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Lumumba in the Hood

The Legacy of Patrice Lumumba in Rap Music since 1990

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“I got the blood of Lumumba in every cell, no hyperbole brother my daddy will tell.
About Central Intelligence, killing our relatives like we Max Payne.
They quell our rebellions and send us to heaven just like a match made.
It’s the exact same. Some have the scars on they backs and some in their last name.”

- Sammus [Enongo Lumumba-Kasongo].
2016. “Back Stabbers”.

As shown by the above lyrics of the American-born Ivorian-Congolese rapper Sammus, a family member of Lumumba on her paternal side, Lumumba is still present in rap music. In this particular case, Sammus used the story of her ancestor in a well-thought-out way to give a glimpse at both history and the process of constructing her personal multi-layered identity. Sammus is far from the only rapper who uses Lumumba in his or her lyrics. Ever since Lumumba’s death, artists across the globe have named songs after or dedicated lyrics to the first prime minister of Congo. An exploratory search for ‘Lumumba’ on *YouTube* leads to an extremely heterogeneous repertoire of songs with even more surprising backgrounds. The Soviet composer Dmitry Pokrass wrote “Песня о Лумумбе” (“Song about Lumumba”, 1961) in the context of the Cold War, during the alignment of the country with the Congo and the opening of a Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow.

On the other side of the Iron Curtain, the British band The Spencer Davis Group released a virtuosic instrumental song on Hammond organ named “Waltz for Lumumba” (1966). In Belgium, “Lieve Loemoemba, klotepa” (“Dear Lumumba, shitty dad”, 1980), written by cabaret artist Jan De Wilde about an old and sick dog named Lumumba, became popular thanks to a cover by comedian Urbanus (1985). An Argentinian reggae band founded in 1996 bears Lumumba’s name, Duke Lumumba; a Ghanaian artist who worked alongside with Fela Kuti, made an album with the title *Lumumba* (1974); and Neil Diamond mentioned him in “Done too soon” (1970). The most remarkable accolade is probably the song “Lumumba” (1974) by Miriam Makeba. This South-African singer became world-famous for her song “Pata Pata” (1967) and was for a decade married to Civil Rights and pan-African activist Stokely Carmichael. In her song, Makeba refers to Lumumba whilst singing how her daughter Bongie Makeba named her son Nelson Lumumba Lee.¹ A decade later, the Italian producer Tony Cercola produced an Italo-disco song called “Lumumba” (1988) that included tribal percussion rhythms and was sold in a sleeve with thick red lips.²

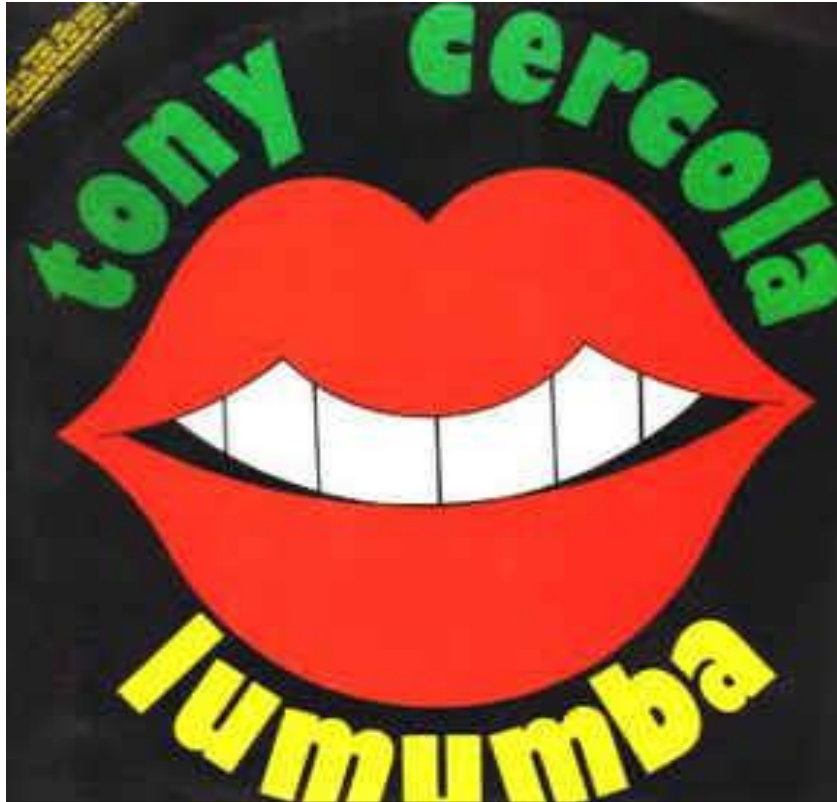


Figure 1: *The striking and racially-insensitive record sleeve in which Tony Cercola's single Lumumba (1988) was sold.*

Source: *Tony Cercola. 1988. "Lumumba." Tendance. EP.*

In sum, Lumumba is appropriated by all kinds of artists. Since he is most often present in the lyrics and videos of rap music, this chapter will look only at this genre and will not consider DJ'ing, breakdancing, or graffiti art, three other forms of artistic expression which hip-hop pioneer Afrika Bambaataa described as essential elements of hip-hop (Kugelberg 2007: 17). The political background of the rap scene, the popularity of the genre and the geographical concentration of this phenomenon make an analysis of the appropriation of Patrice Lumumba in rap music relevant. For the same reasons, so-called hip-hop studies emerged during the 1990's. On the one hand, similar analyses on the echoes of postcoloniality in rap music have looked at other heroes of the postcolonial world or the African diaspora, such as Thomas Sankara, Malcolm X, and Steve Biko (Da Sylva 2016, Urla 2001, Drewett 2007). On the other hand, there is a vast literature on the heroisation of Lumumba in general (Petit, 2016) and the global Francophone literary scene (Halen and Riesz 1997). However, apart from some studies on the postcolonial character of the Belgo-Congolese hip-hop scene (Mertens et al. 2013, Clette-Gakuba 2016, Ledent 2016, Munsya 2016, Tshilumba 2016 and Zibouh 2016) and some hints in the work of Ira Dworkin (2017) on the connection between the Congo and Afro-American anti-colonialist and civil rights activism, an exhaustive analysis of the legacy of Lumumba in rap music is not available to date.³

In an attempt to fill the gap in hip-hop research, this chapter will try to answer the questions why, how, when and by whom references to Patrice Lumumba are made in rap music in the Western world. First, we will look at who is writing lyrics on Lumumba and will outline the respective rap scenes. Secondly, this chapter will focus on two kinds of references: the postcolonial pantheon and more complex references. There, we will look at the meaning of the lyrics in addition to the context in which they were penned. In so doing, this chapter will contribute to a better understanding of the legacy of Lumumba in the arts, postcolonial sensibilities in the public sphere and the sources of inspiration for rappers across the globe.

Lumumba's Crew. A collective biography of rappers making references to Lumumba

The group of rappers referring to Lumumba is as diverse as the rap scene itself. To get an analytically viable overview, some important methodological decisions were made. First, the scope was limited to the American, French, and Belgian rap scenes. These countries were selected since they respectively constitute: the birthplace of rap music, the most important country outside the USA in terms of rap music sales and artistic influence, and the country with the most obvious postcolonial connection with Lumumba.⁴ In this context, this chapter relies heavily on Paul Gilroy's conceptualization of the 'Black Atlantic' as a geographic space. By including artists from both sides of the Atlantic and the postcolonial diaspora's in Europe with origins in both Africa and the Caribbean, the analysis underlines the entanglements within the Black Atlantic. The article also reaffirms the inner hybridity of the rap genre and its artistic diverse origins (Gilroy 1993: 103). Consequently, based on a sample of three case countries, this chapter will draw a geography of a 'Black Atlantic rap scene' in which matters of nationality are of lesser importance and in which a transnational view on Lumumba's heritage in rap music is at the core.

In order to compile a representative list of relevant songs, we used a number of techniques. We made searches on music databases and websites such as *YouTube*, *Musixmatch*, and *Shazam* by querying keywords such as 'Lumumba' and 'Lumumba Rap'. The most fruitful method was an extensive crawl in the annotated lyrics database *Genius*. This website, which was formerly known as *Rap Genius*, offers an impressive full-text database of music lyrics to which, thanks to a *Wikipedia*-styled contributor system, interpretations of certain verses are added (O'Lary 2015). In addition, we collected physical copies of albums that could not be found online. These searches led to almost hundred results. Therefore, a selection of the most influential and critically praised, highest grossing, artistically relevant, and most popular artists was made. Fifty-three songs survived the cut.

