Anticolonial imaginaries in the 'failed state': epistemic violence and the representation of the Congo in cultural discourse

Hana Lisa Sandhu

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

2021

Centre for Cultural, Literary
and Postcolonial Studies (CCLPS)
SOAS, University of London

Abstract

This research critiques the contemporary representation of the Congo as a 'failed' or 'invisible' state and argues that this discourse continues in the tradition of epistemic violence fundamental to European colonial history in the Congo and Africa more generally. The idea of the 'failed state' crucially silences histories of anticolonial struggle as well as neo-colonial sabotage of Congolese independence through the creation of a (post)colonial state steadfastly inhered within the systems of economic and political control established through Belgian colonization.

By erasing this history of neo-coloniality and foreign interference, we have witnessed the re-inscription of imperialist discourses of primordialism, chaos and violence as the permanent condition of the Congo across different forms of cultural discourse such as the media, travel literature and cinema in the post-independence period. In this reading, the 'failure' of the Congo is not seen as something constructed through the politics of neo-coloniality and the extractive logic of global capitalism but rather as the inevitable fate of the African body politic in the contemporary world order.

At this point of epistemic erasure therefore, my thesis draws on a range of texts (literary, visual, archival) that constitute resistant and alternative forms of knowledge production to the dominant mode of discourse. In this way, I construct an alternative archive of the so-called 'failed state' demonstrating the continuous history of resistance and struggle against the material extractions and epistemic erasures of colonialism and global capital in the Congo. Approaching the discourse of the 'failed state' as an ideological site of power and knowledge production, I critically examine contemporary Congolese fiction, Patrice Lumumba's speeches, performance art and visual artefacts that rewrite the 'failed state' and produce alternative imaginaries and anticolonial visions of the Congo in the political present.

Contents

Acknowledgements

My deepest and most heartfelt thanks firstly go to my supervisor, Francesca Orsini, for her guidance and unflagging support. It has been the great privilege of this research to learn from someone as intellectually stimulating, generous and caring as she. I want to thank her for taking me under her wing at a particularly challenging moment in this thesis, for welcoming me into a vibrant and supportive community of fellow scholars and for all the care and support she has given me over the last 4 years.

I would also like to thank SOAS University for the Research Studentship which allowed me to pursue this research in the first place, without their generous support this thesis would not have been possible. Francesca's weekly PhD zooms with fellow postgraduate students Jack Clift, Maryam Sikander, Xiaoke Ren, Sumaira Nawaz, Kanupriya Dhingra, Raahi Adhya and Ayse Kara were a great source of intellectual sustenance and friendship during the write up of this thesis. I would like to thank everyone in the group for all their thoughtful comments and feedback. To Carol John, Robbie Campbell and Sadiq Habib at the Postgraduate Neurodiversity Group thank you for your care and friendship. Sara Marzagora has been an unceasing pillar of support and her warmth, vivacity and friendship a constant light. Rakesh, thanks for being my PhD travelling companion and for all the political chats and cinema trips. To my Fernwood family: Ciaran, Cord, Fi, Liv and Strang, thank you for all the love, friendship and laughter - moving in with you guys has been the unexpected silver lining to this crazy year! Thank you to Eithne for all the friendship, love and support she has given me over the years. To Lauren, your brilliance, wisdom and friendship are a treasure and words cannot express how much having you in my corner means to me, no matter how far away you are!

To all my family, Dal, Kay and Shanti thank you for all your love and care. Thanks to Nick for his support and all those much-needed coffee breaks and wanders around Bloomsbury. Thanks to my grandparents, Maureen and Inderjit, for everything they have given me over the years. Grandad - my decision to write about Patrice Lumumba surely stems from all our long conversations about radical history and politics growing up. To my brother Paul, and my sister Carla, thank you for all the love and support and knowing exactly when a game of Age of Empires was necessary! Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents Angie and Malcolm, for everything they have done for me, with my deepest love and gratitude.

Introduction

The imagination of the Congo, this thesis argues, is bounded in a Western teleology of epistemic violence that goes from the colonial period right to contemporary discourses on the Congolese state's teetering collapse and existential 'failure'. Early colonial representations of native 'savagery' and modernist discourses of dependency and Western 'development' have been succeeded by declarations that the Congo no longer 'exists' (Mills, 2013)[1]. In 2009, the political scientists Jeffrey Herbst and Greg Mills, based in the US and South Africa respectively, published their Fukuyama-inspired pronouncement that 'there is no Congo' in the global current affairs magazine *Foreign Policy* (Mills, 2009).

The publication of such axiomatic declarations demonstrates that the Congo continues to figure as a particularly fraught 'imaginative geography' (Said, [1993] 2012) signifying still an all-encompassing mythology of 'darkness'. Nicholas Mirzoeff argues that 'in the cultural geography of imperialism […] the Congo occupied a specific and important place as the degree zero of the 'primitive' world envisaged by imperialism' (Mirzoeff, 1998: 170). Trapped between the advocacy of positivist doctrines of Western-style 'development' and the epistemic erasures of those scholars who renounce entirely the Congo's existence, the Congo constitutes a space of terror, 'failure' and violence in the global imaginary. Thus, when it comes to depictions of the Congo, we can trace an extreme politics of representation that emanates from its status as the 'degree zero' (170) of civilisation. Such colonial representations reverberate today in the characterisation of the Congo as a 'failed state', revealing an overarching coloniality[2] linking early colonial representations of native 'savagery' to contemporary narratives of the 'failed' Congolese state.

---

[1] In their op-ed piece for the global current affairs magazine *Foreign Policy,* Jeffrey Herbst and Greg Mills argue that 'the only way to help Congo is to stop pretending it exists'. According to the authors, the Congo's 'intractability' is linked to the size of the territory, its high number of natural resources and its bordering with other 'weak' states. They go on to argue that 'Congo has none of the things that make a nation-state: interconnectedness, a government that is able to exert authority consistently in territory beyond the capital, a shared culture that promotes national unity, or a common language. Instead Congo has become a collection of peoples, groups, interests, and pillagers who coexist at best' (Mills, 2013).

