

# FILM REVIEW

**Anne Reijniers, Nizar Saleh, Paul Shemisi, and Rob Jacobs. *Faire-part*. 2018.** 58 minutes, French and Lingala. Belgium, Cordon Coffee X De Imagerie, Kinshasa, DR Congo. Kimpavita films.

*Faire-part* is French for “announcement.” Four young filmmakers, two Belgians (Anne Reijniers and Rob Jacobs) and two Congolese (Nizar Saleh and Paul Shemisi), join forces in this film, which attempts to reflect on the relationship of Kinshasa to the global world. The camera seems to be a major mediator (or facilitator) in that relationship. And therefore, image and sound need to be reflected on. What to show? And what not to show? What does the voiceover have to say? In *Faire-Part*, the object of choice is the work by contemporary artists, who, as the filmmakers claim, “*prennent les choses en main*,” (take control).

The film, experimental in design, has a decidedly meta-level. First of all, the film is cut in four parts (“Voice-over - test 1”; “Voice-over - test 2”; “Voice-over -test 3”, and “Voice-over - test 4”), which are each introduced by a very short scene showing the foursome facing a laptop and discussing the content of the upcoming part. It is unclear whether this is intentional, but the choice to work with four parts echoes the brilliant documentary *Congo en quatre actes* (2010) by Dieudo Hamadi, Kiripi Katembo Siku, Patrick Ken Kalala, and Divita Wa Lusala, four Congolese filmmakers who also tried to respond to the one-sided international visual representation of Kinshasa, and by extension of the DRC.

During these short conversations which frame the upcoming part, the four filmmakers deliberate on what is wrong in the current edit (which the viewers do not see), and some suggestions are articulated. The subsequent scenes visualize the camera and the filmmakers in Kinshasa’s compounds and streets. Ample time is given to musings among the filmmakers about the ethics of filming, the economic inequalities in the local and global film industry, and the daily challenges of life as an artist in Kinshasa. Unfortunately, these reflections remain too superficial. None of the voices is granted the opportunity to express an agenda, an ambition, or deep statements about visual arts. Some sections with the Belgian filmmakers seem odd, such as one

nighttime scene showing Jacobs trying to kill a mosquito from behind the bed's mosquito netting.


Decolonization is a major ideological spur of the film project. This plays out on three levels. First, the *Faire-Part* producers reflect on the politics of the camera. This is seen especially when the Congolese filmmakers relate experiences about what it means to be a filmmaker in Kinshasa. Conventional topics such as who decides what is being shown are put on the table. Yet, these important issues are only too briefly touched upon. There is an unsettling scene in which Saleh proudly describes how he uses a hidden camera as he walks around town. This could lead to deeper discussions of ethics, censorship (as the Congolese police often forbid filmmakers to do their work), and self-dignity (as many of Kinshasa's inhabitants are worried about whether their images are used to mock them abroad).

Such a discussion would have added a deeper layer to the complex entanglements of audiovisual media, publics, and power. Furthermore, it is questionable whether the filmmakers have succeeded in producing less-exoticizing stories. Is following contemporary performance artists whom the larger Kinshasa population either consider to be *aventurier* (immoral and unreliable people) or even sorcerers, a valuable alternative? Does one de-exoticize the African city when deliberately selecting a neighborhood known for its prostitutes as the space to perform? The filmed contemporary artists hardly explain their artwork to bystanders. Onlookers, observing the artistic interventions in Kinshasa's streets, are not given the opportunity to share their understandings of the performances. They are reduced to being presented as mere observers.

Second, very early on, the name of Lumumba is mentioned, which introduces the viewer to the politics of decolonization. Lumumba's heritage is a leitmotif in the documentary. One of the local artists has produced an artwork that resembles a large tooth—reminiscent of the only human remains of Lumumba. Another artist reads out loud Lumumba's famous letter addressed to his wife, and Jacobs and Shemisi read out poetry (a poem by the Flemish poet Hugo Claus, in Dutch) at the foot of the famous Lumumba statue on Kinshasa's main boulevard (itself named after the national hero).

Third, totally in line with other experiments in decolonial arts, collaboration and dialogue are put forward as the building blocks of the relationship among the four filmmakers, and of their output, this film. The title would have been better without the hyphen: *Faire part* means "to invite someone to participate in something." The film could be read as an invitation to the viewers to peer into these efforts to collaborate. Through its reflective line, the film provides a sneak peak into the process of young Belgian and Congolese visual artists trying to figure out a decolonial visual language that could upend stereotypical representations of a poor, hungry, and abject Kinshasa. However, an almost absurd scene in which Shemisi reads a Flemish text out loud in Flemish (a text which neither he nor the public understands), and Jacobs reads a text in Lingala, a language which he does not speak either,

seems to be the culmination of this experiment of collaboration. Is this one step too far? Are we here observing the unintelligibility of the two worlds—the Congolese versus the Belgian lifeworlds? Are the filmmakers suggesting that dialogue across the two communities (Belgians and Congolese) is inherently impossible? That collaboration hardly exceeds form?

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