In Belgium, it is the small Congolese diaspora that accounts for Lumumba references in rap music, even more so than in France and the US (Goddeeris 2016: 444). In a study on Congolese hip-hop in Belgium, Jamina Mertens et al. showed how in this regard Abou Mehdi, Baloji, 13hor, Teddy L and Gandhi (G.A.N.) are key actors (Mertens et al. 2013: 93). This analysis will further expand on that, and discuss

upcoming talents such as Badi as well as well-established stars like Damso. It is important to note that recent Belgian rap music has largely turned away from politically inspired lyrics. Consequently, both artists with a Congolese background such as Coely, Woodie Smalls and some members of ZwartWerk and the non-Congolese rappers who have succeeded in making rap a more mainstream genre such as Safi & Spreej, DVTCH NORRIS, Tourist LeMc, Zwangere Guy, Caballero, 't Hof van Commerce and Hamza, etc. have to date not mentioned Lumumba in their work.⁵ TheColorGrey, a young Antwerp talent, could have been an exception to this rule since he regularly refers to his relation with Congo on his 2017 debut album *REBELLATION*.⁶ Roméo Elvis too, alluded to the debates on Belgian-Congolese history in "Chocolat" (2019), but did not mention Lumumba either. In a broader perspective, postcoloniality in Belgium seems to be a topic mainly addressed by francophone artists. Only recently have postcolonial debates popped up in the Dutch-speaking scene. The video clip of the multilingual song "Money Terug" (2016) by Soul'Art addresses the postcolonial debate on financial reparations, utilizes archival images of the *Dipenda*-era and depictions the equestrian statue of Leopold II. More recently, Pasi [Kim Nzita Vangu] appears to be one of the most vocal Dutch speaking representatives of Belgian postcolonial rap music. Both "Vuur" (2018) with Reflexo and Rakke from collective *EigenMakelij* as well as the solo track "Medaille" (2019) reflect on the Belgian postcolonial debate.

In France too, the most obvious group of rappers rhyming about Lumumba is the Congolese diaspora. Prime examples are Monsieur R, Kalash Criminel, Despo Rutti, TiTo Prince and former Sexion d'Assaut member, Maître Gims. Being the son of Djanana Djuna, who was a member of the band Viva La Musica founded by the Congolese icon Papa Wemba, the very popular Maître Gims [Gandhi Djuna] serves as some kind of a *primus inter pares* in this scene. Almost of all these artists were born in Kinshasa, left Congo at the end of the Mobutu regime, and subsequently climbed the ranks of the French rap scene. Because of their influence, commentators even talk of a certain 'Congolisation' of the French rap.⁷ A second group are rappers with origins in sub-Saharan countries. Lalcko has his roots in Cameroon, Niska and the two brothers who together form Ärsenik originate from Congo-Brazzaville, Youssoupha is of mixed Congolese-Senegalese origin but identifies as Senegalese, Disiz La Peste has a Senegalese father, Ol' Kainry is of Beninese origin, Dany Dan's roots are in the Central African Republic and Démocrates D is a rap formation of Ivorian artists. Médine, Ali and Kery James, respectively of Algerian, Moroccan, and Haitian descent, are the other main representatives of what may be called the 'postcolonial minority culture' (Drissel 2002: 128).⁸ Similarly, relevant American rappers all have African roots and include Killer Mike, Black Thought, Saul Williams, Wise Intelligent, Nas, David Banner and Sammus next to groups of the nineties such as X-Clan and Arrested Development.

In terms of popularity and influence, it is safe to say that the corpus includes a whole spectrum ranging from underground to internationally known artists. For example, African-American rapper Nas is seen as one of the most influential lyricists in the contemporary global rap scene and was even ranked one of the '10 Best Rappers of All Time' by *Billboard*.⁹ Killer Mike is highly popular with his supergroup *Run*

the Jewels and is seen as one of the most important contemporary politically engaged rap artists alongside Kendrick Lamar and Kanye West.¹⁰ Arrested Development won two Grammys in the categories ‘Best New Artist’ and ‘Best Rap Performance by a Duo or Group’ and was even labelled ‘Band of the Year’ in 1992 by *Rolling Stone*. David Banner was heard by a committee of the US House of Representatives during an investigation on the influence of stereotypes in hip-hop culture on the American society.¹¹ Finally, Black Thought is best known for being a member of the critically-acclaimed hip-hop band The Roots, which has been since 2009 the house band of Jimmy Fallon’s popular late-night talk shows.

In France, Sexion d’Assaut was one of the most popular rap groups, selling hundreds of thousands of records. Maître Gims continued these successes after he left the group and pursued his solo career. Disiz La Peste has worked with Stromae, and Rockin’ Squat even collaborated with Ol’ Dirty Bastard of Wu-Tang Clan and political rap legend KRS-One. Youssoupha in turn is the son of world-famous Congolese rumba superstar Tabu Ley Rochereau. The latter was featured on the iconic song *Indépendance Cha Cha* (1960) which still stands today as a symbol of the Congolese independence and Congolese rumba music. Youssoupha also has a vast fan base in Africa itself and is one of the judges in the talent show *The Voice Afrique Francophone 2018*. In 2012 he was asked by then French presidential candidate François Hollande to make a song for his campaign. Claiming ‘rap does not calm the streets, but rather describes them’, Youssoupha refused the offer.

A concert by Médine in the Parisian terrorism-torn concert hall Bataclan in 2018 has even caused a stir in French society. Because of previous controversial lyrics, links with the religious organisation *Le Havre du Savoir*, criticism of secularism and his self-description as an ‘islamo-hooligan’, Médine’s anticipated concert has sparked nationwide public and political discussions on the position of the Islam in France, the integration of postcolonial diasporas, censorship, the freedom of speech and artistic liberties. Far-right Rassemblement National party leader Marine Le Pen even initiated a #PasDeMédineAuBataclan campaign.¹² Belgo-Congolese artists Baloji on the other hand played at the famous Glastonbury Festival and is increasingly featured in international press. Before claims of misogyny forced the Belgian football association to withdraw their proposal, Damso was even scheduled to compose the World Cup anthem for the Belgian national football team in 2018.

Transcending national divisions, the music of all of the included artists can be labelled as ‘political rap’. X-Clan and Arrested Development are the prime examples of the American political rap alternative to so-called gangster rap. In France, too, it is surprising to see how Kery James, Lunatic, Disiz La Peste, Ärsenik, Youssoupha, Ol’Kainry, Dany Dan, TiTo Prince, Rockin’ Squat, Médine, and others in many ways make up a close family of politically engaged rappers.¹³ Another sphere of rappers consists, amongst others, Damso, Niska and Maître Gims. In addition to their political and postcolonial messages, they are also considered to be a part of the Francophone gangster rap scene because of their decadent

lifestyles. Notwithstanding their different nationalities or national origins, all of these rappers seem to have found each other in a shared dissent, influencing each other in the Black Atlantic space through various types of collaborations in the studio and on stage. Baloji and Monsieur R were for example both members of a collective called H-Posse at the beginning of their careers. The fact that most of the rappers share similar social backgrounds contributes to this cohesion. Almost all of them were born and raised in the suburbs of American metropolises, the *banlieues* of France, or the urban settings of Brussels and Liège.

The research covers the entire period of the existence of rap music, which came into being during the 1980s. A song by X-Clan from 1990 is the earliest piece included in this analysis. The bulk of the songs, however, date from the twenty-first century. At first sight, this may be due to the public debate on the death of Lumumba following the book of Ludo De Witte (2001). However, since academic analyses rarely trickle down to youth culture, the increase of songs on Lumumba more likely results from the growing popularity of rap music and a growing postcolonial conscience inspired by more easily accessible and less academic sources. Importantly, this surge may also mirror a certain bias due to a more comprehensive inclusion of songs made in the age of the internet. As a matter of fact, it is practically impossible to retrieve the essentially underground homemade tapes and CD's made in the 1980s and 1990s (Harrison 2006). Nevertheless, it can be claimed that in recent years, rap music on Lumumba has succeeded in reaching larger audiences, both online and through other channels.

Lumumba in the pantheon, a tool for name-dropping

Rap artists draw attention to Lumumba in different ways. A first type of reference places Lumumba in a kind of 'pantheon' (Bonnette 2012:15). This is not a new phenomenon and should be seen in a literary tradition which Halen, Riesz and their contributors thoroughly described in their *Patrice Lumumba entre Dieu et diable: un héros africain dans ses images* (1997). For one portion of the references to Lumumba in rap music selected for this study, the analyses put forward in their volume still stand today, even in regard to rap music. (Halen and Riesz, 1997, Djungu-Simba, 1997 Hoyet 1997 and Porra, 1997). Rappers too often limit themselves to solely mentioning Lumumba's name in order to revoke a very simplistic image. Additionally, in analogy with their colleagues in literature, many rappers also compile lists of people who they deem important in the struggle of civil rights, the history of Africa or the global South.