[2] For the purposes of this thesis, I find Maldonado-Torres' definition of coloniality most useful: 'coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such a nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administration'(Maldonado-Torres, 2007: 243).

There is no denying the fascistic overtones of Herbst and Mills' declaration that the Congo no longer exists. A narrative which, furthermore, recalls Aimé Césaire's argument that the roots of fascist ideology inhere within the logic of colonialism (Césaire, [1950] 2018). In their op-ed piece, Herbst and Mills go on to defend their assertion as simple pragmatism:

> all of the peacekeeping missions, special envoys, interagency processes, and diplomatic initiatives that are predicated on the Congo myth – the notion that one sovereign power is present in this vast country – are doomed to fail. It is time to stop pretending otherwise (Mills, 2009).

According to Herbst and Mills, the best thing to do in regard to the crisis in the Congo is 'to pretend it does not exist' (Mills, 2013). The 'squandered' efforts of aid and development further justify the direct and immediate political disavowal of the Congo from any form of international political consciousness or recognition. It should not go unremarked that this proposed political disavowal occurs simultaneously with the entrapment of the Congo in unending cycles of resource appropriation and extraction under the logic of late capitalism (Renton et al., 2007). The growth of capitalism's extractive technologies and the erasure of the Congo as a sovereign nation state emphasises the power of global capital over the political sovereignty of the African nation-state. The argument that the Congo no longer exists represents the apex, or, perhaps, the inevitable termination of Western colonial epistemology whereby, the perceived 'failure' of the Congo, to replicate the normative Western ideals of political sovereignty and statehood, necessitates its erasure from the dominant order of international sovereign states.

In contemporary political discourse on the Congo, the ideas of the 'failed state', 'tribal conflict', 'strongman' – or, what Arjun Appadurai has labelled the 'Bosnia fallacy' (Appadurai, 2010: 21) – have become the new idiom of media and political discourse that carries the status of scientific and rational analysis whilst recycling racist and imperialist tropes.[3] Representations of Congo under colonial rule and contemporary depictions circulate the same Conradian tropes of 'irrationality', 'atavism', and 'savagery' through a new, but equally problematic, lexicon of 'ethnic conflict', 'tribalism' and ancient grievances. The fall of dictator Mobutu Sese Seko in 1997 registered a shift from the narrative of the Kurtzian African tyrant to a nation submerged into crisis and political failure. The epistemic violence and racism of Conradian discourse continues through the

[3] For Appadurai, this discourse represents an almost wilful misreading of conflict along the lines of 'emergent nationalisms' based on ancient ethnic grievances (Appadurai, 2010: 21).

representation of 'tribal conflicts', 'warlords' and gender oppression as the singular reality of society and culture in the Congo. For example, in 2000, the journalist Ian Fisher described the situation in the Congo as 'a tribal conflict […] fought mostly with machetes and barbed arrows' (Fisher, 2000). In Fisher's article, the war in the Congo is represented as a bloody and violent fratricide with ancient weapons where the collapse of state authority has given way to chaos and pre-modern 'barbarity'. This neoimperial discourse or, what Rob Nixon has termed 'Conradian atavism' (Nixon, 1991), is thus achieved through depicting the Congo during the post-Mobutu period as an interminable nightmare due to the inherently 'tribal' nature of the First and Second Congo Wars (1996-7, 1998-2003).

These contemporary tropes of the 'failed state' re-encode imperialist language and imagery. In response, the Kenyan journalist Patrick Gathara satirises the representation of the 'failed state' as an exclusively African phenomenon in a viral Twitter thread posted on the eve of the 2020 US election (Gathara, 2020). Gathara utilises a specific language and terminology that is seen only in media reports on African conflicts and political upheavals. Indeed, he reformulates the following exchange between Boris Johnson and Joe Biden:

> following intense pressure from the AU, British strongman Boris Johnson calls US president-elect, Joe Biden, with an offer to send troops under the rubric of 'Western solutions for Western problems' to help secure its troubled former colony's transition to democracy (Gathara, 2020).

Not only do we see a Western leader referred to as a 'strongman', Gathara also takes a satirical swipe at the self-perception of the US as the leader of the free, democratic world. In this way, Gathara assumes an attitude of colonial paternalism to the world's dominant superpower which he characterises as a 'troubled former colony'(Gathara, 2020).

Neoimperial modes of representation have increased considerably following the fall of Zaïre in 1997, the beginning of the Congo Wars (1996-7, 1998-2003) and the current period of national and regional political instability. Indeed, Slavoj Žižek is unequivocal about this current state of affairs, arguing that 'Congo today has effectively re-emerged as a Conradean zone no one dares confront it head on' (Žižek, 2010: 162). As I argue in my first chapter, the representation of the Congo as returning to Conrad's original vision in *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad, [1899] 1991) has proven extremely attractive to a number of artists working in the Congo such as the Irish photographer Richard Mosse (Ch. 1) and the Dutch artist Renzo Martens (Ch. 4). Within this new discourse, we have witnessed a return to the erstwhile imagery of African primordialism in which the continent is cast

once again into the role of 'other', 'primeval' and 'pre-modern' counterpart of Western modernity.[4]

Conceptual and methodological framework

I begin this introduction investigating the notion of the Congo as a 'failed state' and drawing connections between early colonial history and contemporary edicts of failed state theory that point to the overarching coloniality of these discourses. From there, I move on to a discussion of epistemic violence and erasure through the reproduction of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in contemporary representations of the Congo. Lastly, I contrast the consistent knowledge production of Conrad and the Congo to the critical muting of Lumumba and the anticolonial struggle in mainstream discourse and the potential for anticolonial rewritings of the 'failed state' in the political present.

