3.1 General information

Acronym (max. 30 characters)
DiaspoFood

Title (max. 255 characters)
The Central African diaspora in Belgium: A transnational anthropology of food practices, narratives and social relations

Scientific discipline 1
Anthropology

Scientific subdiscipline 1 (facultative - max. 5 words)
Social Anthropology

Summary (max. 500 words)
The most important sub-Saharan diaspora settled in Belgium comes from the former colonial areas of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. However, research on this important component (more than 1%) of the Belgian population has remained limited up to now, and focused on a few topics of mostly institutional nature (religion, elites, policies). Based on that acknowledgment of a “blind spot”, the promoters of this project intend to set up an anthropological research on food in the Central African diaspora. Food is endowed with a strong economic and social dimension. It is a rising topic in anthropology since a few decades, much in phase with the growing interest for intimacy, emotions, memory, gender, and bodily practices.
Food culture is a particularly interesting topic in diasporic communities: moving from the home country to the destination area creates a twist between the original diet and a new regime; even the staple food cannot be accessed easily. One should not assume a culturalist position and disregard the capacity of the actors to change their eating practices, but the resilience of food habits is strong. This resilience should be questioned in detail, and related to the system of social relations that food supports. An ethnography of food in the Central African diaspora should raise questions labelled in terms of processes (the changes) and interactions (the exchanges). Despite the innocuous appearance of the topic, it is a most relevant gateway for an in-depth sociocultural analysis of this diaspora, and by proxy, of the African societies this diaspora emanates from.

The study will be divided in different components:
(1) The economy of food. How is “ethnic food” trade organised, at the crossroads of networks in the home country, along transnational links, and in Belgium?
(2) *Food and the social construction of everyday life.* Who shops, who cooks, who eat with whom; how does all this connect to other daily practices in the household? Such apparently banal questions are key issues to penetrate the intimacy of the diaspora, and reveal how food is indexed to issues of gender, age, generation, and status.

(3) *Subjectivities.* Food is a very intimate topic, one that relentlessly provides elements for the construction of the self, and resources for agency. It holds a central place in memory making. How do people conceive the relation between the body, health, beauty, and food?

(4) *Identity and “groupness”.* Food materialises at the same time boundaries, conviviality and togetherness, leading both to internal differentiation, and to relationships between various social groups in Belgium.

(5) *Diachronic considerations.* What have been the main transformations of food culture along time in the diaspora? How does it appear in biographies?

(6) *(Im)materiality.* This dimension should pave the way for a collection of tangible and intangible items related to food in the diaspora and in the home countries, with the view to set up a co-created exhibition.

Those topics will all be addressed through collaborative ethnographic research conducted both in Belgium and in Central Africa, engaging the diasporas.

*Keywords (fill out min. 2 - others facultative)*

Diaspora – Anthropology of food – Central Africa

### 3.2 Promoters

**Promoter in Musée royal de l’Afrique centrale - Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika**

Maniacky, Jacky. Head of “Culture & Society” Research Unit

jacky.maniacky@africamuseum.be – 027695673

**Promoter in Université Libre de Bruxelles**

Petit, Pierre. Laboratoire d’Anthropologie des Mondes Contemporains (LAMC)

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### 3.3 Proposed position to the FED-tWIN researcher

**a) In the FSI :** SW2 - Workleader  
**b) In the university :** Non academic member – PostDoc researcher

### 3.4 Required skills and competences of the FED-tWIN researcher

**PhD scientific discipline(s) (max. 255 characters)**

Anthropology
Specific expertise (max. 300 words)

Application is welcome from anyone having a PhD in anthropology (or a related diploma in social sciences/area studies). The candidate should have published a book, and articles in reference journals of high reputation. (S)he must have an experience of ethnographic research in a non-European context, preferably in Africa; and expertise in either the anthropology of diasporas and migration, or the anthropology of food. Moreover, (s)he should be open to interdisciplinary exchange. In line with decolonial concerns in research practice, the candidate should prioritise active integration of the diasporas in the various stages of the research, and to have a close collaboration with the expert colleagues in the partner institutions of the countries of origin. Some competence in French and English languages is required due to the research context. Any capacity in Lingala, Swahili or other Central African languages will be useful, as well as a good knowledge of the corresponding cultures. Besides, the applicant should also know that French and Dutch are the working languages in the RMCA; while French and English are the working languages at ULB.