This type of reference to Lumumba in rap music is the oldest and was used as early as 1990 by the American group X-Clan. At the end of their song "Raise the Flag" (1990), they sing "No justice, no peace, Father/[Fuck] Moses, Osiris, Oh Isis, Patrice Lumumba, Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, Sonny Carson, The Blackwatch, Sissy!". The phrase is a typical example of the Afrocentric ideology placing Lumumba next to ancient Egyptian gods Osiris and Isis and civil rights activists. (Cummings and Roy 2002). X-Clan should be seen in a context of a movement of Afrocentric ideology in rap music that was

coined by Afrika Bambaataa and further dispersed thanks to artists such as Queen Latifah, Jungle Brothers, De La Soul and A Tribe Called Quest of the closely-related Native Tongues collective.¹⁴ In this way, fans of X-Clan were clearly introduced to the ideas that sought to conquer a place for African history in the historiographical discourse. Moreover, the album cover of *To The East, Blackwards* on which this song of X-Clan was featured, shows Lumumba alongside other postcolonial heroes such as Malcolm X and Haile Selassie. With their Afrocentric message, X-Clan also nuanced the exclusively Afro-American character of rap music and was one of the most influential groups that introduced the genre in the ‘Black Atlantic’ space. (Gilroy 1993: 85)

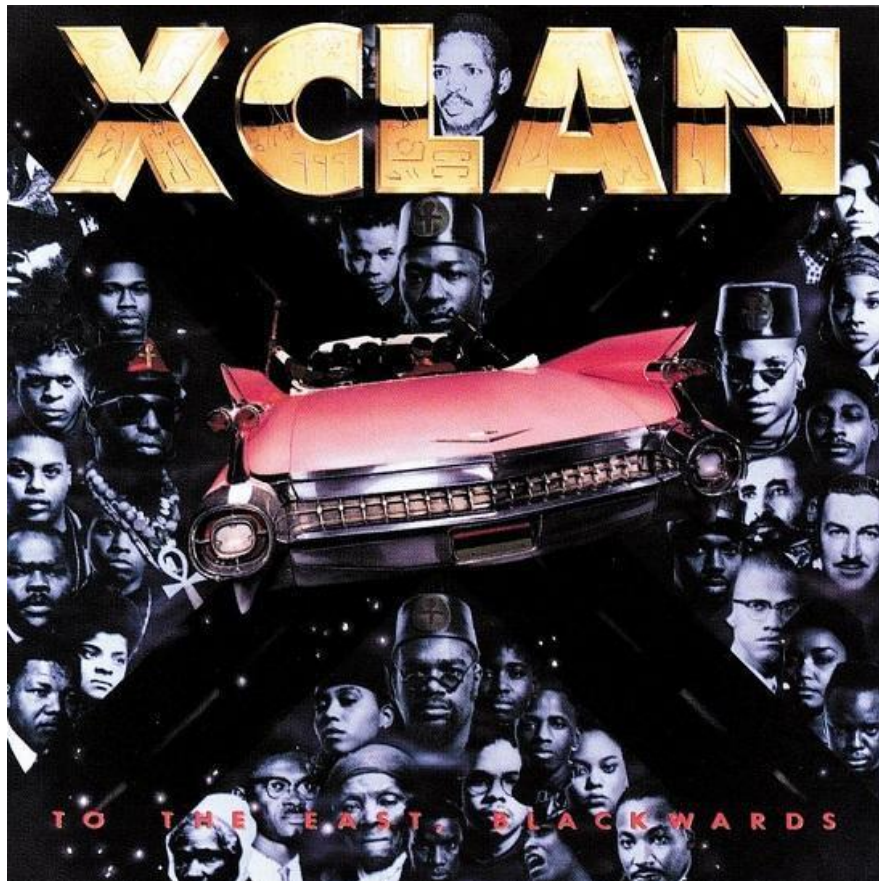


Figure 2: Lumumba, second from left in the lower quarter, as a member of the postcolonial pantheon on the album cover of X-Clan's *To The East, Blackwards* (1990).

Source: X-Clan. 1990. *To The East, Blackwards*, 4th & B'way and Island Records, CD

The stylistic emergence of the postcolonial pantheon, with or without Lumumba's name, should be seen in the context of a close connection between black nationalism and rap music. By constituting such pantheons, these artists wanted to ‘reshuffle the dominant, legitimate and Western hegemonic historical discourse’ (Rose, 1994). The choice for Lumumba may seem obvious, but at first glance it is not entirely clear why rappers preferred him to other African heroes. In truth, Lumumba mainly directed his attention to Congo itself. He did participate in the debate on the rights of the African-Americans. In his poem *Pleure, O Noir Frère bien-aimé* (1959) he called the United-States a country where ‘cotton is God and the dollar the king’ and criticised American exoticism towards their black community.¹⁵ However, the

influence of this poem is probably limited. His reputation as a symbol of pan-Africanism, his political stance in Africa, his charismatic allure and the myths surrounding his death seem to be much more relevant in the process of earning his place amongst the champions of the African-American movement.

Malcolm X's role in the creation and proliferation of the martyrdom of Lumumba is for example far more important. Since Malcolm X acted as a crucial spokesperson of the black nationalist movement and became a symbol within American rap itself, his sympathy for Lumumba still resonates in rap music (Rose 1994: 121-123 and 165-166, Dworkin 2017: 289-291). Subsequently, his speeches in which he heavily criticised the assassination of Lumumba and proclaimed him 'the greatest black man who ever walked the African continent' further fuelled this process.¹⁶ In 1964 Malcolm X and his wife Betty named their new-born daughter Gamilah Lumumba Shabazz after Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser and Patrice Lumumba. Shortly before his assassination Malcolm X even said that 'the chances are that they will get me the way they got Lumumba before he reached the running stage'. After Malcolm X was indeed assassinated, the Committee of African Organisations in England stated that 'the butchers of Patrice Lumumba are the very same monsters who have murdered Malcolm X in cold blood' (Dworkin 2017: 90). In this atmosphere politician Edwin Finley Taliaferro and Black Panther leader Anthony Coston, who was also the first husband of Tupac Shakur's mother, changed their names respectively to Chokwe Lumumba and Lumumba Shakur in honour of the Congolese politician. Just as Dworkin (2017) showed extensively how this political and cultural connection between Malcolm X, the Congo and Lumumba was expressed and reinstated in literature and poetry during the twentieth century, the connection between these two heroes in rap music should be seen from the same perspective.

Roughly a decade later, in 1975, Lumumba's name re-emerged in the American political and public debate. Investigations by the senatorial Church Committee on the activities of the CIA revealed several, though unsuccessful, schemes aimed at assassinating Lumumba. Despite the fact that in the end the CIA had not much to do with the actual successful assassination of Lumumba, this further fuelled a public post-Watergate distrust of the American government (Kuklick and Gerard, 2018: 134-155). From then on, the CIA was perceived as murderous agency of hitmen rather than an institution safeguarding American interests (Johnson, 2004; Trenta 2018). Echoes in popular culture of this widespread distrust of the CIA following the Church Committee and the House Select Committee on Assassinations on the death of John F. Kennedy can be seen in for example *Libra* by Pulitzer Prize for Fiction nominee Don DeLillo (1988) (Willman, 2015). In regard to Lumumba, this resulted in a simplifying dichotomisation between Africa and Lumumba on the one hand and the West with the USA, the CIA and the Belgian colonial administration on the other hand. Since Moïse Tshombe did not fit in these clear-cut categories, attention for his position and role in these events slowly faded. In the same context, Lumumba's name further dispersed within the African-American community following the creation of the Patrice Lumumba Coalition in 1975. This organisation, led by the influential pan-Africanist and Civil Rights

activist Elombe Brath, did not only attempt to put several African revolutionary movements and anti-apartheid on the political agenda, it also tried to convince musicians not to perform in South-Africa during the era of apartheid.¹⁷

It is safe to say that the frequent appearance of Lumumba's name in rap music undoubtedly was accelerated thanks to the proliferation of his message throughout the African-American civil rights movement and anti-establishment sentiments aimed at the CIA. In the biography of rap music legend Tupac Shakur, for example, one can read how his '[...] mother had books by people like Patrice Lumumba and Stokely Carmichael, *Seize the Time* by Bobby Seale and *Sole-dad Brother* by George Jackson. And she would tell these stories of things that she had done or seen and it made me feel a part of something. She always raised me to think I was the Black Prince of the revolution' (McQuillar and Johnson 2012). Although Tupac did not dedicate any lyrics to Lumumba, the linkage between rap music and black nationalism is very clear in his case, certainly because of Tupac's mother's active role in the Black Panther movement. Contemporary artists still connect Tupac and Lumumba as symbols of black music and black politics. Chis Shongo for example, pictured in *Lumumba Shakur* performer Stors Hyns as a Tupac-esque figure in front of the Limete Tower in Kinshasa. With his modern approach, the photographer transferred Tupac within the Black Atlantic space to the homeland of Lumumba and created a dialogue between two historical figures that were assassinated during their mutual challenge of 'the powers that be'.¹⁸

Another example is the story of Professor X the Overseer. He was a member of X-Clan, which, as mentioned earlier, is the first rap formation known to have mentioned Lumumba. This is probably not a coincidence: Professor X the Overseer's real name was Lumumba Carson. His father, Robert 'Sonny' Carson, was a former Korean War veteran and civil rights activist. He may have named or renamed his son after Patrice Lumumba, but this is not entirely certain. As a matter of fact, his son was born in August 1956, when Patrice Lumumba was still at an early stage of his political career and had not yet earned a global reputation. Interestingly however, some lyrics that seem to refer to Patrice Lumumba are actually about Lumumba Carson.¹⁹ This may be another explanation of how Lumumba became a popular reference in rap music.