Origins of the 'failed state'

The idea of the 'failed state' appears for the first time in International Relations theory towards the end of the Cold War producing a wide, interdisciplinary body of scholarship offering multiple definition and interpretations of the 'failed state' (Bilgin and Morton, 2002; Call, 2008). The idea of the 'failed state', as Pinar Bilgin and Adam David Morton argue, is linked to specific Cold War contexts of knowledge production specifically the professionalisation of social sciences in the wake of WWII and the use of American government funding for associations and organisations dedicated to the study of the 'Third World' (Bilgin and Morton, 2002, 58). The roots of post-war histories of knowledge production on the 'Third World' can be seen today in the categorisation of African countries as either 'strong' or 'weak' states. Such categorisations as a mode of knowledge production, I argue, overlook histories of empire and the role of imperialism in determining such social and political realities.

Between the end of the Cold War and the start of the 'Global War on Terror', references to 'failed', 'weak', and 'rogue' states increase exponentially within both scholarly and mainstream political discourse. This discourse rises particularly in the context of the

[4] More recently, we have seen this discourse play out in the political arena with French President Emmanuel Macron who, in his 2017 speech at the University of Ouagadougou, declared a fundamental break with past French-African relations whilst, at the same time, defending both continued French military presence in the Sahel region and the CFA franc as an economically stabilising policy as opposed to a form of neo-colonial economic control ("Macron," 2017). In a similar fashion, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair argued in 2020 that post-Brexit Britain must look to Africa in order to remain a powerful and competitive nation on the world stage (Beaumont, n.d.).

'Global War on Terror', a political doctrine that revived orientalist dogmas of civilisation and barbarism in the run up to the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. The end of the Cold War, therefore, did not result in a corresponding termination of Western interference in African politics, but rather, continued unabated through the 'War on Terror'. Acts of military aggression, removals of African leaders, extraordinary rendition, covert intelligence operations, drone targeted killings all characterised the 'War on Terror' in African countries (see Schmidt, 2018; Usiskin, 2019; Kieh and Kalu, 2012).

Within the 'War on Terror' discourse, countries such as Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan represent sites of pre-modernity; tribal and unruly and, therefore, primed to submit to the 'superior' political order of the West. The representation of Western states as successful modes of political statehood and democracy compared to African states produces what Derek Gregory has described as an 'abstract and de-corporealized' (Gregory, 2010: 53). This imperial language is notably similar to the discursive strategies employed by Leopold II in his colonisation of the Congo. His act of imperial conquest was also framed as an act of 'liberation' of the Congolese from the control of Arab slave traders (Chatelet, 1988). Despite these different historical contexts, what these narratives of Western 'liberation' share is a Eurocentric and racialised foundation of modernity, civilisation, and liberal values as the exclusive cultural products of the West.[5] This kind of language is evident in the Fragile States Index.[6] Commissioned by the American non-profit Fund for Peace, and the American global news publication *Foreign Policy* since 2005 (Call, 2008), the Fragile States Index is a global index that scores individual states according to different criteria such as 'economic decline' and 'state legitimacy'. This classification of fragile states into a global index, as simply an exercise of political utility, conceals the ideological nature of this discourse within liberal and neo-conservative political thought as well as the devastating social and economic impact of neoimperial Western military aggression in Africa and the Middle East.

Looking at this index, what is immediately clear is the dominance of African states within the categories of 'failed' and 'fragile'. Indeed, countries such as Yemen, Somalia and South Sudan are categorised as 'very high alert' ("Fragile States Index | The Fund for Peace," n.d.). The idea of the failed state, as a specific malady of Africa, chimes with the work of

[5] As Derek Gregory argues, the effect of the 'War on Terror' resurrected traditional binaries of East and West, framing Iraq and Afghanistan as pre-modern states of feudal barbarity and, the West, by comparison, as modern and liberal states so that actions of military aggression flew under the banners of freedom and liberation.

[6] Formerly known as the Failed States Index until 2014. The change in name was initiated after critics took exception to the unnuanced finality indicated by the term 'failed state'("Fragile States Index | The Fund for Peace," n.d.).

many other Western scholars who have employed the notion to argue that it is the 'native' character of the African body politic. Such an attitude is exemplified by the leader article in *The Economist* which, in 2000, asked its readers: 'Does Africa have some inherent character flaw that keeps it backward and incapable of development?' ('The Heart of the Matter', *The Economist* cited in Renton, Seddon & Zelig: 207). This new system of classification and political discourse clearly posits European and North American states as 'successful' models against the inadequacies and 'failures' of states in the Global South. Indeed, what is regarded as the failure of non-European states to adopt Western style political norms becomes the main source of threat for so-called European Enlightenment values.[7]

In accordance with such 'values', the 2020 classification of the Congo as number 5 out of 178 states ("Country Dashboard | Fragile States Index," n.d.) is presented as common sense and scientific knowledge by journalists, scholars, and political scientists. In turn, gliding over the history of anti-communist authoritarianism and neocolonialism in the Congo and Africa more widely, backed by the West and the subsequent enforcement of economic liberalisation. It also obscures the central role structural adjustment policies on African states have played in creating 'weak' or 'failed' states (Ferguson, 2006; Harrison, 2010).

Despite the characterisation of the failed state discourse as a framework that serves a purely empirical function, its utilisation by scholars to demand anything from military action to political withdrawal, demonstrates its inherent conceptual and political malleability in times of Western neoimperialism. Where Robert Rotberg (2003) sees the proliferation of 'failed states' as reason for withdrawal and international isolationism, Sebastian Mallaby (2002) regards it as a legitimate pretext for a clear and unequivocal embrace of American imperialism. Thus, the concept of the 'failed state' can be harnessed to both protectionism and hawkish interventionism, though both authors share the same investment in the idea of the state as the foundation of European modernity.

[7] Indeed, the racialised logic and notion of foreign 'invasion' is abundantly clear in texts such as Martin Amis's *The Second Plane* (2008) and Michel Houellebecq's *Soumission* (2015). In Amis's text, the West faces a new enemy different from the 'modernist' experiment of the USSR to 'militant fundamentalism' that remains 'convulsed in a late-medieval phase of its evolution' (Amis, 2008). This characterisation of Islam as a threat to the civilisational values and 'great chain of being' is mirrored in Houellebecq's speculative fiction where he imagines a less apocalyptical but nevertheless comprehensive 'surrender' to political and cultural 'Islamification'.

For Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, however, this idea that the order of nation-states has been imperilled by regional and local divisions of relatively 'new' nation states obscures:

> the long-term consequence of the Berlin consensus [that] the African people found themselves enclosed in territorial boundaries that were decided in Europe. Their political attempts to exercise their political agency, therefore, had to be performed within the "iron cages" of the colonial boundaries (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013: 339).

What critics of the 'failed state' share is a distrust of the imperialist origins within the Western conception of the state; whereas those who find political utility in the concept such as Rotberg (2003), generally, accord virtue and romance to the Westphalian idea of the state, as the sum total of European knowledge and civilisation. Indeed, this construction of the 'failed state' represents the latest permutation of a process in which,

> non-European areas have been systematically organized into, and transformed according to, European constructs. Representations of Asia, Africa and Latin America as Third World and underdeveloped are the heirs of an illustrious genealogy (Escobar, 1995: 7).

As the 'heirs of an illustrious genealogy' therefore, this transformation surely promised success. However, as Gurminder Bhambra discussed in her talk 'A Postcolonial Rethinking of the State and Nation'(2018), a crucial part missing from the history of this genealogy of the nation-state is its origins in global imperialism and empire. Bhambra argues that the standard genealogy of the state and sovereignty crucially omits the imperial foundations of the nation state. Therefore, if we reframe the genealogy of the state not as a 'pure' concept of political analysis but, rather, as an imperial formation, then newly formed decolonised were doomed to failure by their 'lack of empire'. Similarly, Mbembe subverts traditional genealogies of the state in colonial and postcolonial history, asserting instead that we are living in the times of the 'postcolony'(Mbembe, 2015). In the time of the 'postcolony' the material and ideological forces of colonialism continue to determine Africa's political reality. In this sense, Mbembe's theory intersects with the idea of coloniality and decoloniality wherein the formal dismantlement of the colonial system has not, in fact, put an end to its phenomenal and material value in contemporary culture.

This thesis looks beyond the question of the 'failed state' as solely a debate between differing definitions and interpretations to instead 'think together' the history of the 'failed state' notion and imagery alongside the anticolonial imaginary of Patrice Lumumba's prophetic discourse in the bloody aftermath of Congolese independence. The

tension that arises between the utopic mode of Lumumba's prophetic discourse of a future, free Congo and the realities of the 'failed state' constitutes what David Scott has identified as a 'problem-space' (Scott, 2004: 2). In *Conscripts of Modernity*, Scott describes the 'problem-space' as a condition in which 'the old languages of moral-political vision and hope are no longer in sync with the world they were meant to describe and normatively criticize' (Scott, 2004: 2). The marked transformation from Lumumba's prophecy that 'the future of the Congo is beautiful', (Lumumba, [1960] 2009) and the celebration of Congolese independence as a beacon of hope to anticolonial liberation movements across the world, to today's prescriptions of failure and epistemic erasure underline the 'problem-space' of the anticolonial imaginary and the material and epistemic violence of coloniality in the present.

Taking Jennifer Wenzel and Sara Salem's methodology as a cue to approach the anticolonial imaginary of Lumumba and Congolese independence as vital to the critique of dominant narratives that assert Congo's primordial darkness and failure to escape this reality. Reaching for a method of analysis beyond that of 'failure', Wenzel examines the 'afterlives' of anticolonial millenarian movements in Southern Africa and the 'uses to which these movements are put after their spectacular, seeming failures' (Wenzel, 2010: 2). Wenzel challenges the dominant narrative of 'failure' when it comes to African postcolonial history. Similarly, Sara Salem uses the idea of 'afterlives' to connect the different temporalities of the 1956 and 2011 Egyptian Revolutions into a single interlocking history (Salem, 2020: 2).

Therefore, I examine, in an alternative sense, the cultural sinews, afterlives and hauntings of Lumumba and the anticolonial imaginary in the epoch of the so-called 'failed state' through the work of Congolese artists Sammy Baloji, Sony Labou Tansi and Pitcho Womba Konga. In her translation of Césaire's *A Season in the Congo,* Gayatri Spivak writes of a continuing 'haunting' linking generations of postcolonial subjects:

> Césaire haunted me, as he was in turn haunted by Lumumba. Effacing my generation's disappointments, translating him with care I understood in my nerve-endings that generations of postcolonials wanted to undo the flimsy European gift of nation-identification and create a real force in the world, where a new kind of regionalism would undo cultural essentialisms. It did not succeed. But, speaking again and again, Lumumba's dying speech in Act III, Scene 6 – not veridical but true – where death appears as a promise to be in the land, and death's bloody foam as the sense of some coming dawn, I sense in my nerves that failure was not final (Spivak cited in Césaire, 2020: vii).

Spivak's reading of haunting and failure through the figure of Lumumba, as a lyrical repository for the anguish of postcolonial subjects, presents a very different account of failure to that of Herbst and Mills' argument that the Congo 'no longer exists' (Mills, 2009). Rather, Lumumba's haunting and the affective power of the anticolonial canon channels Fred Moten's poignant characterisation of global Black freedom struggles constituting a 'serrated lyricism' (Moten, 2003: 131). Rejecting a Eurocentric conception of history as linear development, Moten links the different histories, geographies and temporalities of the Black radical tradition from Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian revolution (1791-1804) to Lumumba through a transcendent 'lyricism'.[8] Konga captures this transcendental and lyrical quality in his play *Kuzikiliza,* in which Lumumba appears as a silent figure. He communicates only through dance and mime until the play's final scene, when we hear the original recording of his Independence Day Speech, with Konga's instruction to the audience to 'graver dans votre Coeur' his prophetic words.

