

The Research Group

Centrum Leo Apostel for Interdisciplinary Studies

has the honor to invite you to the public defense of the PhD thesis of

Felix Ulombe KAPUTU

to obtain the degree of Doctor in Interdisciplinary Studies (VUB) and
Doctor in Comparative Sciences of Culture (UGent)

Title of the PhD thesis:

**“Chilima” and the Remaking of Chokwe Identity:
An Exploratory Interdisciplinary Study on Globalization, Material
Traditions and Gendered Cosmo-Polity.**

Joint PhD with Universiteit Gent

Promotoren:

Prof. Dr. Jan Broekaert
Prof. Dr. Koenraad Stroeken (Univ. Gent)
Prof. Dr. Sandro Sozzo (Univ. Leicester)

The defence will take place on

Wednesday April 19 2017 at 10:00 am

in Auditorium D.2.01 at the Campus Humanities,
Sciences and Engineering of the Vrije Universiteit
Brussel, Pleinlaan 2 - 1050 Elsene, and will be
followed by a reception.

Members of the jury:

Prof. Dr. Elisabeth Bekers (chairman)
Prof. Dr. Dimokritos Kavadias (secretary)
Dr. Annelies Verdoolage (Univ. Gent)
Dr. Julien Volper (Kon. Museum Midden-Afrika)
Prof. Dr. Donatien Dibwe Dia Mwembu
(Univ. of Lubumbashi)

Curriculum vitae

Felix Ulombe Kaputu (1959, DRC) is PhD in English Literature (Univ. Lubumbashi, 2000). He taught African American, English and comparative literature in Congo (UNILU, '98-'06), the USA (W.E. Dubois Inst. Harvard, '06-'07), in Japan (Int. Ctr Japanese Stu. Nichibunken, '08-'09), in the USA (Ma.Coll. Arts & Des., '09-'12) the Netherlands (Afr. Stu Ctr, Leiden, '13-'14), Gent (UGent,-) and Brussels (VUB,-). Felix received a CARIBU grant for his second doctoral study in the scope of the 'Scholars At Risk' Network. He received a Mobility Grant of the FWO-Vlaanderen and a Civil Society grant for performing fieldwork in Zambia, Angola and D.R. Congo, for his research into the Chokwe identity.

Abstract of the PhD research

This doctoral dissertation is about Chokwe's identities, body management, and history and socio-political understanding made possible through a careful study of their material culture. The thesis offers a comprehensive analysis of Chokwe's identity constructions, body and socio-political management, spatial occupation and social networks from their encounter with the Portuguese early in the fifteenth century. Established scholarly resources into anthropology, philosophy, history, literature, religion, economics, Art history, ethnology, traditional medicine offer a large spectrum of expertise. The research presents the Chokwe within their historical confinement beside their Lunda cousins. The Lunda easily overshadow the Chokwe's activities over centuries. Their closeness has often made it impossible to distinguish the Chokwe separately for many years. From the conception and the fabrication of artifacts within a local dynamic, these objects are carved within their relations with the Chokwe King, and the leaders of different social classes. From the same artifacts, it is possible to find out the Chokwe's ideas about individual and community wellbeing taught in early initiations. These artifacts offer a religious sense separating the sacred from the profane. To ensure connections with ancestors, different rituals are set around the *Gombo*, ritual material used in ethnic consultations. Practically, their wellbeing is put into the hands of *Tahi* and *Chimbanda* whose profession sources are in initiations giving a large place to ancestors. Food contributes a lot to the sense of wellbeing and comes as a gift from ancestors praised for making possible good harvest, peace, and conquests. The Chokwe women have reached social equilibrium and gender understanding in drawing resources from oral sources and traditions. Appadurai, Ferguson, Anderson, Comaroff, Stroeken, Derrida, Foucault, Descombes, Mudimbe and Mbembe offered theoretical tools and fieldwork material that facilitated research and people in their social environment. These scholars' resources permitted to find out that even when marginalized by their respective governments, the Chokwe still unite over the hinterland at the borders of Zambia, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They have constantly invented and reinvented their identities while keeping a strong cohesion and relation with their traditional background. Innovations and respect of their backbone move together.