Although the linkage between black activism and rap music was at its zenith during the 1990s, this phenomenon has



Figure 3: Lumumba-Shakur. A fictional Tupac in front of the Limete Tower in Kinshasa. A powerful image connecting the mutual struggles of rap icon Tupac Shakur and Patrice Lumumba.

Source: "Lumumba-Shakur", accessed May 1, 2018, <http://www.henrikenaumann.com/lumbashak>

continued in the following decades. Some artists keep listing the same icons as before. In “My Country” (2001) the American rapper Nas saw similarities in the way his heroes died and stayed true to the stylistic scheme connecting these heroes already present in the song “Pride” (1994) by Arrested Development. Hinting at the role of Mobutu and Tshombe with the part ‘destroyed by his own people’, he sang:

“This goes out to Che Guevara; A Revolutionary destroyed by his country, Just trying to fight for what's real, This goes out to my n****a Malcolm El-Hajj Malik Shabazz, Just trying to fight for what's real, This goes out to Martin, all about peace and destroyed by his own country, This goes out to everybody in the whole world, Just trying to fight for what's real, To Patrice Lumumba; Just trying to fight for what's real and destroyed by his own people, This goes out to my hood niggas.”

At other times, the African leaders are put in a more contemporary context. The anti-Western and anti-capitalist song “The Globe Holderz” (2007) by Wise Intelligent contrasts the names of Lumumba, Nkrumah and Kabila to the bad practices of ‘the diamond dealers, limb choppers and baby killers, the oil drillers, black nation resource stealers, the truth concealers’. In a slam called “Coded Language” (2001) Saul Williams combined all the above dynamics and mentioned Lumumba in an eclectic list alongside Egyptian pharaohs Akhenaten and Hatshepsut, musicians Bob Marley, Tupac Shakur, Fela Kuti, Marvin Gaye, Janis Joplin, and John Coltrane, activists Harriet Tubman, W.E.B. DuBois, Hellen Keller, Steve Biko, and other remarkable icons such as author William Shakespeare, astrologist Nostradamus, several Yoruba goddesses, the Russian composer Rachmaninov, the Persian mystic Rumi, etc.

These pantheons not only occur in American songs, but are also popular in French ones. One may assume that the former influenced the latter. The African-American rap scene generally had a great impact on French rap thanks to the reach of American cultural production and the atmosphere of shared frustration over society (Prévos 2001: 44-45 and Rose 1994: 19). Even more, La Cliqua, a legendary rap group considered to be one of the cornerstones of French rap, explicitly refers to American artistic influence. One of their members was also nicknamed after Lumumba, and some lyrics that initially seem to refer to Patrice Lumumba, actually refer to this artist.²⁰ A clearer example of how American cultural images strongly contributed to the identification-building process of the young black aspiring French rappers (Helenon, 159) is “Youssoupha est mort” (2005) by French Senegalese-Congolese rapper Youssoupha. He sings:

“Des bisous pour les parias, et j'irais zouker avec Aaliyah. Je me taperais des barres en écoutant Gainsbarre. Je parlerais de nos combats avec Malcolm X et Lumumba. En tant que MC j'accours pour jouer mon rôle, freestyle à la radio avec 2Pac Shakur et Biggie Smalls. Ce sera drôle de revoir Coluche, de voir Foé plein de tonus, d'applaudir Bob Marley et Marvin Gaye.”

In this way, Youssoupha brought together political actors Malcolm X and Lumumba, cultural symbols Bob Marley and Marvin Gaye, popular singer Aaliyah, rappers Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G. [Biggie Smalls], French comedian Coluche and singer Serge Gainsbourg and even the tragically deceased Cameroonian footballer Marc-Vivien Foé. In “Black Out” (2015), Youssoupha lists a series of African postcolonial scenes of conflict and then continues with anti-colonial and postcolonial actors which exemplifies the very diverse origins of his complex identity.

“Kwame Nkrumah, Black Out, Patrice Lumumba, Black Out, Steve Biko, Black Out, Toussaint Louverture, renoi, Black Out.”.

“Que la paix soit avec vous tous” (2016), also known as “Fimbo” (2016), by Despo Rutti is another example of how French rappers rely on American artistic themes and political icons. Not only did Rutti sample the adaptation of Henry Purcell’s “Music for the Funeral of Queen Mary”, which was used in Stanley Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange*, he also rapped ‘Farrakhan, Lumumba, Rosa Parks, Je suis avec la rébellion Bluetooth. Que la paix soit sur vous tous’, mentioning Lumumba next to Nation of Islam leader Farrakhan and Rosa Parks. Songs which lump Malcolm X and Lumumba together are present in France too and confirm the leading role of both leaders in their respective continents. Dany Dan, a stylistic influential rapper in the French scene sang ‘J’aurais préféré connaître Patrice Lumumba qu’ Osama. J’aimais bien JR, mais Bobby serait mon frère siamois’. Not only did he contrast Lumumba with Osama bin Laden in this way, he also hints at the sympathy of Robert F. [Bobby] Kennedy for the Civil Rights movement. Disiz (La Peste) on his turn sings in a verse of TiTo Prince’s “Grosse Touffe Bénie” (2013):

“L’Afrique et coups d’états, c’est pas pour nous, nous c’est Lumumba. Tous se battent à coup de coups bas, se mettent des micros dans les roues. C’est pas pour moi, j’aime trop Malcolm, je teindraient bien ma barbe en roux.”

Two years later Disiz (La Peste) still stuck to ‘Oh ouh oh oh, Brother Malcolm, Brother Malcolm, Le monde manque cruellement de gens comme toi. L’Afrique manque cruellement de Lumumba’ in his song *Malcolm* (2015).

A larger number of French rap songs connect Lumumba to other African postcolonial or precolonial actors. In “Afrique Tolérance” (1995) by rap formation Démocrates D “Afrique tolérance, faite un geste pour l’Afrique, Hailé Sélassié, Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumumba, Thomas Sankara” is sung. Although the rest of the lyrics offer more profound criticism of the postcolonial situation in Africa, no explanation or context whatsoever accompanies these names. In “Tu sais où nous trouver” (2016), the Congolese rapper Kalash Criminel created another connection: “Je suis africain comme Thomas Sankara, Patrice Lumumba et Steve Biko.”. The message of the song nevertheless fades away in the video, which calls to mind gangster rap with images of guns, thugs and balaclavas. Niska goes so far as to rap ‘Je vais tout niquer comme Sankara ou Lumumba, comme Luther King, Malcolm X ou Mandela’

in “Allô Maître Simonard” (2014). Ärsenik on the other hand claims in the song “Putain de poésie” (2002) that he will write his own name in the books of history next to the names of Malcolm X, Lumumba, Antha Diop and Steve Biko. Because of his Algerian background and his connection with the struggles in the Muslim world, Médine created in “Arabospiritual” (2008) his own personal list of heroes, and mentions Lumumba alongside Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Thomas Sankara, Afghan mujahedeen leader Ahmad Shah Massoud and Yasser Arafat. Monsieur R, a controversial rapper of Congolese descent, in turn suggests along with Keny Arkana a fictive alliance between Che Guevara and Patrice Lumumba. In one of the verses of their highly anti-Western and anti-capitalist “De Buenos Aires à Kinshasa” (2008), they sing ‘Patrice et Ernesto réunis, le cauchemar des États-Unis’.

The above-mentioned Disiz (La Peste) identifies with Lumumba in “Cours d’histoire” (2003) too and this time he heavily contrasted his own African postcolonial canon with some of the main exponents of Western culture and history. In “On ne s’oublie pas” (2015), Exs, a rapper who is also a member of rap group Nysay, assigns Lumumba a place in his personal hierarchy. He stated that Lumumba is still subordinate to religious actors. A final example is the song *Des hommes d’honneur* (2008) by New African Poets. They constructed a diverse Afrocentric postcolonial pantheon. If one looks at the following list of their respective lyrics, the similarities become clear.

“Tu m’a parlé de Molière, Flaubert, Baudelaire. Moi c’est Senghor, Césaire et Martin Luther. Tu m’as parlé de De Gaulle et de Napoléon. Moi c’est Mandela, Lumumba et Steve Biko.”

“Je pense à Mamadou, je pense à Mohammed, Lumumba et Malik Shabazz je les respecte, mais ils ne passent pas devant les Prophètes. L’Islam c’est pas le Moyen Âge, ou les guerres et les conquêtes, mais tout un héritage fait pour traverser les siècles.”.