More specific skill(s) (facultative - max. 300 words)

A working experience in museums, or in setting up exhibitions, is welcome. Similarly, an acquaintance with visual anthropology or with “netnography” methodology is an asset.
During the colonial period, Belgium hosted few travellers, and even fewer migrants, from Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. Policies at the time openly discouraged mobility toward the metropole, for fear it would put at stake the social and racial hierarchy between metropolitans and the colonial subjects. Seminarists and (especially after independence) students, sportmen, artists were the first to enter Belgium on a long-term and regular basis, founding the first layer of the present diaspora from these three countries. Things changed in the 1990s, with the coming of political refugees from Congo-Zaïre, the afflux of those who fled the civil war in Burundi or the genocide in Rwanda, to be followed by the massification of migration along networks constituted through family and marriage, business and trade, churches, political parties and NGOs. This population can hardly be evaluated numerically, but in 2010, about 130,000 persons living in Belgium (about 1% of the total population) were born with a sub-Saharan African nationality; about 40% originate from Congo, 10% from Rwanda, and 4% from Burundi (Grégoire 2013: 74-75; Schoumaker & Schoonvaere 2012; see Zana Etambala (2010) for a historical approach of this diaspora).

Of course, this phenomenon has already attracted the attention of some researchers, but curiously enough, few scholars with a long-term position in Belgium work on that diaspora in a socio-anthropological perspective (Bambi Ceuppens and Jacinthe Mazzocchetti being notable exceptions). By comparison, the diasporas from Italy, Turkey, and Morocco are the focus of much more research. This limited scientific coverage is even more striking when one compares it with the relatively high volume of Belgian scholars who have been working in the D.R.Congo in various fields of the humanities, as anthropologist, linguist, historian, geographer, economist, or political scientist. Consequently, research on this important component of the Belgian population has remained limited up to now. The research profile we propose in this application will be instrumental in consolidating greatly this limited expertise, through the detailed analysis of the everyday life of the diaspora along socio-ethnographic methods. With its historic focus on Central Africa, the RMCA will benefit considerably from the new expertise. ULB shares this situation, and its involvement in migration studies and in globalisation issues will certainly be reinforced thoroughly by the creation of such a position.

Based on that acknowledgment of a “blind spot” in their respective institutions, the promoters of this project considered that a general research on the Central African diaspora would be too broad as a topic, and looked for a specific focus of enquiry that would be a good starting point for a longer research on diaspora dynamics, but which would be at the same time limited enough to be carried out in a period of 5 to 10 years. It should be a topic avoiding a focus on the sole elites, associations, churches, representations, policies, and migration networks, which have already attracted most of the current scientific attention. And as diaspora studies suppose, in order to be properly completed, that the research should be carried out both in the destination country and in the home country, choosing a non-intrusive topic – in the sense that it would not from the start raise serious concerns among the people under study – seemed important for the feasibility and the sustainability of the research.

After discussing several options, the two promoters thought that an anthropological research on food in the diaspora – food trade, processing, consumption, narratives – was the best candidate to meet the requirement evoked above. Food is a rising topic in anthropology since the 1990s, especially in a

1 If this population originating from the former Belgian colony and protectorates (as well as their descent) will be the focus of the project, the researcher will keep room for manoeuvre to possibly include other Central African groups based on heuristic opportunity – for example, for comparative purposes. The Cameroonian diaspora, among others, is very well represented in Belgium.
period where the discipline tries to renew its perspective and take intimacy and bodily practices into serious consideration. Mobility and food are indeed intertwined topics in the lives of millions of migrants across the world, and constitutes an innovative research avenue to investigate the daily life and concrete experiences of diasporic populations, as well as their relationships with their home country (Kershen 2002; Mintz 2008; Nun Halloran 2016). The topic will hence allow a global approach, at the crossroads of private life, public spaces, and international networks.

Investigating food among the Central African diaspora will also cover a “gap” in the current research on African diasporas (worldwide), for there is little research on that topic compared to approaches centred on those listed two paragraphs above (elites, etc.). A few noticeable exceptions include Chinyere Duru (2005, 2017) on the Nigerian diaspora in Belgium; Bodomo and Ma (2012) on African traders in China; Bouly de Lesdain (1999) on the Chateau Rouge neighbourhood in Paris; Garnier (2010) on African restaurants in provincial France; Barou and Verhoeven (1997) on home cooking in the African diaspora in France at large; Crenn, Delavigne & Techoueyres (2010) on Senegalese and Malian returnees.

As one of the most basic – as the most basic – issue(s) one faces in everyday life, food consumption is endowed with a strong economic, social and emotional dimension. This applies particularly to diaspora communities at large, for moving from the home country to the destination area creates a twist between what is (or was originally) perceived as a normal, healthful diet to a totally new situation, where even the staple food cannot be accessed easily. One should not assume a culturalist position and disregard the capacity of the actors to change their eating practices, through processes of innovative acculturation, but the resilience of food habits is strong. Actors themselves often explain this persistence in terms of bodily needs. Even if the physiological dimension should not be downplayed, anthropology has highlighted the importance of the social relations organised around food, which are filled with relational, emotional and properly symbolic dimensions. These elements pave the way for a more complex approach considering that “continuity is not reproduction and discontinuity is not rupture” (Crenn, Hassoun & Medina 2010). It appears worldwide that diasporic communities tend to have a proper food regime, distinct from the one in both their old and their new country.

