



EXHIBIT

NDUNGU MAKARA

CHILDREN OF THE IYONDA LEPROSY VILLAGE IN DR CONGO

*a partial output of the cross-faculty and participatory research project
IYONDA@lab: collaborative & difficult heritage*

Venue: Campus Library Arenberg - Willem de Croylaan 6 B-3001 Heverlee-Leuven, for access, see :
<https://bib.kuleuven.be/2bergen/cba/over/routebeschrijving>

Dates and opening hours March 17- April 30: Mon-Thur: 8.30-22.00 / Fri 8.30-17.30 / Sat 8.30-13.00

May 2 - June 30: Monday to Sunday 8.00-24.00 hrs

Admission: free

Lectures on March 22, April 19, and May 24 from 17h to 19h. Venue : 2 Bergen Library, Nicholas de le Ville room, Willem de Croylaan 6 B-3001 Heverlee-Leuven. For more information : prof. P. Devlieger, patrick.devlieger@kuleuven.be



Photo: Martine Peeters @ 2022



maps 2022

Photo: V. de Caluwé, 1948



Photo: Google

Iyonda is a mission, a village, and a former modern leprosarium in the Equator Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo, along the river Congo, not far from the city of Mbandaka. This exhibit focuses on Iyonda village now, in the past, and towards the future.

With the assistance of the colonial government, Iyonda professionalized during the 1940s, and

experienced extensive growth in the 1950s. It became a prime center for medical treatment and vocational training and a modern community. Lyonda village is today in a state of decline. Life has dramatically changed: high unemployment, low education level, overpopulation and social problems.

Lyonda@Lab, a shared heritage project, is a collaborative and interdisciplinary research endeavor by Belgians and Congolese.

Researchers from Leuven and Kinshasa, and staff from the archdiocese joined in Lyonda in 2019, 2021 and 2022 to meet with Ndungu Makara, a nickname for the generations of children of patients affected by leprosy that live in Lyonda. They shared histories and discussed past, present and future, conducted fieldwork, exhibited photographs, film and children's drawings, in the makeshift 'Lyonda Museum'. Congolese painter Gédéon Ndonga joined in 2021 to make a painting about Lyonda.

Key questions

How do Ndungu Makara view their immaterial heritage and culture of today in the light of the future?

What do the buildings of Lyonda tell us? Are they only silent material witnesses of the past, left to abandonment?

Can Lyonda once again become a community of the future?

Key material on display

The general layout of the exhibit metaphorically represents a typical Lyonda street.

Thematic panels introduce crucial themes, taken from informed discussions and reflections with and amongst Ndungu Makara and Belgian people who worked in Lyonda. These were based on photos, film, archival material... that provoked memories and concerns of today and tomorrow. Through quotes, the villagers literally comment.

A painting by popular painter Gédéon, made during his one week stay there, is a symbolic representation of the past, present and future of the village. It is the central piece of the exhibition.

A large architectural scale model represents a major part of the Lyonda village.

Lyonda's timeline is structured along an imaginary cardiogram visualizing its major heartbeats throughout its eventful history - 1945 to 2022. The extreme pulses represent both events and materializations that are indivisible associated with tangible properties of material and immaterial culture. The low pulses stand for Lyonda's state of decline and periods of spatial and cultural dormancy.

A reflective panel asks the question 'Lyonda people, where do we go from here'...

A silent movie documentary is projected in loop: ten minutes in a street in Lyonda

A desktop shows the **movie Marie Lépreuse (1956)** which was shown in 2021 in Lyonda

Another desktop shows the **interview with Dr Lechat** who worked there in the 1950s.....

Central to the exhibition is the **painting 'Iyonda?' by Gédéon**, made in Iyonda in 2021. It symbolically represents the past, the present and the future of Iyonda

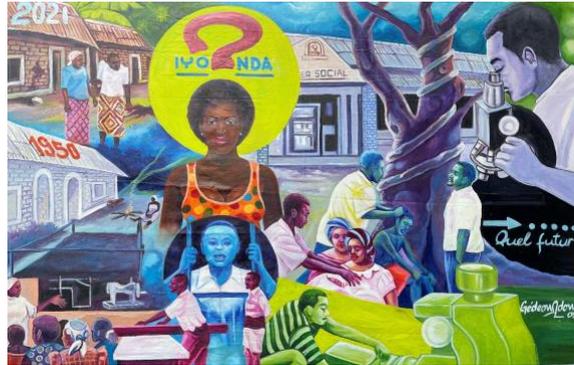


Photo: Patrick Devlieger @2022

'LEPROSY VILLAGE' IYONDA

The early beginnings of the leprosarium are addressed from 1945 onwards, when catholic sisters arrived, as well as the **new health approach** that took effect when the Belgian doctor Lechat arrived in the early 1950s. He started to use new and effective medication, invented in 1948. New facilities were built.