The thwarting of Lumumba's vision for an independent Congo effectively created an 'interregnum' in the postcolonial era, in which the rise of authoritarianism, wealth extraction and political oppression can be seen in the absurd and farcical political satires of Congolese novelist Sony Labou Tansi (1947-1995). The assassination of Lumumba in 1961 and the nominal process of decolonisation that followed saw Tansi turn to the figure of the postcolonial dictator as the 'new' symbol of both sovereign power and decolonisation's failure in his 1981 novel *The Shameful State* (Tansi, [1981] 2016). The partiality and proximity of the dictator to the interests of neocolonial power result in the pathological excess of power and tyranny upon the people of the new nation-state. Upon his inauguration, the tyrant Colonel Martillimi Lopez objects to the borders constructed by the former colonial masters and declares instead that 'the fatherland shall be square' (Tansi, [1981] 2016: 5). In this way, Tansi reveals Lopez to be a pathetic imitation of colonial power and mastery, who is equal parts cruel and pitiable. Through his wielding of nationalist power, he represents an entrenchment of the dominant order of neocolonial power in the postcolonial nation state. For Tansi, the figure of Lopez encompasses the material deprivations and political tyranny of the post-independence period. Tansi's novel raises the question that if Lopez represents a parodic yet no less deadly imitation of colonial power facilitating the process of nominal decolonisation in

[8] This notion of 'serrated lyricism' is evident moreover in the structure of Césaire's quartet of plays which as Souleyman Bachir Diagne's observes, sees the very last words of *A Season in the Congo* 'uhuru' (freedom) uttered again by Caliban in the first line of *A Tempest* (Diagne cited in Césaire, 2020: xiii-iv).

which the same systems of power and social relations remain, how can the utopic politics of anticolonialism be recaptured in times of interregnum?

It is this entrenchment of power that builds a sense of Gramscian interregnum in the novel. In his *Prison Notebooks*, the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) argued that:

> the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear (Gramsci et al., [1947] 1971: 275-276).

Gramsci's argument that the 'new cannot be born' is fitting when we look at the subsequent impoverishment of the Congolese people under Mobutu's rule (1965-1997) and the continuing political repression and economic exploitation in the postcolonial period.[9] The shift in the modalities of power in postcolonial Africa, from the explicit practice of domination to the engineering of proxy forms of power forced a traumatic recalibration from the visionary and utopic politics of anticolonialism and Pan-Africanism to the disillusionment of the post-Independence period. Novels such as Tansi's *The Shameful State* (1981) and Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) both chart this dramatic shift from emancipatory visions to the disillusioned realities of independence in the Congo and Ghana, respectively.

Gramsci's emphasis on the interregnum disrupts the logic that the brief time of Lumumba's leadership, and the failure of the nationalist movement make it insignificant compared to the longer processes in the postcolonial period. Rather, the idea of the interregnum corresponds to the temporal orientation of Moten's conceptualisation of the 'serrated lyricism' of Black freedom movements. Following Gramsci and Moten, we can argue that Lumumba and the anticolonial movement are not limited to the historical period in which they were key operators, but instead exert political and cultural influence outside of those limits. Thus, the significance of the period of independence and Lumumba's central challenge to the colonial order stretches beyond its original historical context to inform the contemporary imagination of the Congo beyond extraneous

[9] As Dominic Thomas points out: 'the end of formal colonialism in Africa saw the disappearance not of colonial power but the overt symbols and codes through which it practiced its political domination and subjugation of African people. One of the defining distinctions between colonial power and neo-colonial power is the switch from the production of power through the symbolism of empire and imperialism to the use of local proxies to maintain the same systems of power […] Thus, we see the articulation of cultural processes of resignification in Zaireanization accommodated within supranational hegemonies of neocolonial power (Thomas, 2002: 18).

assertions of failure and obsolescence. It is for this reason that I approach the anticolonial struggle in the Congo and the thwarting of the Lumumba's vision as creating an interregnum[10] or crisis of the dominant order, in which the unyielding promise of emancipation within this moment of history echoes across the postcolonial present.

Silencing, epistemic erasure and the 'failed state'

I opened this introduction arguing that the representation of the Congo as a 'failed state' has enabled the re-inscription of primordialist discourses of Congo's Conradian 'darkness'. As a counterpart to this re-inscription, we see the silencing of Lumumba and the anticolonial struggle. In this thesis, I argue that Lumumba and his prophetic discourse of an alternative political future for the Congo haunts the 'failed state'. This re-inscription of Conradian discourses and the neoimperial narrative of Congo as a 'failed state' has attained a discursive dominance, I argue, through the silencing of Congolese nationalist struggle, Lumumba, and its broader significance within the political imaginary of anticolonial and Black revolutionary politics.[11] Yet, as already suggested, Lumumba and his prophetic discourse of an alternative political future for the Congo haunts the 'failed state'.

In order to facilitate the continuation of a Conradian politics of representation, the Congolese independence movement and the central role of Patrice Lumumba is relegated to the margins of history. For example, *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz* (2001), author and journalist Michaela Wrong passes over the moment of anticolonial insurgency, giving narrative primacy instead to the words of Larry Devlin who was the CIA station chief in the Congo at the time of Lumumba's assassination (Wrong, 2001). In this account, we are presented the story told from the point of view of someone closely linked to the assassination plot against Lumumba (De Witte, 2002). Her portrait of Devlin as a prime architect of Congo's postcolonial history resembles the flawed hero of a hard-boiled American crime novel. Meanwhile, Lumumba is presented as a shamanic and improbable leader 'flamboyant, erratic figure, bubbling with ideas' with 'a near miraculous ability to win over his audiences' (Wrong, 2001: 64).

[10] Other African writers and scholars such as Nadine Gordimer have found the term 'interregnum' instructive for understanding state violence in the postcolonial period (Gordimer, 1983).

[11] For more discussion in Congo's relationship with a wider tradition of Black revolutionary struggle see the work of Mobley on the 'Kongolese Atlantic' which explores the revolutionary, transatlantic connections between Haiti and the Congo (Mobley, 2015). See also (Villafaña, 2009) and (Gálvez, 1999) for discussion of Cuban involvement in the Congo in the twentieth century period of African anticolonial liberation.