Methodologically speaking, food is a “safe” issue people are eager to talk about, by comparison with others that can bring more tensions to the fore. Food preparation and consumption constitute an apparently light topic, but allow a deep ethnographic approach “from below”. In a tense context, where migration and integration have become touchy issues, this is a strong point regarding the workability of the project.

In short, an ethnography of food circulation, trade, preparation and consumption among the Central African communities in Belgium would be a challenging way to study the diaspora through questions labelled in terms of processes (the changes) and interactions (the exchanges). Despite the innocuous appearance of the topic, food is a very relevant gateway for an in-depth sociocultural analysis of the diaspora, and in an indirect way, of the local societies they emanate from in their home countries. How the research should evolve after ten years cannot be predicted at this point, but there is a huge potential for development around the topics of African diasporas and the anthropology of food.

The study will be divided in different components that could be tackled successively or simultaneously, based on the research agenda the researcher will adopt in discussion with the promoters. It will be, of course, preceded by a preliminary state of the art devoted to the literature about the Central African diaspora in Belgium, and to the anthropology of food.

(1) The economy of food conditions the availability of African products in the Belgian families. “Ethnic food” trade – to take the usual label of this category of trade – is an entrepreneurship at the
crossroads of several networks: the network of producers and traders in the home country; the transnational trade of national food (very noticeable in the Zaventem National Airport); and the network of customers in the host country (Bouly de Lesdain 1999). It is indeed of prime interest not to focus on the host country alone, and to include the home country. How are these traders organised? How do they cope with the legal and logistic difficulties of this national and international trade? Do petty traders sometimes prosper to the point of developing large business – and if not, why? Who are the customers and what kind of relation do they develop with the traders/sellers? What are the connections of Central African traders with other overlapping sectors, like the Pakistani or the Chinese food stores? What is the role of personal or family shipment for supplying food to the relatives of the diaspora?

(2) A central issue of the research is how food plays a role in the social construction of everyday life in the diaspora. This should be investigated through a long-term ethnographic research with families (or lone people), which supposes long-term personal relations that are the trademark of ethnography. The focus on daily food allows questioning gender and familial issues (Barou & Verhoeven 1997): who shops, who cooks, who eat with whom; how does it connect to other daily practices of the household? How does it relate to structures of authority in the family? How about the role of women, men and the youth in the processes of food acquisition, transformation, and consumption? How about practices of eating out, in family or in romantic contexts, or when accepting an invitation? What is a festive meal, and how do such festive events punctuate life from religious celebrations to graduations, anniversaries or weddings? Such apparently banal questions are key issues to penetrate the intimacy of the diaspora, and reveal how food is indexed to issues of gender, age, generation, and status.2

(3) How does food support the subjectivities for the members of the diaspora? Food is a very intimate topic, one that relentlessly provides elements for the construction of the self. It holds a central place in our memory. We are what we eat, as is often said. Rather than considering food culture as a “given” in a specific society, it should be addressed as a resource people use to define themselves, and to distinguish from others. This is a very relevant question for investigating the diasporic identities as a teenager, as a “modern African woman”, a good Christian, or as a male elite – any other example would work, of course. The situation is not different when this diaspora comes back to the home country: Senegalese or Malian migrants returning home after decades tend to use food “in tactics (…) to produce alternately identity and otherness” (Crenn, Delavigne & Techoueyres 2010). Can the culture of food in the diaspora be approached in terms of “civilising processes”, as defined by N. Elias (1973), or in terms of strategies of “distinction”, as defined by P. Bourdieu (1979), or are such sociological concepts elaborated for the European society unfit to capture the processes that take place in the diaspora? Should it rather be approached as affected by the “postcolonial imperialism”, as defined by J. Tonda (2015)? Food and drink are also a good topic to investigate the changing relation to the body and its representations. How do people conceive the relation between the body, health, beauty, and food? Are different standards coexisting in the same population?

(4) This focus on daily life goes together with issues of identity (Kasongo 2020), and “groupness”.3 Food indeed materialises at the same time boundaries, conviviality and togetherness. In between “Us” and “Them”, it paves the way for internal differentiation (regional foods – and beer brands – are often tokens of regional identity in the Congolese diaspora), but also for relationships with other social groups in the host country. Festive food and drink may be seen as a form of communality. It can become an important component in intercultural dialogue, as appears in some festive events related

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2 Beyond the domain of food, Mazzocchetti (2014) and Mazzocchetti & Nyatanyi Biyiha (2016) provide interesting research avenues on the latter topic.