Jean-Pierre Litoka ya Bisanga: *In 1956, at the age of ten, I followed my parents to Iyonda and got affected by the disease. Dr. Lechat had noticed stains. You can still see them on my cheek and calf.*

A strong team, for many patients, was the key to the success of the leprosarium.

The decline of the leprosarium gradually set in from 1960 onwards when financial support dwindled. It finally closed in 2003. Today the new maternity ward is still a very busy place.

Michel Iyana Abonga, fisherman: *NDUNGU (in Lingala language) means 'those who live in Iyonda, the patients'. The word also signifies 'vulnerable, affected by leprosy'. It has a negative and discriminatory connotation.*

Edith Dasnoy, the wife of Dr. Lechat made a maquette of the leprosy village for the World Fair in Brussels in EXPO '58, promoting the leprosarium as a symbol and good practice for modern leprosy treatment.

BUILDING A NEW COMMUNITY

Building frenzy: in 1946, under the aegis of sr. Leontina Wynants, construction started of a dispensary and 19 houses for the patients. Within one year, the number of patients had already doubled. Construction of a hospital, a dispensary, a school and houses followed. In 1953, there were 155 houses, a chapel, a monastery and a graveyard. In total 176 houses were built.

Leprosy as a converging agent: multicultural lyonda emerged. For the first patients, life in lyonda was hard, separated from their families. But soon their families moved to the village, and a community came to life, with people from different population groups in the Equator Province, even from Kinshasa. Nowadays, some villagers wonder if they still belong to their original group and whether they really belong to lyonda.

Jean-Pierre Litoka Ya Bisanga: *My father was affected by leprosy when he arrived here in 1946. All the villagers helped to make bricks and build houses.*

Sister Leontina Wijnants' pragmatic drive embedded development amidst the equatorial forest. In 1945 she pioneered by starting the most important leprosarium in the Equator region, in the difficult, swampy and remote area of lyonda. She stayed until 1983.

And what about maintenance? Since the founding of lyonda village its population has increased tenfold. Nowadays children and grandchildren of the first patients live in the houses. Very few means are available to build or repair damaged houses.

Property rights in the rainforest are constantly debated between the local chief, the church and the inhabitants. The local priest is in charge of lyonda.

Abbé Richard, the parish priest: *The people who stayed here do not have the means to maintain their houses.*

Graham Greene, the famous British writer, visited the leprosarium during a prospective trip to the Belgian Congo, in preparation for a new novel. lyonda also served as the setting for 'A burnt-out case', published in 1961.

EDUCATION: EVERMORE A NECESSITY

The missionaries gradually developed education, but schooling remains a major problem with **multiple causes and multiple consequences**. At a young age, some children start to work in the field, fish or hunt, spending little time at school. It is estimated that 90 % of the children do not study. The parents are aware of this situation and point to the cost of education, to very high unemployment - but also mobile phones, drugs, and an aggressive public environment and promiscuity.

Albert Bosenga, an elder [*notable*]: *'MBELI ELIQUI LES BICS'. 'A machete is better than a bic', meaning 'working in the fields is better than studying'.*

BEING TRAINED TO MAKE

Professional education has been a prime goal from early days on: farming, clothes making, animal husbandry, fishing. Vocational training was offered in many fields. But these activities were stopped. More **income-generating activities** are very much needed these days. It is said that lyonda has a mentality problem.

Kelly Nseka, manager at Mbandaka: *We need a mentality shift and entrepreneurship. No use waiting for money.*

The 'foyer social' (community center) was a thriving success once, providing many training activities for the women. It also closed in the late 1960s due to lack of subsidies.

In 1959, **princess Liliane of Belgium**, the wife of the Belgian King Leopold III, visited the leprosarium. The community center exhibited the needlework of the women.

THE FUTURE

Extensive deliberations about the past, present and future were held with elders, former patients and their descendants, religious personnel, former medical personnel and former inhabitants/emigrants. Films and photographic material from the archives of the 40s and 50s were shown. Many comments were quite nostalgic. Cultural practices and traditions were discussed, as well as the deterioration of the village during the last decades.

Steps towards improvement were discerned: Extension of the dwelling/living areas - More agricultural land for new economic perspectives - Discuss property rights - Heritage valorization - Better youth support activities - More commitment in education by the parents - Organize scholarship grants - Vocational training partnerships - Promotion of artisanship - Cooperation through projects with universities and other organizations - Mentality shift adapted to the new social-economic and political environment

A new way of working and a new association saw the light with the objective to valorize the heritage of Iyonda and to support the community's flourishing through research and activities in the domain of cultural and spatial heritage, education, vocational training and conflict management.

