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UN FILM DE
MACHÉRIE EKWA BAHANGO

MAKI'LA

PRODUCTION TOSALA FILMS COPRODUCTION ORANGE STUDIO. LENNOX. INZO YA BIZIZI. DISTRIBUTION ORANGE STUDIO . DIFFA.
AVEC LE SOUTIEN DU FONDS IMAGE DE LA FRANCOPHONIE AVEC LA PARTICIPATION DE EKWA JEAN-LUC
PRODUIT PAR EMMANUEL LUPIA ET MACHÉRIE EKWA BAHANGO PROD. EXECUTIF ANTHONY MANDEMVO
ECRIT ET RÉALISÉ PAR MACHÉRIE EKWA BAHANGO ASS. REAL. ANTHONY MANDEMVO ET MICHEL WETSHI DIR.PROD. PACIFIQUE TABARO
IMAGES JIMMY TISSANABO IR. SON JOHN VAN ET CEDRICK MBONGO DIRECTEUR PHOTO. PERRIN KAM DIRECTEUR ARTISTIQUE DOLET MALALU
MAQUILLAGE NOELLY OKITO MUSIQUE JONNY EKWA MONTAGE PHILIPPE RADOUX ET DIVITA WA LUSALA INFOGRAPHIE J.J. AKWANE ET ERIKAS BINTONGO



A film by Machérie EkwaBahango
DR Congo-France, 78 mins.

A production by
TOSALA FILMS
in co-production with
ORANGE STUDIO, LENNOX and INZO YA BIZIZI
with the support of
FOND IMAGES DE LA FRANCOPHONIE,
and the participation of Jean-Luc Ekwa, Anthony Mandemvo and the
Pullman Kinshasa Hotel.

Technical info sheet

Title : MAKIPLA Written and directed by : Machérie EKWA BAHANGO Produced by : Emmanuel LUPIA
Co-produced by : Orange Studio, Lennox, Inzo ya Bizizi Genre : Fiction/Drama Durée : 78 Min
Running time : 78 mins Production Format : HD Language : Lingala/French Subtitles: French/English Production
Manager : Pacifique Tabaro Assistant Directors : Anthony Mandemvo and Michel Wetshi
Cinematography : Jimmy Tissanabo Director of Photography : Perrin Simonet Kam Sound : John Van and Cédric Mbongo
Editing : Philippe Radoux-Bazzini and Divita Wa Lusala Original Music : Jonny Ekwa
Production companies : TOSALA FILMS and ORANGE STUDIO International distribution : DIFFA and ORANGE STUDIO
Country of production : DR Congo and France Place of production : Kinshasa/DR Congo Year of production : 2018

Casting

MAKI : Amour LOMBI ACHA : Fidéline KWANZA MBINGAZOR : Serge KANYINDA ZOLA : Deborah TSHISALU
MADO : Davina IKUNDAKA CHAMPION : Plotin DIANANI DRAGON : JOEL EKILA MEJE : Naomie MAKIESE
KELE EKWA-EKWA : L'officiel

Synopsis

MAKILA, nicknamed MAKI, is a young 19-year-old girl who has been living on the streets since she was 13. When she first finds herself homeless, she is befriended by Mbingazor, a young hoodlum who has grown up on the streets. He teaches her the street smarts she needs to survive and they end up getting married. However, founded on exploitation and violence, the relationship soon leaves Maki feeling trapped. She manages to escape and goes into hiding knowing that MBINGAZOR is the boss of a criminal gang and not the kind of person you can run away from.

Then one day, she meets ACHA, a small 12-year-old girl who has recently wound up on the streets. She takes her under her wing and lets her stay in the abandoned garage where she has been hiding. ACHA has lost both her parents and as the two young girls spend more and more time together, they forge such a close friendship that it drives MBINGAZOR wild with jealousy. He commits a terrible act from which there is no going back...



Statement of intent

In Kinshasa, as in most African cities, street children have been a common phenomenon since the 90s. It is estimated that roughly 200,000 individuals are currently living on the street.

These street children and teenagers, are above all else, 'children on the street'. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is one of the lowest ranked countries in the world on the Human Development Index, and many families, torn apart by poverty and destitution, either abandon their children or turn them out onto the street, sometimes claiming that they are 'witches'.

These children find themselves in a vulnerable situation and facing a number of problems: poverty, disease, malnutrition, insecurity, and violence of all kinds. They are vulnerable in physical, moral, emotional and psychological terms, with no steady sources of food or opportunities for education.

More than half of these children are young girls, forced into prostitution at a very young age in order to survive. With survival being the universal objective, they exploit any means at their disposal: odd jobs, theft, violence, crime, gang activities...