3 This section and the preceding one could be grouped together, for they investigate similar dynamics: they differ in the sense that these realities are addressed at the level of individual agency in section (3), and at a more collective level in section (4).
to the African diaspora in Brussels or elsewhere. In which circumstances does food take a role in the presentation of an African, national or regional identity in the Belgian public space? How do members of the diaspora deal with the stereotypes people have of their culture (Arnaut et al. 2009) and of their culinary traditions? What kinds of customers do the Central African restaurants attract, and what kind of atmosphere and sociability do they create, by comparison with other “exotic” restaurants (Garnier 2010)?

(5) Ethnography of the present situation should be completed with diachronic considerations. What have been the main transformations along time in food culture among the diaspora? This question can be asked on different scales, through a biographical approach of the evolution of specific individuals, to a longer-term comparison of different generations of “Afropeans”. Visual anthropology can, through research on video and photographic personal archives, elicit interesting comments on such evolution. More broadly, archival sources will be researched in the relevant corpuses at hand (mostly in Belgium, and for sure in the collections of the Museum).

(6) The (im)materiality of food culture should be addressed as well, and be an incentive for the collection of intangible items as well as artefacts related to food in the diaspora and in the home countries. Research on food culture should include audio-visual data on food practices comprising a collection of recipes of common meals and signature dishes recited in Central African and/or European languages. Culinary wordlists can be extracted from these data paying attention not only to names of ingredients but also to food processing, names of dishes and the actual eating and appreciation of the prepared food (Ricquier & Devos, forthcoming). As for material culture, the banality of food ingredients, packages, advertisements, cooking equipment, dishes and tableware explain why, like most popular culture objects, they have largely escaped investigation. Interestingly, such objects are endowed with an evocative dimension for many people, and are a good starting point to trigger storytelling, as revealed during an exhibition on memory-objects held in 2000 at the Museum of Lubumbashi (Sizaire 2001; Petit 2001). This will pave the way for an exhibition based on objects and testimonies gathered in Belgium and in Central Africa, an exhibition including relevant, existing collections of the RMCA, in co-creation with the communities involved, paying equal attention to material and other components, like sounds, voices, smells, and of course tastes.

These specific objectives should be addressed through ethnography. The present application is not the place to develop what is ethnography, but it should in any case involve a direct, participative involvement in Central African families and formal/informal groups. Ethnography is carried out with people, places, and events. Even if French is the most usual communication language in the diaspora, the researcher should familiarise with other languages, especially Swahili and Lingala. In line with the leading position of the Africa Museum in Bantu linguistics, language will remain a constant concern during the research, with attention to regional differences in the vocabulary used. Research will be carried out through participation to events, sharing time, interviewing, filming, but also through a “netnography” (Kozinets 2015), i.e. research carried out through involvement on social networks, like Facebook, Instagram or TikTok, which are intensely used by the members of this diaspora, to keep connected across the Belgian territory, but also with their relatives and acquaintances in the home country. Interestingly enough, a consistent proportion of images that are posted on such social networks are related to meals, with the family or friends, in the restaurant, or during festive contexts. Software and new ethical guidelines are presently being developed for dealing with such data. This is a methodological dimension the promoters would like to buttress through the present research, for it is still underdeveloped in social sciences as they are practised today in Belgium.

The research supposes fieldwork carried out in the Central African home countries. This is needed for different reasons, the first of which being that many people from the diaspora share their life between the two countries, and that any child born in Belgium is expected to visit his/her home
country at some point. The diaspora members are hence aware of the two different food systems, and the researcher should be as well. It is also mandatory to conduct research in the home countries to understand the origin of the different food traded to Belgium; and to study the food habits as practised before the departure to Belgium. Methodologically speaking, it is very important that the researcher has a direct experience with the food culture in the home countries of his/her informants: this creates propitious conditions for discussion, through a shared intimacy with the “homeland food”. It is also important for the researcher to engage the diasporas instead of treating them as mere scientific objects.

The relevance of this research for society and public services is high. It is less and less credible for a museum devoted to research in Central Africa to overlook the diaspora living next door. But this is not only a social or moral concern: it is a scientific one, for societies cannot be approached without taking into account their interconnectedness. In a highly globalised era, diaspora and their home societies are mutually constitutive. The creation of the position under discussion would benefit the Museum at large, for it would provide a person of reference who could help different departments to take this diasporic dimension into account when developing a new research project. This is obvious for economy, political science, history, but art history, musicology and linguistics are concerned as well.

The recent and heated debates about the “decolonisation” of the Museum have revealed that members of the diaspora are eager to take a role in the public representation of African cultures; and many ask for “reparation” of the colonial violence. The ULB underwent similar criticisms at the same time, after a medallion of Leopold II was vandalised, and African human remains were discovered in the Museum of Biological Anthropology. Such societal issues cannot be overlooked in the near future. Although the position under consideration is clearly a scientific profile, and should in no way be equated with the role of a mediator or an ombudsman, it will be very beneficial for the Museum and the University to rely on an additional colleague informed about the present stakes in the African diaspora. (S)he should be able to help understanding the setting of the current claims, and exploring the ways to communicate more efficiently with the diaspora and its various representatives about their concerns. More globally, in a period where international mobility is rising, and where migration has become a public issue in Belgium and at the EU level, it seems important to have someone who has an in-depth knowledge of the everyday life of the diaspora, and is able to communicate about it.

