES « SOUFFLEURS HABI-
LES » CHANTENT POUR CONJURER LES MAU-
VAIS SORTS QUI S'AVISERAIENT DE BOUCHER
LA SOUFFLERIE. QUAND LE MINERAI ENTRE
EN FUSION, ET QUE LE MÉTAL RUTILANT AP-
PARAIT, LA FOULE JOYEUSE ENTONNE LE CHANT
A LA GLOIRE DE LA MONTAGNE DE KALABI.
LES MANES DES ANCÊTRES ONT ÉTÉ FAVORA-
BLES AU TRAVAIL. CE CHANT CÉLÈBRE LA
VERTU MYSTÉRIEUSE DE LA «TERMITIÈRE»
QUI EST LA GRANDE COLLABORATRICE DU
FONDEUR. ✖✖ ✖✖ ✖✖ ✖✖ ✖✖ ✖✖ ✖✖ ✖✖

In addition, the preface informs us that the play *Chura na Nyoka* was adapted from a Kongo tale collected by Father Ivo De Struyf, 'translated' from Kikongo into French and published in his collection *Fables et légendes congolaises*[10] (Congolese Fables and Legends). The multilingualism attests to the plurality of languages present in the Congo, and thus contributes to the recognition of these languages. Although French had the privilege of being the scholarly language, this play shows that an opera, an elitist form par excellence, can be composed in African languages. While this multilingualism may surprise the reader today, it was nothing unusual for Élisabethville readers, who were accustomed to the French/Swahili bilingualism of printed matter, most notably newspapers, and in particular *Mwana Shaba* (Child of Copper), the monthly newspaper of the UMHK mining company.[11]

Finally, at a semantic level, *Chura na Nyoka* is a play rich in symbolism. It lends itself to several interpretations, linked to the socio-historical context in which this play was adapted and produced: Élisabethville in the 1950s, during which aspirations for independence were beginning to be heard. This tale features two 'communities' living in different spaces, who meet in a transitional space (the bush or the forest that leads from one community to the other). At first the companions turn their difference into their strength (the snake pulls the toad along on his tail to move through the grass) which allows them to establish a certain complicity. However, this difference becomes unsurpassable when the snake is challenged to first sit like a toad before he is allowed to drink the palm wine. Spitefully tested, he fails and things turn sour in the inverted mirror of the tale, where the toad visits the snakes. This visit costs him his life, as a result of the snake's vengeance. The moral of the story, although it is curiously not spelled out here, could be this: differences between communities are insurmountable and assimilation impossible, at the risk of perishing. Another interpretation could be to see this animal duo as the symbol of Black and White, the toad representing Black and the snake White. Although the toad is warned by his family of the snake's (lethal) power, he persists in inviting him to his village. The snake's technical performance is demonstrated very early on in their exchange, as they make their way to the toads' space. The snake's fatal vengeance could be interpreted as a warning addressed to the Congolese, warning them not to dare to mock the Europeans. However, these are merely two interpretations to be taken with the precaution required by our reading, which is of course marked by the post-colonial sensitivity of our modern era.

Kiwele by Baloji or the echo of the copper songs

Chura na Nyoka – and more broadly, the works of Kiwele – are symbolic of the urban culture that flourished in the 1950s in Élisabethville and in the urban conurbation of the Katanga Copperbelt. Here Congolese artists and their Belgian 'promoters' forge an urban identity tied to the plans of colonial modernity, according to which all social transactions and collective representation systems had to be correlated to the economy of technical and industrial progress (with the Church's blessing), making this economy, if not a relay, then an echo of these transactions and systems.

It is thus striking to note the extent of the artistic collaborations in this period. For example, the Atelier du Hangar illustrated the sleeves of the records released by the Chorale indigène d'Élisabethville (**see below**), and Kiwele composed the music for several plays with Gabriel Kitenge, a playwright and musician who was very active in the Katanga scene.

Like the copper that glows red and reverberates with Kiwele's copper songs (**see page 22-23**), Sammy Baloji's work highlights the work of one man, a key actor in the Belgian colonisation of the Congo, by revealing the full complexity reflected in the hybridity of his works, as he hovered between a classical European education and a 'reprise'[12] (revival or taking up) of the Bantou artistic tradition.