I myself have experienced life on the street, although only for a few days, after throwing a tantrum at home. It gave me the chance to view the full scale of the problems faced in this 'street world'. I was struck by how as soon as I was amongst them, I became one of their own. Although at first it felt like I had nothing in common with these children, it didn't take long for me to identify with them.

I discovered another side to these young people whom I had previously

thought of as monsters. I took the time to get to know them and found there was a lot more to them than the stereotypes associated with street life. After all, they were children just like me: and this is the story I want to tell in this film—another side of street children, a side that we rarely get to see.

The 'shегues' as they are known in our country, are young and full of life, energy, enthusiasm and courage. I was so impressed with the bravery they showed when coping with the ordeal of street life, their stoicism against the hardships they face on a daily basis.

This film tells the story of the 'shегues', in their own way, they fall in love, they look after one another, they get married, they realize dreams, they reach their goals and they have problems just like everyone else. It is the story of the everyday life of street children, their vulnerability, their apparent violence, as well as their loves, dreams, sexual adventures and their moments of madness...

Although it is a film about juvenile delinquents, first and foremost, the audience becomes immersed in the lives of these characters, sharing their extraordinary journeys and discovering this hidden universe on the Congolese streets.

With this film, I'm aiming to reach the widest audience possible, through television, festivals, cinemas, DVDs and various screenings. I would like this film to be seen throughout the entire world and hope that it will touch people's hearts and redefine the image of street children in the minds of people everywhere.



Biofilmography



Machérie EKWA BAHANGO

Writer and director

Machérie Ekwa Bahango, was born in Kisangani on 8 November 1993, in the eastern province of the DR Congo. From an early age, Machérie acquired a taste for the stage, taking part in school performances: theatre, dance, and fashion shows.

In 2010, she launched her career as a professional model, while at the same time studying Law at university. Passionate about the '7th art', she initially learnt the principles of screenwriting and film-making through internet research. She then took part in various workshops in order to consolidate this knowledge. These initial collaborations with the filmmakers on the scene earned her an esteemed reputation and credibility which would eventually lead to jobs on various large-scale projects, which in turn further increased her ambition to make films.

In 2014, Machérie worked as a production manager and interviewer (Kinshasa shoot), for the production company LABSON BIZIZI Ciné-Kongo LTD, (London), on the documentary entitled 'KIMPA VITA: The mother of the African revolution.'

In 2015, she worked as a producer on the film 'FÉLICITÉ' by the French-Senegalese director Alain GOMIS, during which she was tasked with translating the script into Lingala.

In 2016, she wrote 6 episodes (26 minutes long) for the television series, 'NDAKISA: Lobi mola ya sika', an institutional film financed by the American NGO, SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND.

MAKI'LA is her debut film as a director. Shooting for the film took place from the end of 2015 through to the beginning of 2017 and it was produced by TOSALA FILMS in co-production with ORANGE STUDIO, LENNOX and INZO ya BIZIZI. The IOF (International Organization of la Francophonie) contributed to post-production and the film will be internationally distributed by Diffa and Orange studios. Maki'la has been selected to be shown at Berlinale 2018 in the Forum section.

Machérie took part in the Cannes Film Festival for the first time in 2017, when invited as a young new talent to the round table discussion 'Finding new talents in Africa,' organized by the IOF and the Institut français. She was chosen for the Berlinale Talents 2018 program but the selection of her film in the Forum section means she cannot present in both.

Machérie is already developing her second film project, provisionally entitled 'ZAÏRIA'.

Filmography

- **2017** : Writer/Director of MAKI'LA (First feature film)
Production: Tosala Films, Orange Studio, Lennox and Inzo Ya Bizizi
Release: Berlin International Film Festival, Forum section.
- **2016** : Screenwriter for the television series 'NDAKISA: Lobi Mokola Ya Sika' (6 episodes each 26 minutes long)
Produced by SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND
- **2015** : Translator of the film script for 'FÉLICITÉ' by ALAIN GOMIS into Lingala,
Production: ANDOLFI and GRANIT FILMS.
Award: Grand Jury Prize at Berlinale 2017 and the 'Etalon d'Or de Yennenga' at Fespaco 2017
- **2014** : Production Manager and interviewer (Kinshasa shoot), for the documentary film entitled 'KIMPA VITA: The mother of the African revolution.'
Production: LABSON BIZIZI Ciné-Kongo LTD (London).
Nominations: The Ecrans Noirs Film Festival, Afrykamera Film Festival, International Pan African Film Festival in Cannes...