“Pour des gens qui sont morts et ont soufferts. Des gens comme Steve Biko, l’Emir Abd-El-Kader, Patrice Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah, Toussaint Louverture ou Fanon.”

Within this French scene, the duet “Ba Mana!” (2009) by the ethnic French rapper Rockin’ Squat and the Malian artist Cheick Tidiane Seck is probably the most remarkable example of how Lumumba is introduced as a pan-African hero within a post- and precolonial French pantheon. Although Lumumba is mentioned in the same breath as traditional icons such as Biko, Fanon, Césaire, Nkrumah and Cabral, other parts of the song are the most historiographical enriching phrases analysed in this article. The title of the song for example refers to the eighteenth and nineteenth century Bamana empire in present day Mali and a great deal of lesser-known precolonial or anti-colonial African actors are listed as well. Amongst others, they mention: Awura/Aura/Abla Pokou, an eighteenth century queen of a breakaway part of the Ashanti empire in present-day Ghana; Aline Sitoé, a female resistance leader of the interwar period in the Senegalese region Casamance; Béhanzin, king of Dahomey in present-day Benin; Samouri Touré, founder and leader of the late nineteenth Wassoulou Empire in West Africa, and Mansong Diarra, who was the leader of the Bamana empire. Rockin’ Squat and Cheick Tidiane Seck’s postcolonial

message in *Ba Mana!* was not a big surprise for the French audience. One year earlier, the duo caused a big stir in the French media. Disregarding prior agreements they sang the controversial song “France à fric” (2007) in the French talk show *Le Grand Journal* baffling the host of the show. The title of this song refers after all to the postcolonial French interventions in former colonies described by the term *Françafrique*, and consequently they also criticised contemporary French-African relations.²¹

This integration of Lumumba’s legacy in a more diverse corpus of lyrics has several explanations. Firstly, the French rap scene developed its own styles and repertoires from the end of the 1980s onwards and abandoned an uncritical adoption of African-American themes (Prévos 2001: 45). Although it is clear that French rappers adapted American cultural references when remembering Lumumba, they also broadened their minds and included other themes. Both the geographic proximity of their homeland and the relatively recent character of their migration inspired Franco-Africans to construct a less mythical interpretation of their past than their African-American counterparts (Drissel 2002: 131). Moreover, the French rap scene is known for its explicit postcolonial character and its regular references to questions of segregation, racism and integration. According to Helenon, Franco-African rappers tend to ‘glorify the African past and extol its values, which they often oppose to those of Western societies, considered to be on the wane politically as well as morally’ (Helenon 2006: 152).

Since French rappers come from diverse postcolonial African origins, a pan-African agent like Lumumba is both an easy symbol that can bring Cameroonian, Senegalese and Congolese minds together as well as a tool which enables rappers to formulate a modern Afrocentric position in their criticism of the West. The French songs in which Lumumba is mentioned are not only perfect examples of a loyalty to classic themes in French rap such as the global origins of humanity in Africa, the history of slavery, and the destruction of African civilizations by Europeans. They are also more logical and historically accurate (Gross, McMurray and Swedenburg 1994: 3-39 and Drissel 2002: 132). After all, the discourses of Sankara, Lumumba, Cabral and Nkrumah are similar in their shared struggle for an independent Africa without neo-colonial interference (Bazzan 2012: 218-237). Moreover, it should also be noted that some of the most prominent Franco-African rappers, such as Maître Gims, TiTo Prince Despo Rutti and Youssoupha, are of Congolese descent. Undoubtedly, this has facilitated and increased their curiosity to investigate their own history and, in turn, has possibly inspired other artists.

In sum, it should not be surprising that in the American scene connections that take Lumumba out of his African context and introduce him in a hall of fame of the Afro-American nationalist movement are the most frequent. Since both are seen by some as the prime leaders of their respective continents and because of the active role of Malcolm X, connections between him and Patrice Lumumba have a special place in this context. In the Francophone part of the Black Atlantic rap scene it is an amalgam of influences from American rap music, the appeal of Malcolm X and the African-American civil rights movement, the fact that Lumumba became a member of the Afrocentric, pan-African and postcolonial

pantheon, and the direct connection of many French-Congolese rappers with the history of their homeland that has caused the introduction of references to Lumumba. This led to the mention of Lumumba alongside several actors who were of particular importance to the history of Africa. References to various freedom fighters, people like Che Guevara, are equally present in both scenes. The fact that the names of some of the most important postcolonial heroes such as Kwame Nkrumah, Thomas Sankara, Nelson Mandela and Che Guevara all rhyme with the word Lumumba facilitates the emergence of this type of reference in the flow of a rap song from a linguistic-phonetic point of view. Although the usage of the pantheon most often results in simple listings of heroes accordingly to the findings of Halen and Riesz (1997), in some cases a well-illustrated context or simply the other actors which accompany Lumumba actually reveal a strong sense of postcolonial discomfort and activism.

Complex references to Lumumba

So far, this analysis has mainly analysed the pantheons existing in the French and American scene of the Black Atlantic. More complex references certainly exist as well. Such songs chiefly portray Lumumba as a source of inspiration and identification. Despo Rutti for example raps: “Je suis Lumumba avec une écharpe palestinienne.” in “P.I.B (Poète Interdit Bancaire)” (2010) and thus connected the symbolism of Lumumba as a freedom fighter with the struggle of the Palestinian cause. As a member of Sexion d’Assaut, Congolese singer Maître Gims sang in “22h45” (2008): “Je m'embarque dans une story comme Patrice Lumumba.” associating his own personal life with that of Lumumba. Lalcko on his turn titled a song “Lumumba” (2008) in which he reflects on his own personal struggle and compares it to that of the Congolese politician. In an interview, Lalcko further elaborated his views on Lumumba praising him for his ability to stay in touch with the people he represented and compared him to Nelson Mandela and Thomas Sankara.²² Others attribute several positive characteristics to Lumumba and accordingly represent him as an ideal politician. Kery James connects Lumumba with boxing legend Mohammed Ali and emphasises their perseverance in “Mouhammad Alix” (2016). Lumumba is also put forth as the inspiration for artists’ lifelong struggles for equality and advancement for black people. Killer Mike sings in “40 acres” (2016) for example: “When them crackas ask why say we did it for Lumumba, fucker.”.

Although these references mention topics outside the postcolonial pantheons, they do not really demonstrate a profound knowledge of the debate on Lumumba’s life and death. Others do, however, especially in France. Most of them focus on the blurry circumstances in which Lumumba was assassinated in January 1961. Some limit themselves to a more general description of Lumumba’s death. Ali wrote in “Opérationnel” (2010) for example: “Voulant éliminer les gens de paix comme ils l'ont fait pour Lumumba Patrice.”. Others focus on the role Mobutu played in his death. Noko Vesti raps for example in “Trahison” (2004), a song in which he collaborates with *Sexion d’Assaut*: “J'ai pas envie qu'on me trahisse comme Patrice Lumumba par Mobutu.”. Médine on the other hand focuses on one

detail of the assassination. He directs his attention to the myth that Lumumba, whilst being muzzled, was forced to eat the piece of paper on which his fierce speech of 30 June 1960 was written. Although soldiers indeed pushed a piece of paper against Lumumba's lips, he never actually swallowed it. In "Anéanti" (2006) Médine wrote: "Et j'irais chercher mes couplets dans l'estomac de Lumumba." Two years later he claims in "Portrait Chinois" (2008) that he will swallow his speeches just like Lumumba had done. Stressing this event, Médine creates a fictional nexus between the speech and the death of Lumumba and contributes to a further mythification of the circumstances in which Lumumba was killed.

In the United States more profound references are also heard. The most notable examples are by Sammus



Figure 4: *The infamous moment at which a piece of paper is pushed against Lumumba's lips.*

Source: *Lumumba Seized. Followers Threaten New Congo Upheaval, Universal Newsreels, 1960/12/05*
https://archive.org/details/1960-12-05_Lumumba_Seized_0.56

[Enongo Lumumba-Kasongo], a grandniece of Lumumba. She regularly refers to Lumumba in order to address both her own personal troubles as well as the widespread postcolonial neglect. In an interview she gave after a performance in Goma in 2016, it is evident that she still struggles with her Congolese identity and she explained that the trip to explore her roots made her feel at home for the first time in

her life.²³ Four years earlier she posted an update on her website celebrating what would have been the 87th birthday of Lumumba. Referencing the strong genes in her family, she claimed that her great uncle would have made it into his 80s if he were not assassinated. More importantly, Sammus also told her fans that Lumumba is one of her biggest inspirations and that she hoped she was making him proud.²⁴ An adjacent picture depicting the head of Lumumba as a map of Africa further contributed to an atmosphere of heroization and underlined the pan-African character Sammus attributes to her great-uncle. Sammus has equally mentioned Lumumba in a more complex and considered way. In her song “Back Stabbers” (2016) which focuses on her identity as a young black woman, she wrote:

“I got the blood of Lumumba in every cell, no hyperbole brother my daddy will tell. About Central Intelligence, killing our relatives like we Max Payne. They quell our rebellions and send us to heaven just like a match made. It’s the exact same. Some have the scars on they backs and some in their last name.”.