LES CHANTEURS A LA CROIX DE CUIVRE

MUSIQUE BANTOUE

Record sleeve illustrated by Atelier du Hangar.

NOTES

[1] There are two releases of his records: 1948, Société belge du disque, African series, Brussels, including two booklets with a letter of introduction by Georges Duhamel; 1952, Decca éditions, Paris.

[2] In the Archives Africaines de Bruxelles (Brussels African Archives), the bundle of documents dedicated to the 'Chanteurs à la croix de cuivre' (Copper Cross Singers) consists of correspondence between the general colonial government in Léopoldville and the office of the Minister for Colonies in Brussels, which reported three invitations to Europe for the Chorale indigène d'Élisabethville (Native Choir of Élisabethville) between 1947 and 1953: in 1947 (plans for a Belgian tour), in 1950 (participation in the first Musical Olympiad in Salzburg), in 1952 and 1953 (3 relaunches of the plans for a Baelgian tour). In 1947, Mgr de Hemptinne firmly opposed the tour, under the pretext of repercussions on the smooth running of the school in the absence of the accompanying teachers. In 1950, following the death of Lamoral, it was considered that the choir's training had been 'severely neglected'. In 1953, the minister's office wrote to the governor general that the 'current artistic value of Joseph Kiwele's choir is quite insufficient to envisage it undertaking a Belgian tour, particularly in order for it to stand alongside other choirs.' (Archives Africaines, GG, Inventaire Info (102), Bundle 17 – Petits chanteurs à la croix de cuivre).

[3] This phenomenon could be observed in all artistic disciplines in the colonial era: music, theatre and visual arts: Cakpo (Erick), *Art chrétien africain : Caractéristiques et enjeux*, Paris, L'Harmattan, Coll. Etudes Africaines, 2013 ; Muikilu Ndaye (Antoine), *Topique des représentations théâtrales en R.D. Congo de 1905 à 1960. Fondement de l'histoire théâtrale de la République Démocratique du Congo*. Saarbrücken: Presses académiques francophones, 2014.

[4] Brasseur-Legrand (Brigitte), 'De l'histoire à la légende dorée : le récit des Martyrs de l'Ouganda et sa diffusion en Belgique', in Halen (Pierre), dir., *Approches du roman et du théâtre missionnaires*. Bern, Berlin, Oxford, Frankfurt, NY, Vienna: Peter Lang, coll. Littérature religieuse et spiritualité, 2006, p. 55-102.

[5] 'For the municipal consultation, the Congolese composer Joseph Kiwele composed a folk song that he dedicated to Mr Pétillon, Governor-General. The theme of this song, entitled 'Kongo ni moja', is the following: 'we must be united, with our only concern being the progress of the Congo': extract from *Dépêches Belga, Nouvelles d'Afrique*, N° 24/12/1957 (Archives africaines de Bruxelles, Fonds COPAMI 4796 – Bundle 1957-1960). The songs recorded also contain several passages praising the colonists, like Bwana Kawaya, translated as 'The chief who is everywhere' (in 'So Mwenda Kongo nani ?' and 'Elea Mutumbi Kazobole').

[6] Évolué ('evolved' or 'developed') was a French label used during the colonial era to refer to a native African or Asian who had 'evolved' by becoming Europeanised through education or assimilation and had accepted European values and patterns of behaviour.

[7] Lamoral (Arnold), 'La Chorale indigène d'Élisabethville et la renaissance de la musique bantoue', *Bulletin des missions*, (Abbaye de Saint-André, Bruges), April 1947, p. 230-250 (p. 230).

[8] The first was published in the Congo (Élisabethville, éditions CEPSI – Centre d'étude des problèmes de la société indigène 1953), the second in Belgium (Gembloux: Duculot, 1957).