The cast



MAKI : Lead role

Amour Luzolo Lombi

Aged 20, student of contemporary dance, this is Amour's debut film role. Passionate about the 7th art, playing this role is an opportunity to realize a childhood dream: To act in a film.



MBINGAZOR : Central role

Serge Kanyinda

Mbingazor is Serge Kanyinda's second film role. This young 26-year-old actor has already proven his considerable talent in the film 'REBELLE' by Kim Nguyen, acting alongside Rachel Mwanza (Silver Bear for Best Actress).



ACHA: Central role

Fidéline Kwanza Mafimbu

Fideline was only 12 years old during the shooting of the film. It's the very first time she has acted in front of a camera. Although still at school, she has shown great skills as an actor.

Production

Tosala films

Founded in 2014 by Emmanuel Lupia, TOSALA FILMS is an audiovisual and film production company, based in Kinshasa. Tosala Films has produced and co-produced several short films and a medium-length film commission. Maki'la is the first feature length project by this company which develops fiction projects (series, long and short films) and documentaries. Everything possible is put in place to ensure that each film and project is unique and special.

The company takes an editorial approach which combines favorite projects, eclecticism and realism. Our objective is to find innovative projects and talents in order to champion groundbreaking cinema. TOSALA FILMS guarantee practical expertise and budget management from project conception to delivery. For us, each film is a unique project and a chance to apply our enthusiasm, creativity and professionalism.

Emmanuel LUPIA CEO / FOUNDER

Emmanuel Lupia is responsible for the artistic, strategic and commercial development of the company. He unearths new projects. He is also an editor, cameraman and director. After studying economics, Emmanuel Lupia trained in the cinematic arts at active workshops in Kinshasa for two years, training courses which were set up by Suka in collaboration with INSAS. He worked for Suka on several production projects, working in various positions. In 2014, he founded Tosala Films through which he produced several short films, including 'Mosinzo' by Kadima Ngulungu (broadcast on the TV5 monde network), which received 7 nominations and an award). He directed a commissioned film entitled 'Matshozi', co-produced a series of 3 short fiction films and directed 6 institutional documentaries for the Belgian Technical Cooperation. He has also taken part in several documentary writing residencies such as Africadoc in Burkina-Faso and Tenk in Saint-Louis in Senegal. Maki'la is the first feature-length film produced by the company, in collaboration with Orange Studio, Lennox studio and Inzo ya Bizizi. The film will be distributed by Diffa and Orange studio. Lupia's artistic experience allows him to forge privileged relationships with writers, actors, directors, designers and technicians.



Interview with Machérie EKWA



You studied law at University; how did you end up in this field with so few avenues in your country?

Machérie EKWA : I've been fascinated by cinema since I was a little girl. Art in general has always interested me, especially since I was a model. I began to learn about cinema by reading articles on the internet. I did a lot of on-line research, and then I began to mingle with a few film directors and that's how I gradually developed a strong desire to be a filmmaker. At first, I wanted to be an actor, but now I've found my place behind the camera. I have a law degree, but I'm happy to be able to do what I love. It's difficult to make a career in film in the Congo, that's true, but it's a beautiful, amazing experience to do what you love. I had a really hard time combining my law studies with cinema, both are very demanding fields...but I did my best to earn this degree while making strides in cinema, my passion.

MAKI'LA is your first feature film. What initially inspired you to make a film about young people living on the streets of Kinshasa?

ME : MAKI'LA was the result of a passion and desire to simply make a film. I wanted to try my hand at the art and begin to assert myself as a filmmaker. But my inspiration for this story came from my own personal experiences and the people I met on the streets. I discovered that the children and adolescents living on the

streets were full of dreams; they had friendships and love affairs. Despite the horror that many people associate with life on the streets, these young people experience the full gamut of human emotion every day. This is what I wanted to portray in my film.

You wrote the storyline yourself. How did you research it? The story is quite tough, since it includes extreme poverty, drug use, theft and violence. Please tell us—perhaps you could use some scenes as examples—to what extent did you stay true to this reality almost in a documentary style. How much of this reality was enhanced for your film in terms of dramatic structure and suspense?

ME : I wanted to tell a story of friendship and

passionate love between two young women. When I thought about how I wanted to portray the specific world they live in to drive the film's storyline, I kept thinking about a particular group of street children that I had met several times before. But after that I never saw them again. The memory of this group inspired me. Meeting these children showed me that life on the streets is a peculiar blend of poverty and freedom. I wanted to show their dreams, their loves and their friendships without ignoring the reality of life on the streets. I wanted this film to link all these elements with my own dreams and artistic style. Take the wedding scene for example. It shows that love reigns everywhere, even on the streets. We all love and need to be loved. I wanted to show that these children are





full of happy dreams and that every day they try to build these dreams in their own way and by their own means and on a daily basis. Maki is a lover and a dreamer, like any woman. It was also a way of adding a higher dimension to the reality of freedom that characterizes life on the streets. It was a way of stating that they too have the right to marry. They have the right to enjoy all that is beautiful in this life; they even say so in the film.