In this narrative, the figure of Lumumba is often reduced to a tragic hero and martyr who acted out of personal hubris instead of political pragmatism. The representation of Lumumba as an Icarus-like figure evades questions over why colonial powers found his political vision for the Congo so threatening. Indeed, in evaluations of Lumumba's legacy it is the violent manner of his assassination and subsequent martyrdom that are often underlined. For example, the Belgian historian David Van Reybrouck argues that:

> in no time, the murdered prime minister was elevated to a martyr of decolonization, a hero to all the earth's repressed, a saint of godless communism. He owed the status more to the grisly circumstances of his death than to any political successes (Van Reybrouck, 2015: 309).

Meanwhile, for Wrong the question that hovers over Lumumba's legacy is:

> whether he would have been such a hero if he had remained and run the country and faced all the problems that running a country as big as Congo would have inevitably bought (Service, n.d.).

In these evaluations, both Lumumba's actual failures and, strikingly, his speculative failures, serve as Realpolitik correctives to the heroic narrative of decolonial martyrdom. Yet to frame Lumumba's legacy only through his political failures and the grim spectacle of his murder, this thesis argues, demotes his political contribution not only to Congolese independence but to anticolonial movements and Black revolutionary struggles internationally.

The marginalisation of Lumumba and his political challenge in histories and accounts of the Congo is significant because, as this thesis argues, the Congo constitutes a site of overarching coloniality between late European imperial history and nascent American neoimperialism; later becoming a key battleground in the Cold War throughout the Mobutu years. The nationalist movement embodied by Lumumba's uncompromising demand for economic self-determination specifically threatened both forms of colonial hegemony. The assignation of the Congo as a 'failed state' silences both histories of anticolonial struggle and neocolonial sabotage. If the assassination of Lumumba by Western security forces saw the hope of a free and independent Congo unravel into political authoritarianism with the West's backing of anti-communist dictator Mobutu, the narrative of the 'failed state' suppresses the active sabotage of an independent and self-determined state following the period of decolonisation.

Ever since this crisis, authoritarianism, economic pillaging, and civil strife have enmired the Congo. Yet through its erasure of such material histories, the failed state paradigm

refuses to historize the present catastrophes in the Congo. This erasure further silences the histories of anticolonial liberation struggle and the imagination of alternative forms of political identity, belonging and statehood at the core of these political movements. What is more, the idea of the Congo as a failure discredits the ideas of Lumumba and the anticolonial struggle as a brief interlude of ill-fated and deluded ambition set against a longer chronicle of failure and exceptionality to the Enlightenment-based model of political sovereignty and statehood.

The evacuation of history from the failed state narrative goes hand in hand with its cultural instrumentalization, inculcating a politics of representation that is distinctly neocolonial. The dominant images through which the Congo is represented today, as a land in which NGOs, rebels and government forces fight to control and maintain order deliberately position the Congo as the antithesis of Western nation-states in the mode of classic Enlightenment thought (Ch 2). The continuous framing of the Congo through a Conradian lens in contemporary culture enacts, this thesis argues, an epistemic violence and erasure on the role of the Congolese nationalist struggle in challenging the colonial order. In Gayatri Spivak's discussion of epistemic violence, she identifies two strands to the phenomenon: firstly, the 'desire to conserve the subject of the West' and, secondly, the 'orchestrated, far-flung and heterogenous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other' (in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* Nelson and Grossberg, 1988: 24-25). Each of these organising principles takes place in a cultural environment in which 'great care was taken to obliterate the textual ingredients of the colonial subject' (24). Applying *Heart of Darkness* to the contemporary period reconfigures Conrad's text as one capable of capturing an essential, transhistorical truth about the Congo, maintaining both the 'subject of the West' and the colonial subject as 'Other'.

It is the argument of this thesis that the notion of the Congo as a 'failed state' is rooted in the epistemic violence of colonial modernity and Enlightenment thought which positioned Africa and Africans as outside the 'modern' nation-state. Following Max Weber's ideation of the state in his 1919 lecture 'Politics as a Vocation' as one marked by the use of 'legitimate violence'(Weber et al., [1919] 2015), this thesis tracks the cultural and ideological forces at work in the idea of the failed state, its dominant images, and narratives and how they work to suppress alternative anticolonial visions of the future compellingly illustrated within the prophetic discourse of Lumumba. In order to do this, I draw on the cultural theories of coloniality and 'reprendre' firstly, to examine the epistemic violence of the 'failed state' discourse and secondly, to explore how different

Congolese artists and writers have returned to sites of colonial power to understand its afterlives in the present.

Congo's coloniality and *reprendre*

The concept of coloniality usefully excavates the continuities between colonisation and the workings of colonial power in a nominally decolonised world (Maldonado-Torres, 2007: 243). As already argued, the political 'grading' of the Congo, as a 'failed state' and a perennial underachiever in international development goals neatly sidesteps the history of Belgian colonisation and Western neocolonialism in thwarting the Congolese struggle for independence and economic sovereignty. It is for this reason that, in this thesis, I approach the 'failed state' as a Western invention that retools Enlightenment thinking. I will next briefly examine its political genealogy in order to illustrate its entanglement with Enlightenment and contemporary Western neoimperialism. The technocratic discourse of underdevelopment and state weakness erases, moreover, what Walter Rodney famously described as the calculated policy of African underdevelopment by the West (Rodney, 1972).[12] The idea of the 'failed state' furthers exactly the types of logic and reason of modernist development that Rodney sought to dispel.