An exhibition about food culture in diasporic contexts, which could be programmed in the next five to eight years, would be a very interesting way to help diffuse the results of the research to a larger audience. As already mentioned, the visual and archival dimensions of the research will be considered seriously from the very start of the project, given its importance for research itself but also with the view to contribute to the creation of a specific collection in the museum. This shift to current popular culture artefacts would help to de-centre the Museum from its century-old focus on the collection of artefacts and artistic objects from colonial Congo.

Another societal impact will be the creation of expertise on food issues considered through the lens of social sciences, in the diaspora and in Central Africa. There is a demand for such expertise. The Belgian Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (AFSCA-FAVV) is committed to take this “cultural” dimension into consideration when dealing with “exotic” foods – it is limited up to now but should be growing soon, as became clear during the recent discussions on insect consumption. The need for this expertise is even more developed considering Central African contexts, due to the concern for nutritional values, food security and food safety. The creation of the present position would enable the RMCA and the ULB to provide a useful support in cooperation issues, as food security is part of the Millennium Development Goals. Once again, this would not be the main job of the position under discussion, but as a practical result of the research, a significant side contribution, notably for helping to design development-project applications.
The common challenges of the planned collaboration between the RMCA and the ULB have been presented throughout the preceding paragraphs. For both institutions, the position would be instrumental in covering a common blind spot in their respective expertise: African diaspora studies. Both institutions are located in Brussels and its vicinity, that is, the area hosting the most important Central African diaspora in the country. Both of them have a long expertise in research in Central African societies, while the transnational dimension of the present African societies is not yet systematically taken into account. ULB has been involved in different scientific projects related to the anthropology of food, but no researcher has made this topic the main focus of his/her research; as for the RMCA, such a topic with a high multidisciplinary potential would be beneficial in enhancing the cohesion within the relatively young “Culture & Society” Research Unit, and connecting more closely different departments within the Museum at large. For both institutions, the need to integrate diasporas into the scope of the research, in various domains, seems a necessity due to the scientific urge to consider transnational links, by contrast with the former nation-based approach; and due to the emerging, and growing, voice of members of this diaspora when discussing the representation of Africa, in its past and its present.

References


As a scientific research institute dedicated to Africa, the RMCA has a worldwide reputation. The primary activity of the FED-tWIN position will be research. The researcher will join the “Culture & Society” Research Unit and reinforce research and activities in anthropology in becoming a specialist in social anthropology for what concerns Central African diaspora in Belgium. Synergies and complementarities are expected with other research on diasporas. Indeed, on-going research of Bambi Ceuppens has mainly addressed diaspora issues through an in-depth analysis of the representation of the ‘colonial Other’ and the politics/policies of identity and culture in Belgium. The present position is mainly focused on the ethnography of everyday life of the diaspora, which is very complementary to Ceuppens’ main field of research. As for on-going research of Cristiana Panella, diaspora (West African diaspora in Italy, not in Belgium) is targeted as well but the focus is the informal/illegal context. This particular experience will be very valuable when the research addresses the issue of the transnational economy of food (the first-listed of the six components) regarding Central Africa diaspora.

That new position will also positively (re)activate some research on food vocabulary and diasporas in linguistics.

Collaborations outside this Research Unit will be clearly facilitated seeing the shared interest for the topic in areas like history, ethnography or ichthyology for instance.

As a cultural site, the RMCA is a window to Africa that has undergone a ‘decolonising’ process. It is one of the most visited museums in the country. Even if this should not become the main activity of the new researcher, (s)he will share her growing experience in taking part in projects that deal with the relations between museums and the diasporas. For instance, the permanent exhibition of the RMCA includes a room “Afropéa” which is dedicated to African diaspora in Belgium. This room is conceived as a scalable one, welcoming meetings and debates. Input from research of the chosen candidate will be expected.

- In the University (max. 500 words)
The new position will be beneficial in many ways for the ULB. A specific lecture on the Anthropology of food could be created after a few years. The topic has been already part of the MA curriculum of anthropology in the past (2000-2013), under the form of a module of the “Séminaire d’anthropologie I-II” (P. Petit), which was always met with a great success – the topic is much appreciated by the students. Alternatively, a lecture on the Anthropology of diaspora could be created as well, but it seems less profitable given the existence of different courses on migration, globalisation or mobility. Nonetheless, there is no scholar with a tenure position working on sub-Saharan diasporas at ULB, and the chosen candidate could present a few yearly lessons on the topic in lectures like “Anthropology of globalization” (A. Newell), “Migration and gender” (A. Fresnoza-Flot), or “Anthropologie des sociétés de l’Afrique subsaharienne” (J. Noret), or “Ethnicité et nationalisme” (P. Petit).