You spoke about meeting a gang of children, could you talk a little more about that? How was that experience?

ME : At first it felt strange getting close to them. Bonds like these are unimaginable at times or simply difficult to understand. A “young house girl” makes friends with “street children”. I was touched by the esteem they had for me. They respected me a lot and spoke to me openly about themselves. They had lots of dreams and behind the outward appearance I could see their sincerity and a sort of innocence, despite the rough life they lived on the streets. Life on the streets is so hard, you have to fight. Every day is a battle for survival and you try to survive by any means necessary. The street is a world all its own where the only rule of law is survival. We accuse these children of theft, prostitution, etc. and I think that they’re more often victims than culprits. We see them as villains but I think they do what they do out of necessity, not wickedness. It was important for me to speak about this in my own way in the

film.

Who are the actors?

ME : Most of them are unknown artists. I sought them out for the film and we began to rehearse several months before filming. They have always been thoroughly disciplined in their work. One of the actors, Serge, had already landed a major role in Kim Nguyen’s film, *War Witch*, in 2011. It was a wonderful experience working with young people as passionate as I am. We had to rehearse intensely for three months before filming began. We were preparing for filming, but we were also learning a lot. It’s an experience that I’m not ready to forget.

Do you consider the casting was successful after the performances of Amour Lombi and Fidélité Kwanza who were both new to film?

ME : Allow me to say that I’m immensely proud of all the actors. They all did great work and they were so attentive and in tune. Amour Lombi and Fidélité Kwanza are just perfect. They stuck closely to my vision and my direction. I remember at times during filming they’d be asked to start over and they had a hard time doing things differently to how I’d taught them during rehearsal. It was all ingrained in their mind, in their skin. I’m so very proud of what they gave. They gave the best of themselves. And not just them, all my actors did a fantastic job.

Kinshasa is a megacity, but we hardly ever see it on the big screen. The city is a key character in your film. Why was it important for you to visually portray this city?

ME : Kinshasa is a very friendly city. This is exactly what I wanted to portray from the first scene. The rest flowed from this: choice of setting, camerawork, costumes, language and working with the actors. I wanted the viewer to be able to identify with Kinshasa’s reality. I wanted viewers to be submerged in the energy of Kinshasa that you can feel when walking its streets. For example, the first scene focuses on *sapologie*, the art of dressing well. This is one of the things that represents the streets of Kinshasa but also evokes what I wanted to show in this film: the contrast between being and seeming. These children in tough situations or separated from their families and living on the streets aren’t always as bad and wicked as we think they are. Kinshasa can be rough, but it is also a beautiful place.

Most people in Kinshasa aren’t used to seeing a film crew around. What sort of challenges did you have to face while making this film? And just as important, what type of support did you appreciate having?

ME : Well actually, people were really cooperative; they encouraged me several times about my project. Many of them even wanted to be a part of the film. A lot of people came onto





the set and took photos with us. Everywhere we went people wished us good luck. I'm not sure, but I think it might be because so many people were surprised to see a young woman directing. I remember how we shot the market scenes and the vendors persuaded their customers to remain silent and be extras in the film. This was a bit of a shock to me, and the market suddenly became completely still when we began the live action shot. I am eternally grateful to the people of Kinshasa. We also had two run-ins with the police, but luckily, we had our filming permit on hand!

The title MAKI'LA is split by an apostrophe, why is this? What does that represent?

ME : There are two reasons for this. Firstly, Makila without the apostrophe is the name of the protagonist. When she arrives on the streets, she is called Maki. So, I wanted to spell the title in this way as reference to this change. It's sort of like a good girl done bad. It's as if she loses a part of her pure identity, a part of her human value when she arrives on the streets. The second reason is linked to the sense of the term and the story of the film. Makila is a Lingala word that means "blood". The film also deals with blood ties between the three main characters. There's a broken kinship between Mbingazor and Acha, then blood ties between Maki and Mbingazor are established when they make a blood pact after their wedding. And at the end, this tie is broken because sister kills brother without

knowing it and husband kills wife without wanting to. Mbingazor could not die alone. I drew inspiration here from the stories we were told growing up, that a blood pact brings misfortune. Death took them away because they were tied. And this same blood is spilled.