The legacies of Western European philosophy are evident today in the construction of the Congo as the 'dark' antithesis of Western modernity. The Congolese historian Jacques Depelchin and philosopher V.Y. Mudimbe have revisited the canonical texts of Enlightenment philosophy in order to trace the dominant representation of Africa as 'anti', 'Other' and 'backward' compared to Europe (Depelchin, 2005; Mudimbe, 1988). Depelchin traces these representational tropes to the histories of Western colonial modernity, highlighting in particular the 'Hegelian ex-cathedra' that defines Africa as the child of history (Depelchin, 2005: 1).[13] Within this colonial paradigm, the Congo is traditionally seen as embodying the essence of said 'darkness' and 'backwardness'. For the sake of this thesis, I call "Enlightenment thinking" the types of philosophy expounded

[12] Rodney made the important corrective to the idea of uneven world development as either a naturally occurring phenomenon, or as a matter of superior civilisational values stating that, 'all of the countries named as "underdeveloped" in the world are exploited by others; and the underdevelopment with which the world is now preoccupied is a product of capitalist, imperialist, and colonialist exploitation' (Rodney, 1972: 14).

[13] In his major work *Lectures on the Philosophy of History,* Georg Willhelm Friedrich Hegel, the leading figure of the German Idealist movement, wrote that 'Africa proper […] is the land of childhood, removed from the light of self-conscious history and wrapped in the dark mantle of night'(cited in Eze, 2013: 24). According to Hegel, Africa existed in the twilight of history and remained trapped within a state of unawareness and 'savagery'. From the view of Enlightenment thinkers, the history of Africa could therefore only truly have begun with the arrival of European colonialism.

by the likes of Hegel, David Hume and Immanuel Kant who postulated that reason and science was the sole domain of the white, European man. I follow scholars such as Eze who have re-examined Enlightenment thought through the lens of critical race theory to interrogate 'modern philosophical thought and its contribution to the formation of racialism and indirectly racism'(Eze, 2013: ix). For the anthropologist James Ferguson, these discourses represent 'de-temporalised visions of Africa' through which 'the Great Chain of Being threatens to reappear, with the different conditions of different world regions appearing simply as a naturally or divinely ordained, unchanging order'(Ferguson, 2006: 186). Indeed, within such 'de-temporalised visions of Africa', it is the Congo that has traditionally occupied the nadir of this order.

Mudimbe's archaeology of European philosophy and imperial knowledge production reveals how European imperialism has often looked to Africa for reassurance and confirmation of the 'supremacy' of Western civilisation by positing the absence of African history before European colonialism (Mudimbe, 1988). We see such ideologies in the representation of the Congo as the last 'unknown' and unmapped territory providing a stage for colonial agents such as Stanley to 'conquer' Africa embodying, at the same time, a hegemonic form of late Victorian colonial masculinity. Thus, the dominant perception of the Congo as the 'essence' of the continent writ large inculcates a powerful cultural imaginary that is shaped from an associative web of meanings used to define European modernity and conversely, Africa's 'anti-modernity'. The essentialised signifiers conferred upon the Congo and its representation as a Hobbesian state of exception coalesce to form a uniquely encoded and canonised place in the cultural imagination of the West, which as James Coleman and Ndolamb Ngokwey note is 'insistently defined by superlatives' (Ngokwey cited in Lemarchand: 249). This encoding of the Congo as a 'primeval' place has provided a stage for artistic exploits that stage a triumphal form of colonial masculinity following Conrad's characterisation of colonial explorers in Africa as 'conquerors of truth' (Conrad, 1926: 19).

Challenging this mode of knowledge production, Mudimbe articulates the idea of 'reprendre' which, he argues:

> [takes] up an interrupted tradition, not out of a desire for purity, which would testify only to the imaginations of dead ancestors, but in a way that reflects the conditions of today (Mudimbe, 1994: 154).

Mudimbe's idea of reprendre rejects any 'pure' notion of pre-colonial tradition choosing instead to examine the contemporary condition of knowledge and cultural production in

Africa as marked by the interruptive and transforming context of colonial power and history. Mudimbe's notion of reprendre is invoked in several of the texts and artworks in the following chapters where artists and writers such as Sammy Baloji, In Koli Jean Bofane and Pitcho Womba Konga return to the context of colonial history in order to meditate upon the social and political conditions of contemporary Congo and postcolonial Africa.

Research context and historical background

My reflection on the history and continued relevance (and power) of the notion of the 'failed state' as applied to the Congo originates in the work of classical theorists of violence and the state namely Hannah Arendt and Franz Fanon. Following their work, many contemporary thinkers have pointed to the problem of the nation-state and the integration of former African colonies into the dominant liberal order. It is this process of integration that is held as ultimately responsible for sabotaging the truly liberatory politics of anticolonial struggle (Lloyd and Lowe, 1997). In accordance with this argument, it is noteworthy that both Arendt and Fanon would eventually turn against nationalism as the means of liberation for colonised peoples.

Indeed, I share Fanon and Arendt's antipathy and distrust on the efficacy of nationalism against colonial and neocolonial power but, in the case of Lumumba and the struggle for an independent Congo, it is striking to note how this particular nationalist struggle took on decidedly internationalist dimensions. This internationalism encompassed different imaginal geographies and temporalities of global Black struggle. The argument that the failure of decolonisation in Africa was due to the uncritical uptake of liberal-bourgeois ideas of the nation state by African political elites as the political model of African postcoloniality, something which Fanon warned of in *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon, [1961] 1990a) is compelling.[14] Indeed, for many African scholars, the failure of the postcolonial African state points to the shortcomings of decolonisation as a process of political liberation and transformation through the continuation of economic domination in Africa by other means. For example, in 1995, Ali Mazrui submitted the

[14] Fanon elaborates on the pitfalls of nationalism in which he writes: 'the national middle class which takes over power at the end of the colonial regime is an under-developed middle class. It has practically no economic power, and in any case it is no way commensurate with the bourgeoisie of the mother country which it hopes to replace' (Fanon, 1990b: 120). For a more discussion on the issue of nationalism in anticolonial and postcolonial thought see Laura Chrisman's essay 'Nationalism and postcolonial studies' (Chrisman, 2004).

precepts and certainties of his own political philosophy, along with his own identity as a member of the 'elite', to a painful re-examination in his essay 'The Blood of Experience':

> we used to think that decolonization consisted of the nationalist struggle against colonialism, the granting of independence, and the replacing of colonial symbols of authority with national flags and national anthems. Decolonization was complete, we thought, when colonially educated members of the African elite, the author included, came to the fore, and when some of us, as, for example, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Leopold Senghor of Senegal, inherited the reins of the colonial state from our colonial masters (Mazrui, 1995: 28).