The FED-tWIN is, of course, primarily a research position and the idea is not to overburden the chosen candidate with lectures. However, it could be most rewarding for him/her to have one lecture in direct relation to the topic of the research, which will attract MA and PhD students eager to make a thesis under his/her tutorship. This would help covering the domain of investigation.

The scholar will also be invited to adhere to the ULB research platforms Afric@ulb, the Multidisciplinary Research Network on Africa. Contacts should also be taken with the GERME (Group for Research on Ethnic Relations, Migration & Equality).

The chosen candidate could also be involved in the editorial team of Civilisations, the only journal devoted primarily to social anthropology in Belgium, hosted at the LAMC. (S)he could take the initiative of a special issue in relation to the anthropology of food in diasporic contexts – or another combination of topics in line with his/her research.

And of course, we expect his/her presence and participation during the seminar ABBA (Anthropologie à Bruxelles - Brussels Anthropology) taking place twice a month, and the Cycle de conférences en anthropologie, hosting five or six scholarly communications along the year.

- In terms of collaboration between the FSI and university (max. 500 words)

This position will be beneficial in enhancing the network linking not only ULB and RMCA, but also the three major Central African universities with which the two Belgian institutions have developed important partnerships for years (UNILU, UNIKIN, UNIKIS, U. of Bujumbura; see Section 3.7). The long-standing relation of both the RMCA and the ULB with the Museum of Lubumbashi would also benefit from this new perspective of collaboration, more specifically in terms of an exhibition project that could at some point travel to Congo.

The RMCA and its collections represent an important and symbolic place to arouse meetings and research. In his/her activities, the new researcher will automatically contribute to the promotion of the museum as a place of choice for ULB students in African studies, which is very important to arouse vocations in a period where the interest for research in Africa seems waning.

AHA (Atelier d’Hybridations Anthropologiques) is a lively research group hosted by the LAMC. It is made up of young researchers who aim to promote visual anthropology and other non-classical media in relation to the discipline. It is quite vibrant and deserves its very name, for hybridisation is a commitment: AHA connects anthropologists, artists, and film-makers. The exploratory dimension of AHA could certainly be of interest for the museum in its search of new interfaces with the public. For example, one of the founders of AHA, Mikaëla Le Meur, has set up an exhibition based on her doctoral research about the uses (and abuses) of plastics in Vietnam, an exhibition that has been recently awarded a prize.
Under the impulsion of the new researcher, an international conference will be jointly organized by the RMCA and the ULB after 2 years of the project. This will be a major event gathering specialists in the anthropology of diaspora and food from around the world, with comparative purposes. Of course, contributions from other disciplines like linguistics and history (among others) will be most welcome.
a. In the FSI (max 1000 words)

Even though the anthropology of diaspora and food is a new domain that the RMCA wants to develop, the researchers affiliated to the Museum (with their names underscored hereunder) have already published extensively on either diaspora or food:


Within the “Culture & Society” Research Unit, anthropological research on diaspora is carried out by two researchers: Bambi Ceuppens and Cristiana Panella (see Section 3.6). They will provide a most useful support for the new researcher in developing the brand new topic.
Outside the field of anthropology, “Words and Plants”: Comparative study of the vocabulary of food crops in Central and Southern Africa (€200,000, January 2003 – December 2006) was a Bel spo-funded multi-annual research project, with Claire Grégoire and then Jacky Maniacky as promotor. This project has initiated an interest and an expertise in linguistics in relation to food culture in Central Africa. The “Culture & Society” Research Unit has a long experience in fieldwork in sub-Saharan African and a good network of collaboration with Universities in Rwanda, Burundi and DRC (Kinshasa, Kisangani, Lubumbashi).

As far as museology is concerned, the RMCA takes part in a series of EU-funded projects that were aimed at rethinking the role of Museums of Ethnography and World Cultures within contemporary European societies, how they can function as places that foster a greater sense of belonging for diasporic and post-migrant communities without their continued “othering” or alienation. The current project of this series is TAKING CARE: Ethnographic and World Cultures Museums as Spaces of Care (€2,000,000; October 2019 - September 2023), led by the Weltmuseum Wien, with Jacky Maniacky (himself member of the Central African diaspora) as the RMCA leader. This project is framed around the notion of care, and explores under-tapped potential of Ethnographic and World Culture Museums, for thinking critically about planetary pasts and about sustainable, convivial futures. These museums should no longer be conceived primarily as repositories of heritage to be preserved. They are places of encounter and practice, of social experimentations and innovation, of knowledges and skills, where diverse ways of knowing and being in and with the world, and narratives of diversity can be (re)discovered, co-created and publicly shared.

