While it was Spike Lee who made sneakers inextricably bound up with pop culture in his 1989 film “Do the Right Thing”, the emergence of sneakers as the footwear of the cool kids would already happen in the early 60’s. The rubber basket shoes, Converse’s All Stars and Bata’s Super Bullets, became as legendary as the people who wore them.

The BATA shoe factory, established in 1894 by the Czech entrepreneur Tomas Bata, grew quickly to become the world’s biggest shoe company. The severe division of the world after the second world war into first and second however, meant the division of the company as well. The Eastern branch was nationalised; The Western branch moved its headquarters to Toronto. While the first focus was completely on the production of shoes for within the Soviet Union, the latter quickly reached towards new international markets, with two new factories being built per year at its height. One of these new factories, BATA 300, was built in 1962 in the newly independent nation of Congo.1 The production of rubber tennis and basketball shoes in Kinshasa seems to suggest that the company wanted to open up a new consumer market for their products in Africa as well.

The Belgian contractor and family business Blaton-Aubert, who developed a ground-breaking prestressing system for concrete in the early 1940’s with the Ghent based professor Gustave Magnel, was active since early 1950’s in the Belgian Congo with the subsidiary company Compagnie Congolaise de Constructions (CCC). With the end of Belgian reign in 1960 however, the Blatons had to find a way to reposition themselves on the newly independent Congolese market. The company actively searched for new opportunities, along with the fabrication of flange girders. The Blaton-Magnel prestressing system gave the company serious credibility as one of the founding fathers of the building technique. A pioneering application of prestressed concrete in a building was the Blaton-Magnel prestressed concrete factory for the Multinationel Bata shoe company. The opportunity and gave everything to win the important contract to build the new factory for the multinational shoe company. The experience with prestressed concrete they had gained in Belgium was used as the main argument in their promotional material (Brussel: aan, Fonds Blaton).

The development of the Blaton-Magnel prestressing system gave the company serious credibility as one of the founding fathers of the building technique. A pioneering application of prestressed concrete in a building was the Blaton-Magnel prestressed concrete factory for the Multinationel Bata shoe company. The opportunity and gave everything to win the important contract to build the new factory for the multinational shoe company. The experience with prestressed concrete they had gained in Belgium was used as the main argument in their promotional material (Brussel: aan, Fonds Blaton).

The development of the Blaton-Magnel prestressing system gave the company serious credibility as one of the founding fathers of the building technique. A pioneering application of prestressed concrete in a building was the Blaton-Magnel prestressed concrete factory for the Multinationel Bata shoe company. The opportunity and gave everything to win the important contract to build the new factory for the multinational shoe company. The experience with prestressed concrete they had gained in Belgium was used as the main argument in their promotional material (Brussel: aan, Fonds Blaton).

Magnel mentioned the UCO-factory in his Magna Opus ‘Le Béton Précontrainte’ as the “most important work executed as an application of prestressed concrete in a building” (Magnel, 1953, p.278). With the end of Belgian reign in 1960 however, the Blatons had to find a way to reposition themselves on the newly independent Congolese market. The company actively searched for new opportunities, along with the fabrication of flange girders. The Blaton-Magnel prestressing system gave the company serious credibility as one of the founding fathers of the building technique. A pioneering application of prestressed concrete in a building was the Blaton-Magnel prestressed concrete factory for the Multinationel Bata shoe company. The opportunity and gave everything to win the important contract to build the new factory for the multinational shoe company. The experience with prestressed concrete they had gained in Belgium was used as the main argument in their promotional material (Brussel: aan, Fonds Blaton).

The case of the Bata 300–factory in Kinshasa allows us to reassess Congo’s architectural history by shifting our view from the obsession with style and form to a more inclusive perspective with attention for transnational flows of ideas, models and practices. By focusing mainly on the figure of the architect, architectural history research on 20th century Congo is in tune with the emerging scholarship that views construction history as an application of pre-stressed concrete in a building. This PhD-research is conducted as part of the FWO-project ‘Tout le Congo est un chantier’. Re-assessing Congo’s architectural history from 1918 till 1975 through a construction history approach, supervisors: Johan Lagae (UGent), Luc Taerwe (UGent), Rika Devos (ULB) en Jacob Sabakinu Kivilu (Unikin).