[9] Mongita (Albert), *Mangengenge*, Musée de la Vie Indigène, 1956. Mongita was also a painter and host of radio programmes on Radio Congo Belge.
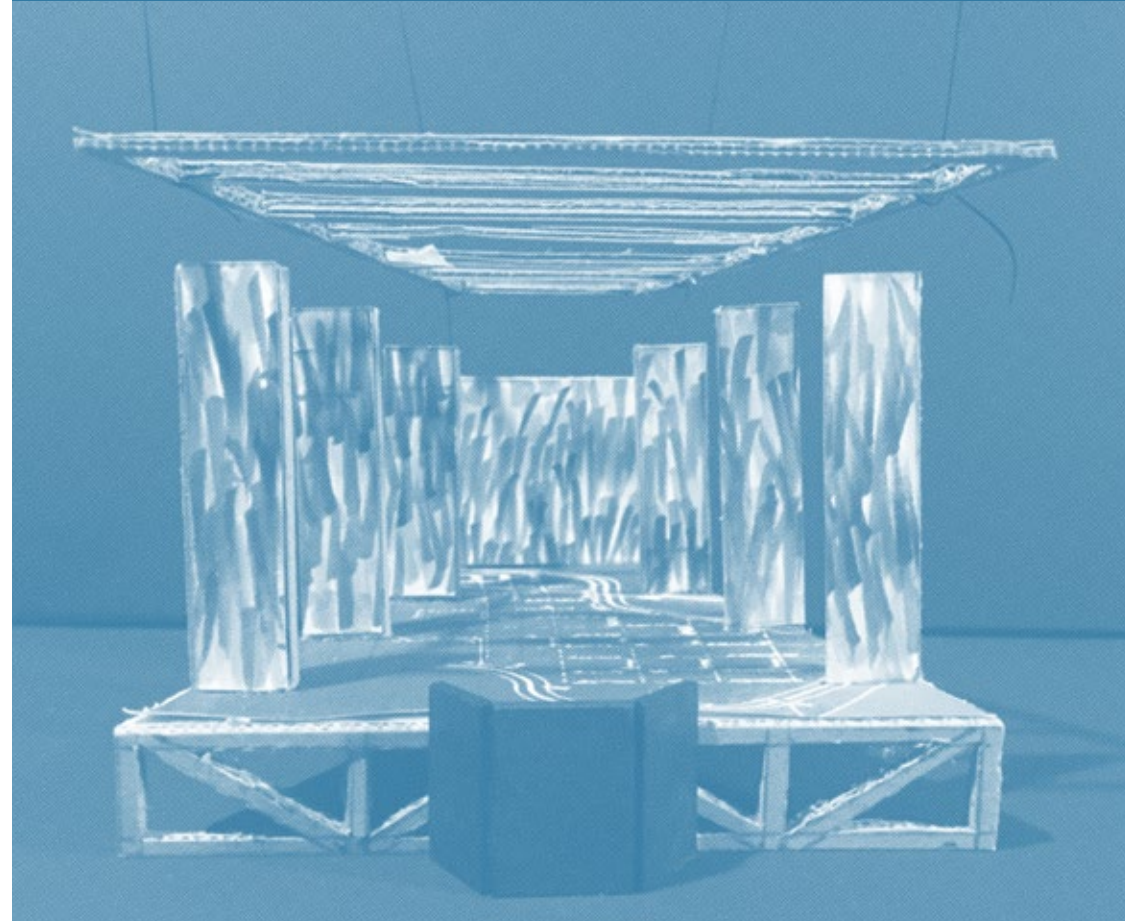
[10] Struyf de (Ivo), *Fables et légendes congolaises*. Volume 2. Leuven: Xaveriana, coll. Xaveriana-Brochures, 2nd series No 53, 1928, 32 p. This type of creation is a common device in African literature. Numerous African authors have 'repris' (taken up/revived) and re-written 'African tales and legends', supposedly collected 'from the mouths of the natives' by Europeans who then published collections, the idea being to help build a cultured record canonising the texts re-written by authors who could already boast a certain legitimacy in the literary field.

[11] Johannes Fabian, in his essay *Language and Colonial Power. The Appropriation of Swahili in the Former Belgian Congo 1880-1938* (University of California Press, 1986), recounts the colonial language policy, consisting in giving Katanga Swahili an official existence, legitimised with a publishing presence.

[12] To paraphrase Mudimbe in his famous text 'Reprendre': 'The word *reprendre* (...) I intend as an image of the contemporary activity of African art. I mean it first in the sense of taking up an interrupted tradition, not out of a desire for purity (...) but in a way that reflects the conditions of today': Mudimbe (V.-Y.), 'Reprendre' in *The Idea of Africa*. Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 154-213

OPERETTA: CHURA NA NYOKA
BY JOSEPH KIWELE

Maquette of theatre stage,
designed by scenographer Jean Christophe Lanquetin.