Relations between the Museum and the African diaspora are a main concern since more than 15 years now. The COMRAF, a consultative committee RMCA – African Associations in Belgium, has been set up in 2004 in this sense. A room of the new permanent exhibition has been dedicated to African diaspora in Belgium (see 3.6).

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**Section 3.7 Past record & current activities of the FSI & the University in the scientific domain**

**b. In the University (max 1000 words)**

The list has been limited to publications of current members of the LAMC (underscored hereunder) related to the anthropology of diasporas or of food. Two publications falling outside the area of Central Africa and its diaspora have been included for their thematic relevance.


Many PhD dissertations at LAMC have been devoted to migration and diaspora: M. Maskens, Cheminer avec Dieu – Pentecôtisme et migration à Bruxelles (2010); C. Furtado, Les migrations de l’Afrique occidentale au Cap-Vert : attitudes et représentations (2012); C. Grégoire, Faire avancer la communauté. Diasporas africaines et associationnisme panafricain en Belgique (2013). The last PhD was part of a larger project funded by an ARC-project, “The outsiders in Europe: The foreigner and the ‘other’ in the process of changing rules and identities” (€750,000, 2007-2012), for which P. Petit was co-promoter.

Other related theses are in process: I. Wilhelm, Les migrants entre ici et là-bas. Etude des relations entre les migrants et leur pays d’origine, à travers le cas des migrants lao impliqués dans le développement du Laos; M. Marcus, Nem África, nem Europa, mas Cabo-Verde - ni Afrique, ni Europe, mais Cap-Vert. All these theses have been/are under the tutorship of Pierre Petit. There are presently two new PhD researchers recruited for an ARC-project called Contextual mobility in Europe-Southeast Asia social spaces: Belgian-Vietnamese and Belgian-Laotian couples in focus, a project under the direction of Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot (€217,000, 2018-2022). All these research projects are devoted to diasporas, creating an intellectual environment that will be most favourable to the proposed project.

As for research related to the anthropology of food, the references of Petit (2004) and Istasse (2015) are monographs of long-term relevance that will help the holder of the position in his work plan. Petit (2004) is the result of a research project conducted in the frame of the Observatory of Urban Change at the University of Lubumbashi (a CUD-cooperation project promoted on the Belgian side by P. Petit, 2000-2008, €750,636). The book includes many contributions about the current evolutions of food practices and representations in Lubumbashi. They were written by twenty contributors, some of which are still active in the university and would certainly appreciate being involved in the present research.

It should be noted that LAMC has a long-standing relation with the universities of Lubumbashi (UNILU), of Kinshasa (UNIKIN) and of Bujumbura. Maïté Maskens is presently involved as co-promoter in a project funded by the Académie de recherche et d’Enseignement supérieur (ARES,
€490,000) to create a Master in Socio-Anthropology at the University of Bujumbura. Connections with the members of the three universities are regular and frequent, and LAMC has hosted several scholars of these three institutions in the last few years.

This book by Istasse (2015) in Cambodia is an output of a larger project, “Annâdya – Promoting appropriate technology for smallholders to increase food security among indigenous peoples in Cambodia and Lao PDR”, a project financed mostly by the EU (EuropeAid), for which Pierre Petit was the scientific director (€3,600,000, February 2012-January 2015). This has been an important step to familiarise with food issues in another non-Western country context.

As for outreach activities – which are an important component of any scientific activity, in our view – P. Petit made the opening plenary lecture for the Belgian Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (AFSCA-FAVV) during the Awareness Days “Alimentation et interculturalité” (Namur, September 2014, and Brussels, October 2014) – in a context where the federal agency allowed the commercialisation of ten alimentary insects, some of which were popular in the African diaspora.

Although museum activities are not the core business of LAMC, we have been involved as co-promoter in an innovative project hosted by the Museum of Lubumbashi, “Images, objets, paroles. Mémoires de Lubumbashi”, together with the Museum, the UNILU, the RMCA, the University Laval, and the SEPHIS (Netherlands), in 2000 and 2001 (see above, Sizaire 2001). The experience of the first exhibition on everyday life objects has been profitable to think about the way to use basic artefacts related to food in an exhibition about memory and intimacy. P. Petit has also co-authored an article about the RMCA’s renovation, published in a major journal (Sullivan, Elaine, Tristan Mertens, Pierre Petit & Kevin Conru, “AfricaMuseum reopening Tervuren, Belgium”, African Arts 53(2), pp. 82-94, 2020).

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Section 3.8 If relevant: existing collaboration between the FSI and the university (facultative)

ULB has an old tradition of research in Africa, conducted for decades in collaboration with the RMCA which shares this tradition and which is fully dedicated to African studies. This is greatly facilitated by the geographical proximity of the two institutions. The creation of the Multidisciplinary Research Network on Africa at the ULB (Afric@ulb) has recently reinvigorated this commitment for African studies. In the field of humanities, the disciplines that are most concerned by these institutional links are archaeology, linguistics, history, art history, and anthropology.