In 2021, **a local exhibit** took place about the neglected heritage of Iyonda, leading to discussions about its revalorization and actualization. Archival photos, a new painting by Gédéon Ndonga, artisan work and children's drawings about their 'dream village' served to discover Iyonda.

Felix Mbandoma, professor at the University of Kinshasa: *It seems as if their future lies behind them.*

Albert Bosenga, notable: *We want our children to know and learn about the story of Iyonda.*

IYONDA'S CHILDREN DREAM

The children of Iyonda's primary school made **drawings of their dream village** that were shown in the exhibition. Their dreams: drinkable water and water taps, electricity, bulbs, a clock, an asphalt road, a good house, a school, a hospital, a factory, a photo studio, a shopping mall...even a university and an airport.

The building of the old lemonade factory was cleaned, painted, and repaired in 2021 to host the exhibit. The space also served for discussions, performances, training and meetings.

IYONDA, A PAINTED STORY



Photo: Patrick Devlieger @2022

Gédéon Ndonga is a Congolese artist who participated in the academic research project on Iyonda's heritage, in July 2021. For the painting 'Iyonda?', he found inspiration in archival material, photos, films, meetings with the inhabitants and project leaders, as well as visits to the village. The canvas is now part of the permanent exhibit room in Iyonda. It questions the future of Iyonda through the uncertainties of a mother expecting a baby. The baby is actually already a hostage.

The painting in this exhibit, around the same themes and with the same symbols, was painted for the exhibition in Belgium.

Acknowledgments

The exhibit makers would like to thank:

Members of the Iyonda community who participated in discussions and interviews in Iyonda in 2019, 2021, and 2022

Abbé Richard Dandu, parish priest; Boketshu Loleka, customary chief; Abbé Jean-Faustin, priest and vicar of the parish; Jean Longango, former nurse; Freddy Masaya; Ibrahim; Raphael Libonze; Hypo Baende; Henri Efinda; Jonathan Ikanga; Genitta Losako; Elonga; Sylvie Botuli; Nzombo Kofi; Nzombo Messie; Kandongo Mpaka; Albert Bosenga; Jonathan Ikanga; Jean-Pierre Litoka ya Bisanga, and Papy Bapoto, coordinator of the parish

Members of the project team in Iyonda: Patrick Devlieger, Eric Metho, Léon Mbadu, Bertin Nsitwayizatadi, Jonathan Enguta, Gédéon Ndonga, Abbé Louis Iyeli, Sr. Christiane Botelua, Abbé Richard Dandu, Félix Mbandoma, and Martine Peeters

Persons interviewed in Belgium: Mrs. Edith Dasnoy, Sr. Beatrix Vranken, fndsc and Fr. Honoré Vinck, msc

Persons, Religious Congregations, KU Leuven, and Belgian Public Service for the use of archival material

‘La léproserie de Iyonda’ by Dr. Michel F. Lechat, unpublished article, Prof Michel F. Lechat Personal collection

‘Lepra - Iyonda KUL’, by Sr. Beatrix Vranken, Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, personal collection (B)

Mémoires du Congo, Interview Dr. Michel Lechat, recorded in 2003,
<http://www.memoiresducongo.be/en/>

KADOC, KU Leuven, collection of ‘Aide aux Missions Médicales’

KADOC, KU Leuven, collection of the Congregation of the Fathers of the Sacred Heart, Borgerhout (B)

Collections of the Congrégation of the Fathers of the Sacred Heart, with special thanks to Fr. Honoré Vinck, msc

Michel de Caluwé, for the photo taken by his father, Victor de Caluwé, www.victor-au-congo.be

The African Archives of the Belgian Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs in Brussels, FOREAMI collection

Colofon

Coordination of Iyonda@Lab: Collaborative, shared & difficult heritage in DR Congo, an Open Faculty Project of KU Leuven: Patrick Devlieger, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, KU Leuven

Curators of the exhibition in Belgium: Patrick Devlieger, Faculty of Social Sciences, KU Leuven - Marc Dujardin, Faculty of Architecture, KU Leuven

External collaborators: Eric Metho Nkayilu, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, University of Kinshasa UNIKIN

Concept: Patrick Devlieger, Marc Dujardin, Min De Meersman, Martine Peeters, Rik Vanmolkot

Texts: Min De Meersman, Marc Dujardin

Photo selection: Min De Meersman, Marc Dujardin, Argjire Krasniqi

Exhibit design: Marc Dujardin

Graphic design: Argjire Krasniqi, Marc Dujardin

Translations: Rik Vanmolkot, Argjire Krasniqi

Film and photography: Martine Peeters, Patrick Devlieger

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Note on terminology

The exhibit team is well aware of the need for correct language use. They opted to use the word 'patient' (and not leper, or person with Hansen disease). In this way it is implied that people affected by leprosy and their family members were influenced by medical discourses. The makers also opted for 'village' (and not settlement).