The lines dealing with her last name and the emphasis on the shared blood are clear references to her identity as a family member of Lumumba. Furthermore, by comparing the assassination of Lumumba with the backstory of the shooter game *Max Payne*, she echoes the CIA-distrust trope. From an Afrofuturistic point of view this combination of the murder of Lumumba and video game culture must be seen as a clear example of her mission to bring blackness in new cultural spaces and reimagine black cultural expression.²⁵ However, the case of Sammus simultaneously proves how one should not be tempted to reduce all artists with a postcolonial background as inherently and naturally postcolonially active. Sammus’ brother Disashi Lumumba-Kasongo is a guitarist and vocalist of the popular, non-political pop-rap band *Gym Class Heroes* famous for their love songs such as “Cupid’s Chokehold” (2005).

Another influential rapper of the American scene worth mentioning is David Banner. Whereas Banner mentioned Lumumba already in “Malcolm X (A Song to Me)” (2012) only alongside Huey Newton and Malcolm X, his verses in the song “The Who?” (2014) by Sa-Roc, show a more profound approach of the death of Lumumba.²⁶ In the setting of a classroom he tells his audience how Lumumba was beaten, tortured and then murdered by guns on January 17, 1961. He refers to foreign involvement – “The firing squad, the CIA, the MI-6, the Belgians were in on it.” – and simultaneously accuses Mobutu of having tried to kill Lumumba. Banner also gives attention to the geopolitical situation and blames the United Nations for having turned their backs on the situation. He resonates in this regard the CIA-distrust trope in a traditional way. His reference to the role of the British secret service MI-6 on the other hand, is only supported by little evidence and most speculative (Kuklick and Gerard 2015: 155). He also addresses the question on whether Lumumba was a communist and, like Teddy L, Banner blames the United States for falsely labelling Lumumba as such.

A final interesting song from the American scene is “Dostoyevsky” (2018) by Black Thought. In this rap, the perspective of criticising American imperialism is addressed in a very unique way. He sang: “I’m a stranger in Moscow, don’t ask how deadly is the ummah. Patrice Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah. To the Tripoli shores from the halls of Montezuma.”. Following a reference to Michael Jackson’s song *Stranger in Moscow* (1995), Black Thought places Lumumba in a tradition of American imperialism mentioning him in verse including a line of the Marine Corps’ Hymn (a hymn which commemorates earlier American interventions during the First Barbary War and the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848).



Figure 5: Rapper David Banner rapping about Patrice Lumumba to a class of young pupils in the video clip of *The Who?* (2014).

Source: Sa-Roc [Assata Perkins]. 2014. “The Who?” Featuring David Banner. Accessed 29 December, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MsaPikRQ22s>.

The theme of Lumumba’s death is also present in the Belgo-Congolese scene. For example, Damso raps in “Graine de Sablier” (2016): “Déter oui mais pour la mifa je partirai en fumée comme Patrice. Seul dans le coin, accusé à tort.”. On *Genius.com*, he personally explains that he is referring to the burning of the corpse of Lumumba.²⁷ Despite Damso’s references to the shared past between Belgium and Congo, the focus in the Damso debate on the misogynistic character of his lyrics proved that the Belgian audience still neglects his postcolonial stance. They looked at rap music from a misogyny-seeking perspective that Gilroy already described in the 1990’s (Gilroy 1993: 83-85). Next to Damso, also Badi and Youssoupha refer to the death of Lumumba in their short overview of Congolese history in the song “#243” (2015). They specifically refer to the pits in which two prominent Congolese were buried, singing: “Lumumba, Kimbangu au trou, C’est ce Congo aux troubles.”. Gandhi (G.A.N.) in “Roi des Belges” (2013) asks the question of how Lumumba was killed and if the Belgian government will kill

him too. To conclude, Belgian rapper Pasi's interest in the history of Belgian colonialism and the postcolonial debate was sparked by the documentary *Children of the Colony*. This resulted in the track "Vuur" (2018) which reflects on the subject in general terms as well as in "Medaille" (2019). In this last song Pasi expressed both the hope that 'Patrice' will come haunt [the country] and that Belgium does not deserve its crown if it was involved [in his assassination]. To date, Pasi is one of the rare examples who translated postcolonial issues in Dutch lyrics.

Whereas the rappers of the Belgian scene do reflect on Lumumba his death from refreshing points of view, their references are not as informed as they might appear at first glance. To a certain degree, they contribute to a blurred depiction of Lumumba's final hours. Scholars are nevertheless clear. Lumumba was executed by a firing squad, buried, dug up, cut into pieces and finally dissolved in acid and burned. In this process, some of the teeth of Lumumba were extracted from his body and conserved by colonial official Gerard Soete (Gerard and Kuklick 2015: 206-214; De Witte 2001). To conclude, the parliamentary commission stated that Belgium bears a "moral responsibility" in the events leading up to the assassination of Lumumba. These complex insights however rarely end up in the lyrics. The reasons for this unconstrained way of dealing with the past within the Belgo-Congolese rap scene have been convincingly made clear in Mertens et al.'s analysis: the loose and superficial connection with the homeland, the lack of sources, the unwillingness of parents to share their knowledge, and the problematic way Belgium deals with its colonial past through education and public debate (Mertens et al. 2013: 101-103).

The widely-present passive acceptance of the moralising dichotomisation in Belgian education between the 'good Lumumba' on the one hand and the 'evil Mobutu and Leopold II' on the other hand strongly contributes to this process (Cuypers and Verbruggen 2016). The widespread neglect of the role of Moïse Tshombe and the complex context of the Katangese secession in Lumumba's death may have his origins in this dynamic as well. Nevertheless, Belgo-Congolese artists still address Lumumba in a more complex and controversial way than their French and American colleagues. Simultaneously, their songs also suggest how their direct link with the history of Congo was not their sole inspiration and how they get their inspiration from their colleagues within the Black Atlantic sphere too. In other words, rap music not only serves as a mouthpiece for expressing opinions regarding Lumumba, but also as a channel through which the legacy of Patrice Lumumba is kept alive as well.²⁸ Therefore, this chapter claims that Belgo-Congolese rappers were also influenced and affected by the same dynamics that inspired French and American rappers to include Lumumba in their songs, which reaffirms the existence of the 'Black Atlantic' cultural space in this regard.

Although some of the recent lyrics still breathe a sense of heroisation, Belgo-Congolese rappers have been writing more refined songs over the past few years. Badi, a nephew of former (TP)OK Jazz member, Papa Rondo, is a prime example of this wave. This up-and-coming Belgo-Congolese talent

still used the postcolonial pantheon by mentioning Lumumba alongside Malcolm X and Black Panther founder Huey Newton in “Pour l’histoire” (2013), and focussed on the death of Lumumba at the beginning of his career, his EP “Matonge” (2015). Yet, he seems to reveal a certain postcolonial maturity. In a song on his Belgo-Congolese identity called “Belgicain” (2015), he sings : “Si tous les noirs ne mangent pas du manioc et bien j’en suis la preuve, dans ma tête Boulevard Lumumba, mais je marche sur la Rue Neuve.” In this way, he addressed a completely different debate, namely on the place of Lumumba in the Belgian public space (Goddeeris 2015: 401-403). In “Lettre à ma femme” (2016) Badi goes further and dedicates the whole song to the last letter Lumumba wrote to his wife while in prison. In this way, Badi is part of a new modest trend of using historical sources directly related to Lumumba. Abou Mehdi and 13Hor for example both integrated fragments from Lumumba’s independence speech in one of their songs (Mertens et al. 2013: 100). Badi even actively creates continuity by first showing a picture of Lumumba and then a fragment in which the rapper speaks in a Lumumba-like way honouring him.²⁹



Figure 6: Belgo-Congolese rapper Badi incarnating Lumumba in the video clip of his song *Lettre à ma femme* (2015).

Source: Badi [Badibanga Ndeka]. 2015. “Lettre à ma femme.”. MP3 audio. Track 5 on Badi, *Matonge*, Mukongo Business, EP. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qyqlzvspJi0>

Unlike Badi, Baloji Tshiani is an established rap artist of the Belgo-Congolese scene who already succeeds in transcending the borders of the Belgian artistic scene. Being a member of the rap group Starflam, he became fed up with the very political style of rap music of the 1990s.³⁰ Baloji calls, for example, “Ready To Die” (1994) by The Notorious B.I.G. one of the biggest influences on his work.³¹ He left Starflam in 2004 and made a solo debut with his ‘auto-bio-phony’ “Hotel Impala” (2007), a gift to his mother who reached out to him after 25 years of estrangement. The album was widely acclaimed by Belgian and international press and bears several traces of a postcolonial identity struggle, a reimagination of postcolonial geographies and the question of linking the colonial past with a postcolonial future (Jewsiewicki 2010: 1101-1105, Ledent 2016). In this context, Lumumba is also present. In the introductory song, for example, Baloji states that people should wear t-shirts with the

face of Lumumba so they can forget Che Guevara. In contrast with earlier examples, which try to connect Che Guevara with Lumumba, Baloji makes a unique call trying to secure a position for Lumumba alone.