The storyteller Mungole opens the dance:
Mungole, we will dance with you.
And if someone among us does not dance…
then his mother is a witch!

I'm going to tell you the story of the toad and the snake. Master Toad wanted to take a walk with his companion the snake, but he was not allowed to do so, because it was said that the snake was a bad animal. Flouting his father's advice, the toad invites his companion the snake…

Croak! Croak! calls the toad… and the snake hisses in reply…
Let's go, let's take a walk…
Hey! says the toad, come and visit my family and friends.
There we'll drink the good palm wine and we'll take some back with us to drink at home!
Ok! Let's go! answers the snake.

Master Toad and Master Snake set off together to the toads' friends to feast there!

Let's go faster, we must hurry!
But I don't know how to walk, says the toad…
So slide along in the grass, it's easy!
No it isn't! For a toad it's complicated!
So hang on to my tail and we'll save some time!
Oh! Oh! Thank you companion!
This time… we'll dash!
But let's go faster still!
Because it's good wine… palm wine that we'll drink!

After having walked much longer still, they reach the tribe of toads who were heading off to the fields! Without stopping, straight away the toads give the two companions a gourd of palm wine… There's a warm welcome… just listen…

Cries of welcome from the toads!
We're happy that you came to visit!

While Master Toad empties the gourd he was given down to the last drop, his friends present another to the snake. But in order to drink, they impose a condition: In order to bring the wine to his lips, he will have to sit like a toad! So it's impossible for him to quench his thirst… poor snake… And the toads have a laugh at his expense and make fun of him!

Master Snake… you will only taste our wine if you sit like a toad!
But for me it's impossible! says the snake
Come on, fold up, curl up! Idiot, imbecile!
Come on… get on with it, curl up!

CHURA na NYOKA
Le crapaud et le serpent.
par
Joseph KIWELE

CETTE FABLE EST INSPIRÉE DU CONTE "le crapaud
et la grenouille" DE J. STRUYF, s.j. publié dans
"FABLES et LÉGENDES CONGOLAISES, Collection Xavériana.

Come on... so go back home... without drinking! since you're not one of us! Leave!

You've seen how angry Master Snake was... He returned to his village alone... But sometime after that, the toad, even though he hasn't forgotten what happened, wants to have another adventure with the snake... You can hear him... he is calling his friend:

Croak! Croak! calls the toad... and the snake hisses in reply...
Let's go, let's take a walk...
Hey! says the snake, come and visit my family and friends.
There we'll drink the good palm wine and we'll take some back with us to drink at home!
Ok! let's go! replies the toad.

Master Toad and Master Snake set off together, but this time their walk will take them to the snake's friends!

The two friends arrive out of breath and thirsty at the village of the snakes! The snakes come back from the fields when they see the two companions... Listen to the welcome they are given.

Cries of welcome from the snakes! We're happy that you came to visit!

Repeating the bad joke that the toads played, the snakes bring two gourds of palm wine. Our snake rushes to finish his in one go, while they force the toad to drink his in the same way as the snakes! And obviously our friend the toad can't manage this... still thirsty and angry... while the tribe's mockery and the snakes' jeers ring out on all sides.

So off you go... Toad, go back to your wife thirsty!
What a disgrace! A guest who doesn't know how to behave like his hosts!

So the angry toad goes away. And the snake says to him: Hey, you're getting angry! The other day we were together, you drank palm wine and I had to go home thirsty. And today you're furious with me? The toad's anger continued to grow; the snake says to him: now it's finished between us! And if you quarrel with me again, I'll kill you!
You, kill me? says the toad
So the snake bites the toad.
The mourning chorus of the toads.

I will bite you, nasty toad...
Chwi — there!
I can't see him any more... I'm looking for him, but I can't find him...
I can't see him any more... and the sun's already setting!
If you die by the hand of a man, come back to tell us!
If the snake kills you, come back to take your revenge!
You who goes to his mother... tell her...
Your son, the toad is dying, murdered by the snake!
Toad, we're crying, we're all in a state of affliction...
But you, sleep... sleep toad, sleep!

ESSAY: MAKING AND SHAPING A DIVIDED CITY. NOTES ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF LUBUMBASHI'S FIRST PLANNED 'NATIVE TOWN', THE COMMUNE KAMALONDO, 1919-1929

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