Recently, RMCA and ULB have been partners in ERC projects (“KongoKing”; “Crossroads of Empires”, and “Banturivers”) and in one FED-Twin project (“HisTech”). There are already teaching conventions linking some researchers from RMCA with ULB (L. André, A. Smith, R. Jadinon, J. Volper); while academics from ULB are or have been involved in the management boards or commissions of the RMCA (P. de Maret for the Scientific Board; O. Gosselain for the Recruitment and Promotion Board). In anthropology, the two institutions were involved in the exhibition project “Images, objets, paroles. Mémoires de Lubumbashi” mentioned in the preceding section. An international conference “Norms in the margins and margins of the Norm. The social construction of illegality” (October 2012), which met an international success, was organized by a steering committee mostly based in the RMCA and the ULB.

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**Section 3.9 Concrete expected workplan for the 2 first years of the FED-tWIN researcher activity (max. 1.000 words)**

The position is a long-term one, and anthropological methods are time-consuming for anthropologists create their own corpus through face-to-face interactions and observations. The six issues reported in Section 3.5. can hence not all be addressed in the first two years of the contract. They should be sequenced, even if the researcher will keep them all in mind, and possibly elaborate preliminary enquiries for some of them in the early phase.

The second of the six topics, “how food plays a role in the social construction of everyday life in the diaspora” will occupy the foreground of the programme during the first two years. The reason is that this dimension is the most important one to give a global overview on the living conditions, the familial setting, and the social relations of the Central African diaspora, which is the fundamental objective of the research.

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<td>Study of eating practices in the diaspora</td>
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Detailed workplan:

(a) The first four months should be devoted to making a state of the art on the literature about the Central African diaspora in Belgium, and about the anthropology of food. This period will also be used to acquaint with the RMCA and the ULB (and other relevant Belgian institutions), meeting the researchers who share an interest in the fields of migration, food studies, or nutrition in Africa.

This initial period should also be devoted to making contact with members of the diaspora. The researcher will do so using personal networks, those of colleagues, and through participation to various events. At this stage, the idea is simply to become familiar with people, recruited preferably beyond established associations, to avoid institutional bias. The researcher will diversify his/her contacts, based on national/regional origins; social class, age, and gender; and residence in Belgium (Brussels, Antwerp, and Liège being potential research locations). Casual discussions could be helpful to rephrase more adequately some of the research questions listed in Section 3.5, and to improve self-confidence with the human environment of the research.
(b) Still in this initial phase, the researcher should make a preliminary research stay in Central Africa (months 5-6). A priori, Congo is the most suitable place for a first mission, given its importance in the demographic constitution of the diaspora. The specific destination will be decided based on what seems most suitable according to the preliminary contacts in Belgium, and on the political situation of the moment – which is quite unpredictable in the three countries. It will also be decided in close collaboration with the African partners in the local universities. A certain volume of research will be ensured even in the event of a pandemic crisis preventing international travel.

The aim of this stay is similar to what has been done in Belgium: to become acquainted with the basic realities of food in the home countries of the diaspora. The research of Petit (2004) (see Section 3.7) will be helpful to figure out relevant issues related to food in the urban African context, and could be used, in Lubumbashi at least, for comparison with the situation two decades later. This initial trip in the home country of the informants will be instrumental, when back in Belgium, for engaging in conversations based on a shared experience of food.

(c) One month (month 7) will be needed for classifying and indexing the data, back in Belgium, and for completing the information collected in Africa with new visits/interviews in Belgium.

(d) The next phase of research (months 8-15 and 19-20) should be directed to the study of eating practices in the diaspora. Based on the contacts established during the earlier phases (months 3-4), and with a commitment to diversify the sample, interviews and observations should be conducted with 20 to 30 families to allow analysing the dynamics of food in the household. Who shops, who cooks, who eat with whom? What kinds of products are used, and in which circumstances? How is defined a “good meal”? What are the moralities associated with food? The observation should concern not only everyday meals, but also exceptional circumstances where food intake is central, like going to the restaurant, receiving a guest, celebrating a wedding or a rite de passage. How are such practices revealing of gender and age relations, and how can they uncover structures of power in the household? How are they used as a resource by the actors, who exert through them their agency – for example, to show independence, to remind of hierarchies, to display their wealth or their modernity, etc.?

(e) Eleven months (months 14-24) will be dedicated to the valorisation of the research, in the form of two articles for major journals and to the preparation of an international conference devoted to the topic of food, family and agency in African diasporas.

(f) The last two months (months 23-24) will be devoted to the concrete organisation of the international conference. Afterwards, contacts should be taken to edit a collective book, or a special issue in a specialised journal.