Later, Baloji referred to Lumumba in a visual way. In the video clip of the song “Karibu Ya Bintou” (2010), which he made with the Congolese group Konono N°1, Baloji is seen screaming in front of a mural depicting Lumumba alongside the words ‘HEROS NATIONAL’ and ‘PATRICE LUMUMBA’. One particular version of a clip of his “Le Jour d'Après / Siku Ya Baadaye” (2011), which is a dystopian interpretation of the world-famous song “Indépendance Cha Cha”, shows quotes by Lumumba. Baloji’s regular references to Lumumba did not go unnoticed in the media. In a review of Baloji’s album *Kinshasa Succursale* (2010), a journalist turned the tables and called him ‘Lumumba with sneakers dancing like James Brown’.³² Lately, the connection with Lumumba has seemingly faded away. Baloji now has embraced his complex identity. Recently, he emphasised the equal importance of the European, Belgian and Congolese influences on his work, criticized press who exaggeratedly highlighted his African ancestry and he did not mention Lumumba on his latest EP *64 Bits and Malachite* (2016) or the album *137 Avenue Kaniama* (2018) (Munsya 2016: 242-248).



Figure 7: *Commemorating a national hero. Baloji in front of a mural depicting Lumumba.* Source: Baloji [Baloji Tshiani]. 2010. “Karibu Ya Bintou” Featuring Konono N°1. Track 3 on Baloji, *Kinshasa Succursale*, Crammed Records, CD. Accessed 29 December, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sD3tWgZAav8:118>

Figure 8: Quote by Lumumba as shown in the video clip of Baloji's *Le Jour d'Après / Siku Ya Baadaye* (2010).

Source: Baloji [Baloji Tshiani]. 2010. "*Le Jour d'Après / Siku Ya Baadaye*". Track 1 on Baloji, Kinshasa Succursale, Crammed Records, CD. Accessed 29 December, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTQtIaZ0:197>

....ensemble nous allons commencer une nouvelle lutte,
une lutte sublime qui va mener notre pays à la paix,
à la prospérité et à la grandeur.

Elongo, bandeko na ngái básí pé mibáli,
Tobandí etumba ya sika, Etumba elutí motúya
etumba óyo ekomemela bisó kimya, bozwi pé bonéne.

Patrice emery lumumba, le 30 juin 1960

Next to Baloji and Badi, Pitcho Womba Konga is a third leading rapper of the Belgo-Congolese scene who refers to Lumumba in his music. For the song "Enfant du pays" (2008), he expressed the inspiration he received from Lumumba writing: "Je continue le combat et toute la force est dans le courage de l'héritage de Lumumba.". Although the album cover of his "Crise de nègre" (2008) on which this song appeared, is full of portraits of postcolonial heroes and in this way suggests that Pitcho is stuck in a classical pantheon, the relationship with Lumumba has a more profound dimension. Pitcho put together his own pantheon on the basis of personal criteria and contrasts pure black heroes such as Bob Marley, Louis Armstrong and Patrice Lumumba with more corrupted black people like Michael Jackson and Barack Obama (Mertens et al. 2013: 106-107). Pitcho was also a main force behind the *Héritage* project. This artistic collaboration commemorated fifty years of Congolese independence and brought together a large part of the Belgo-Congolese rap with the production of a Belgo-Congolese rap album (Clette-Gakuba 2016: 252-255). During this project, Pitcho mentioned Lumumba in the lyrics he wrote for the song "Sur La Boulevard de 30 Juin" (2010). He did not only refer to the molested body of Lumumba, he also connected it with the postcolonial criticisms on Hergé's depiction of the Congolese in *Tintin in the Congo* with the following lyrics:

"J'ai vu Tintin se balader dans sa modèle T, Juste à côté du corps de Lumumba molesté. Tenant dans sa main un discours ou peu de mots sont restés."



Figure 9: Pitcho's duality of sincere and corrupted postcolonial pantheons.
Source: Pitcho [Pitcho Womba Konga]. 2010. Crise de nègre, Skinfama, CD.

In a recent interview, Pitcho further elaborated his point of view. He explained that he is especially inspired by the humanity in Lumumba's discourse and righteous struggle, his fight for liberty, his freedom to act, and his desire to choose his own destiny, to govern his country and to find a new destiny for the entire world.³³ He also claims that Lumumba has succeeded in obtaining this symbolic position because of the deficit of other Congolese heroes. On an artistic level, Pitcho was heavily influenced by recordings of Wu-Tang Clan and La Clique in his early career.³⁴ Later, Emmy and Tony award winning British theatre and film director Peter Brook also played a crucial role in Pitcho's artistic interests. In contrast with Afrika Bambataa who only showed Pitcho how to use rap as a positive type of cultural expression, Pitcho stated that Brook introduced him to more complex postcolonial debates. This inspired Pitcho to organise the cultural *Congolisation*-festival, of which the portmanteau title refers to Congo and colonisation. During the 2015 edition, a particularly noteworthy incident took place. One of the governmental co-organisers and co-funders was not keen to give attention to Lumumba during the event. In response, Pitcho fiercely reacted, and implicitly answering Baloji's call, made T-shirts with Lumumba's portrait. In 2017 Pitcho even made a play for the Royal Flemish Theatre called *Kuzikiliza* in which he reinterpreted the speech of Lumumba.³⁵ As such, multi-talent Pitcho reclaimed Lumumba's place in the Belgian postcolonial debate also in other cultural and more activist ways.³⁶



Figure 10: Pitcho Womba Konga during the protest action reclaiming the presence of Lumumba at the 2015 Congolisation-event.

Source: <http://www.dewereldmorgen.be/artikel/2015/01/18/lumumba-taboe-op-eigen-herdenkingsdag-in-bozar>

As a grandson of Patrice Lumumba, the most remarkable rapper of the Belgo-Congolese scene is Teddy L. Ever since his youth, Teddy Lumumba was aware that he was a part of Congolese history that transcended his own life.³⁷ Nevertheless, Teddy L made music for several years without explicitly referring to his famous grandfather. Only recently, he made the song “Patrice Lumumba” (2015) with Ange Nawasadio in which he seems to reconcile with his grandfather’s legacy once and for all. The lyrics of the song are from start to finish critical of the Belgian colonial endeavour in Congo and of the way Belgium fails to deal with its past. For example, Teddy L makes a reference to the assassination of Lumumba and claims that Lumumba was cut into pieces and dug up in order to prevent Congo from having a grave where they could mourn over the death of their leader. According to Teddy L, his grandfather was also only portrayed as a communist in order to provide an alibi for his assassination. Finally, Teddy L refers to his grandfather’s emancipatory role and pledges that justice should be done. He does not aspire to create history, but rather wants to fill in the gaps of the common educational discourse. In a later interview he reinstated this message, explaining that he made this puzzle-like song in order to preserve his grandfather’s thoughts for younger generations.³⁸

Teddy L further strengthened his message by means of visual techniques. After a waving Congolese flag is shown in the introductory shot, both the oppressive activities of the missionaries and a shackled slave alongside two colonial soldiers are depicted. The next scene portrays the arrest of Lumumba in December 1960. The producers of the video were clearly inspired by archival footage of this event as they succeeded in copying both the look of Lumumba and the sense of despair in his eyes. Similar to Badi in his “Lettre à ma femme”, the clip has shots of Teddy L dressed as his grandfather, creating a visual reincarnation of the Congolese prime minister. Other scenes feature a white man grabbing a thigh of a black woman, highlighting sexual violence during the colonial regime, and two black men being encouraged to wrestle by white soldiers. The video clip ends with a photo of Lumumba next to his full name, his date of birth and the date of his assassination.