There is a lot of violence directed against women in the film – both verbal and physical. To what extent is this specific to the life on the streets that you portray in the film, and to what degree do you want viewers to recognize the difficulties that women face in the Congo?

ME : Verbal as well as physical violence, such as rape, are some of the realities of the streets. And the young girls are often victims because it's dangerous out there for them. I believe women are the pillars of society and if the woman has no education, do you see the danger there? I think that if I could have, I would have done more in this film. On the streets, girls are victims not only of their difficulties to live in this environment, sometimes under the control of their men, but there are also several other difficulties which they face, such as encounters with members of the occult who manipulate them for occultism, witchcraft and prostitution. And they have no choice. Imagine a girl on the street who becomes pregnant. How does she survive? And if she has the baby, how does she keep it? If she has an abortion, she is condemned by our society. Our country does not accept abortion. This is a profound subject and when I think about it, it's painful. Unfortunately, I was quite re-

served in portraying certain facts in the film because I wanted to show the reality without crossing over into militancy. I wanted to leave a big enough space for the story of the film. I think that the street is no place for anyone, especially a woman, because on the streets she loses her sense of purpose, her value and her morality. A woman needs to be supported so that she in turn can support others. This is what I'd like my society to understand.

I imagine it must be difficult for a young woman to be a filmmaker in the Congo! Do you think that your success will inspire other young Congolese women who want to make a career in film?

ME : Yes, of course I think so, and I encourage all women in the field to work hard towards a breakthrough. I switch roles when I'm working and on set I'm a director. I control everything, I direct and I make sure I have the final say. I believe this is the best approach for earning the respect of your team, and especially for achieving the kind of results you're looking for. This is how I get the images and sounds that reflect my personality and style. It's very hard to be a woman and an artist in the Congo, and in fact I'm working on a project that will soon be launched, to help women artists to make it in the business. I think if you act like a little girl or a princess, the film industry is not the place for you. You won't get anywhere. In terms of my relationship with women, most of them show support, and while we were filming Makila





there were a good number of women who lent their support. They've seen how far I've come and lots of them are motivated to achieve their own goals. I'm so touched, happy and flattered to see other women and girls encourage me and be proud of me. Some of them send me words of encouragement and congratulations, and others want to meet me to talk. So, I think this shows that in the future we'll see many women waking up and launching their careers. But I also think that women artists in the Congo need assistance, especially to find themselves and realize that they are capable of doing things.

With all that is said among the Congolese public, do you think that this film could attract the local audience in terms of quality and performance in the middle of a film revolution?

I think that this film will be well-received, because at the beginning I had lots of stories. But I chose this one for my first film because I wanted to tell a story set in a world that Congolese people could easily identify with. I wanted something genuine, and I hope that my film adds its ripple to the wave that is now forming, with a view to the emergence of a Congolese film industry. But the world depicted in Maki'la remains purely a choice in terms of the film's context, but it is not a full representation of my beautiful Kinshasa, which for me still has many wonderful qualities.

You also touch on prostitution and pimping in the film, why?

ME : Because unfortunately it is one of the realities of the streets. I couldn't tell a story about girls on the streets without including this sad, very present reality. The weakest are exploited for the benefit of the strongest. The street is like a jungle. By juxtaposing prayer and prostitution, I wanted to send a message about morality and good sense. People can mix a life of immorality and a life of prayer with no qualms. The same people we find in the churches are also going to these places of disrepute. But I didn't want that to be the central focus.

Maki'la starts off on an upbeat note, then ends with tragedy when we see Makila...

ME : I love intense emotions. Personally, I love joy and I can't say I care much for sadness. But I think when I express myself, especially in my work, I like to shock people a bit. I like to touch souls, whether through joy or sadness. Life isn't all a bed of roses, things can change dramatically at any time. One day you're laughing and the next you're crying. Furthermore, these emotions complement one another: joy and sadness, laughing and crying, love and hate... they go hand in hand! As for me I'm probably just a bit obsessed with drama...it's sort of my thing, my weakness. But with Maki'la, I wanted to provoke thought and raise questions. I hope

that when people see this film, they'll see street children differently.

Any other comments before you go?

I'm happy with MAKI'LA, my film debut, we can say that it's sort of my calling card...and I'm happy and thankful to have met all these wonderful people, my producer Emmanuel Lupia, my manager, the co-producers, the team, the actors, sponsors, etc.; everyone who made this project a reality and who helped us to get this far. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to everyone who believed in me and my little talent and my boldness. I'm so very grateful.

So finally, I'd like to say Godspeed to MAKI'LA the UFO, which is what Pierre Barrot calls it in his encouragements.



International distribution

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