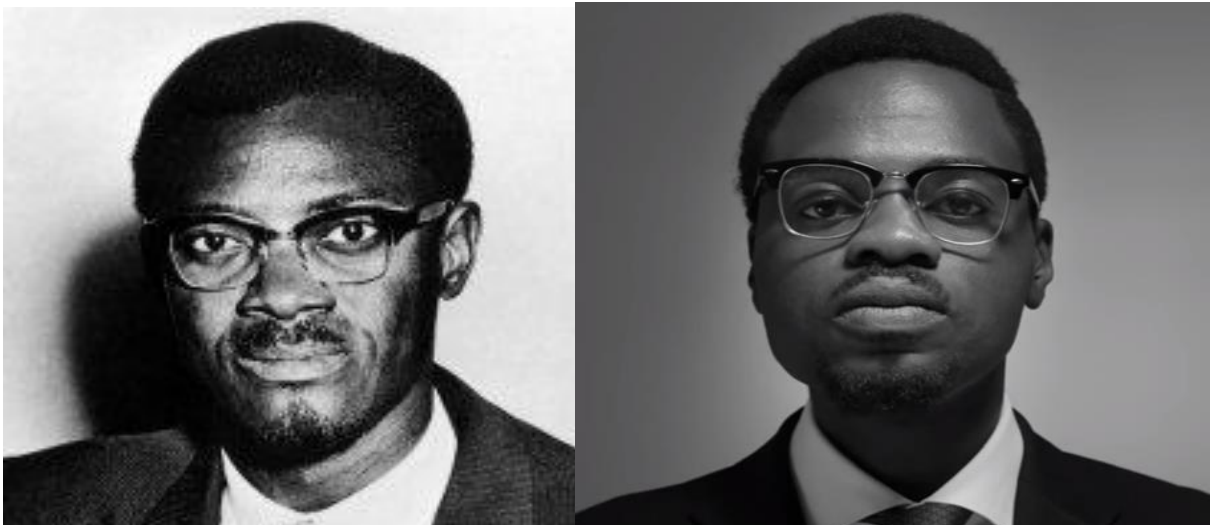


Figure 11: *Teddy L, copying his grandfather’s famous look. Notice the similarities in terms of haircut, facial hair, costume and eyewear.*

Sources: Left: *Teddy L [Teddy Lumumba]. 2015. “Patrice Lumumba.” Featuring Ange Nawasadio. Accessed December 29, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TaUpS_1Q3-c:62*

Right: <http://www.jeunefrique.com/medias/2015/07/02/Patrice-Lumumba-le-2-juillet-1960-200x200-1435852364.jpg>



Figure 12: *Teddy L re-enacting the arrest of his grandfather Patrice Lumumba.*

Sources:

Top: *Teddy L [Teddy Lumumba]. 2015. "Patrice Lumumba." Featuring Ange Nawasadio. Accessed December 29, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TaUpS_1Q3-c:54*

Bottom: <https://www.newcoldwar.org/u-s-president-eisenhower-ordered-murder-of-congolese-leader-patrice-lumumba/>

Conclusion: a matter of unfinished business

Patrice Lumumba's legacy in rap music is multifaceted and has evolved significantly. Throughout the 1990s and at the beginning of the new millennium, Lumumba predominantly featured in a pantheon of heroes both from the decolonization as well as the civil rights movements. At the turn of the century, the burgeoning French rap scene began to refer to Lumumba, and new types of lyrics appeared. Although the American cultural influence was significant, the classic black nationalist pantheon was reinterpreted and received a more African and postcolonial flavour because of the stronger ties of the French-African diaspora with their homelands. Recently, the Belgo-Congolese rap scene has emerged and made its voice heard. As a firm and cohesive group of rappers, most of them succeed in surpassing superficial references. They give context, address a wide spectrum of postcolonial issues and elaborate on the life and death of Lumumba. This does not mean that there was a straight line from the American black nationalist pantheon via a French-African series of postcolonial heroes to a Belgo-Congolese in-depth picture. The American influence of the pantheon still keeps resonating in both French and Belgo-Congolese songs and more detailed lyrics have recently also appeared in the United States and France. On a quantitative level, it is safe to say that the visibility of rap songs in which Lumumba is mentioned, has rapidly increased over the last several years.

The motivation of artists to rap about Lumumba is a more complex matter to analyse. Surely, the influence of Malcolm X on introducing Lumumba as a symbol in the Afro-American movement cannot be underestimated. This was the starting point of Lumumba's appearance alongside other heroes of the black nationalist movement. As said before, the pan-Africanist resonance of Lumumba's politics is a very important and inspiring characteristic as well, especially for French rap artists. In the Belgo-Congolese case, it should not be surprising that direct linkages with the colonial past and postcolonial debates account for a great deal of the attention. In France, personal ties with the Congolese past and the strong bonds within the scene play a crucial role too. Some important artists are for example the sons of key artists of the Congolese rumba who lived at the time of Lumumba. Lumumba's position within the discourse of American heroes such as Malcolm X and the reflection of this in American rap music is also an important incentive.

Some specific characteristics of Lumumba's life contribute to his appeal. The fact that Lumumba was murdered in very questionable circumstances is a very suitable topic for postcolonial criticism. Mainly in the American context, but also in Europe, the assassination of Lumumba is an event that allows rappers to formulate their distrust of the government and institutions such as the CIA. The revelations of the Church Committee in 1975 probably stimulated this process and serve as the background for this CIA-distrust trope. Most rappers also adhere to Lumumba's anti-colonialist worldview, and connect it to criticism of colonialism, neo-colonialism, American interventions in the Middle East, or the

Palestinian cause. In this way they introduce Lumumba in debates of the twenty-first century and secure his place in contemporary discourse.

In general, it is the idea of an unfinished process that lies at the base of the repeated references to Lumumba in the three researched rap scenes of the Black Atlantic space. Rap music is in this context a well-suited medium acting as an exponent of 'hope, increased pride, and self-esteem at a time when any other evidence of the three has been eroded by prevailing social conditions' (McDonnell 1992: 92). Whether it be in claiming a place for Lumumba in the different pantheons, writing an Afrocentric alternative discourse, creating a postcolonial awareness, getting attention for the murder, or securing a position in the Western cultural and political canon, in all of these processes the rappers feel the urge to mention Lumumba. Even within the pantheon phenomenon there is a great deal of variety. Some mention his name alongside other heroes and Western icons and thus create an image of conciliation and integration. Others introduce the name of Lumumba both singularly or in a list of both known as well as lesser-known postcolonial and precolonial African actors in order to criticize the Western hegemonic discourse. However, there is a common sense of obligation to draw attention to Lumumba present alongside an educational mission to convince a broader audience of Lumumba's importance. This is what inspired rappers in the past to sing about Lumumba and what will probably lead to more Lumumba-themed lyrics in the future.

The fact that these characteristics, motivations and lyrical approaches are shared by the rappers mentioning Lumumba regardless of their respective nationalities, confirms both the existence and persistence of the Black Atlantic as a cultural space for rap music in the twenty-first century, as put forward by Gilroy in 1993. However, to a certain extent some kind of a snowball-effect took place as well. The mentioning of Lumumba as a black hero increased the credibility of a song because of prior references in rap music. In this regard, the Black Atlantic space serves as an echo chamber in which Lumumba's name can freely resonate alongside other heroes. Simultaneously, in some cases the significance and message of Lumumba were lost and he simply became a symbol, like Che Guevara. This dynamic, which is not exclusive to rap music, threatens to completely hollow out both the historical and the artistic significance of Lumumba and will be a determining factor in the way he will be perceived in the coming decades. On the other hand, rappers should also be aware that they risk contaminating the perception of Lumumba with the societal problems which are both fairly and unfairly associated with the genre itself (McDonnell 1992). Nevertheless, rap musicians keep the attention for Lumumba alive through their music. When a fan of rap music, either in the United States, France, Belgium or elsewhere, without having ever been taught about the Congolese colonial past listens to a song in which Lumumba is mentioned, his or her interest can be sparked to read and learn about Lumumba or even participate in other postcolonial debates.

YouTube playlist

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLdW4II52EOtkldbUB3PDVsFvCB_3zi48T

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³“Ira Dworkin: In the Name of Lumumba”, accessed May 19, 2018,

<https://uncpressblog.com/2017/06/30/ira-dworkin-in-the-name-of-lumumba/>.

⁴ In the future, research on artists such as Elom20ce of Togo, Ivorian-Malian rapper Iss Bill, Bantu in Nigeria, Alesh in Congo DRC, the British-Iraqi rapper Lowkey, the Scottish-Jamaican artist Akala, the American-Peruvian activist and rapper Immortal Technique and the Congolese-Canadian musician Pierre Kwenders can offer interesting new insights that go beyond the geographical scope of this article.

⁵ “Hiphop in Vlaanderen”, accessed 2 July 2017, <http://poppunt.be/article/hiphop-vlaanderen/>; “Hiphop heerst. Belgische rap heeft roem geroken”, accessed July 2 2017, <https://www.demorgen.be/muziek/hiphop-heerst-belgische-rap-heeft-roem-geroken-b4e33e17/>.

⁶ “Het verhaal achter de platenhoes van TheColorGrey: "Een collage van sleutelmomenten" ", accessed May 18, 2018, <https://www.demorgen.be/muziek/het-verhaal-achter-de-platenhoes-van-thecolorgrey-een-collage-van-sleutelmomenten-b0577c58/>

⁷ “Quand le rap français prend l’accent congolais”, *Le Monde Afrique*, accessed May 19, 2018, http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2015/09/18/quand-le-rap-francais-prend-l-accent-congolais_4762857_3212.html.

⁸ “Origine des rappers Français”, accessed April 25, 2017, <https://genius.com/Rap-genius-france-origine-des-rappers-francais-lyrics>.

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