Mazrui's eloquent piece describes the false idols of formal decolonization and the pyrrhic victory that it ultimately represented against the encroaching forces of neocolonialism. His painful reappraisal of these histories of liberation struggle sees them as amounting to nothing but a shift in the symbols and semiotics of power. Indeed, Mazrui's reappraisal of decolonisation echoes Spivak's description of the 'postcolonial neo-colonized world' (cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015: 488).

However, as Ghanaian feminist writer Ama Atta Aidoo points out, nationalism in the context of African anticolonial liberation remains to this day 'a powerful term for us (Africans) because of what we have been through as a people and are still going through':

> Over the last five hundred years African people have been under all kinds of onslaught -physical, mental, emotional. It seems to me that whatever was left for us to recoup cannot be done unless we see ourselves as a people, as a nation. When I say African nationalism, I am also using the term to embrace the global African world – African-American, African-Caribbean, and so on (Needham and Aidoo, 1995: 125-6).

Indeed, it is a striking historical phenomenon of how the Congolese national struggle became straited with the hopes and ambitions of colonised people internationally in the period of decolonisation. The anticolonial nationalism of the Congolese struggle for independence embodied the unrestricted aspirations of the colonised to fundamentally re-write the colonial experience. It is this transnational solidarity of global Black struggle that Patrice Lumumba and Congolese independence signified which captures Aidoo's conceptualisation of African nationalism and its residual power in the political present. Whilst Aidoo notes that nationalism in the European context produces 'a shudder because people think of Germany, German nationalism, Nazism, that sort of thing' (Needham and Aidoo, 1995: 126), its signifying power in the context of Africa produces a very different historical genealogy of anticolonial liberation and global Black revolutionary struggle over the past 500 years.

The main argument of my thesis is not to defend or rehabilitate the idea of the nation-state in the Congo against its detractors and critics who assert categorically that the Congolese state no longer exists. For, a Congolese state patently exists both in ad hoc reality and in other plains of imagination, individual and collective. Rather, my aim is to show how the idea of a free Congolese state, in the shape of Lumumba's prophecy remains a powerful imaginary in challenging the dominant economic and political systems of global capitalism and neocolonialism as well as being a particularly poignant receptacle for the dreams and aspirations of anticolonial liberation struggles internationally.[15]

This particular idea of the Congolese state stands much like other momentous events of Black revolutionary struggle such as the Haitian Revolution as a counter to existing systems of colonial oppression. In this sense, the Black African Nationalism that Aidoo refers to remains a powerful form of political ideology and resistance against the coloniality of power in the present.

Before I turn to the content of my chapters and my interventions, let me retrace the history that the contemporary discourse of the 'failed state' erases. Its place, I argue, is filled by the spectre of Conrad.

History

The establishment of the Congo Free State in 1869 was designed to compensate for Belgium's perceived 'lack' of imperial power on the European stage. What followed these economic negotiations was the creation of, even in those times, an exceptionally brutal and devastating colonial regime.[16] Thus, it was Leopold's desire to become 'worldly' and

[15] I wish to make a distinction here between the state that was not - as in the aborted Lumumbist vision of a free and independent Congo - with the cultural nationalist state of Zaïre that was sanctioned by colonial powers. Where Lumumba's political vision drew from the ideologies of Pan-Africanism, African Marxism and anti-imperialism, the state under Mobutu which was renamed Zaïre committed to removing the visible symbols of colonisation whilst maintaining a system of economic neocolonialism. In distinguishing these two states, we can see that the state is not a uniform concept not is it the only political actor in contemporary Congolese society actively shaping ideas of the present and future Congolese state. NGOs, multinational corporations, utopic visions of the African metropolis as a state in itself are all present in the conceptualisation, articulation and imagination of the Congolese state in its current and future iterations.

[16] For more detail on the history of the Congo Free State, Adam Hochschild's popular bestseller *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* charts the history of the Congo Free State as well as the subsequent 'great forgetting' of the colonial genocide (Hochschild, 2012). Meanwhile, the historians Jules Marchal (2008) and Jacques Depelchin (1992) offer respective historical-economic analyses of Belgian colonial exploitation. Finally, the anthropologist Nancy Rose Hunt takes a different critical approach examining colonial and indigenous attitudes to health, fertility, and sickness and the wider biopolitics and cultural

eventually control an empire that would rival other European powers and escape from the provincialism with which he saw his own nation, which brought the full force of modernity's murderous instruments of submission into play in the Congo Free State. This experience of capitalist modernity saw an outflow of economic profit to the Belgian state and the devastation of the Congolese population under the brutal conditions of forced labour, virulent epidemics and punitive violence that manifested in the colony.

One of the chief concerns for Leopold was making the Congo Free State not only a prized slice in the Conquest of Africa but an economically profitable colony (Hochschild, 2012; Renton et al., 2007). In order to maximise profitability, Leopold transformed the Congo into a colony of forced labour, abuse, and terror. The Force Publique, a private paramilitary force, patrolled the colony and punished workers for not fulfilling high quotas by amputating limbs and kidnapping family members. These brutal tactics led to a massive decline in the population's overall birth rate. Seeing this decline as a threat to the profitability of the colony, the anthropologist Nancy Rose Hunt has documented how colonial administrators subsequently set up infertility clinics within the labour camps spread throughout the colony forming a biopolitical architecture of colonial domination and oppression (2016).

The Congo Free State as a colonial territory was therefore governed by the demands of what Cedric Robinson has termed 'racial capitalism'. The genocidal and extractive logic of racial capitalism in the Congo Free State saw the overall population decrease by 10 million people (Hochschild, 2012: 233). Through his adept use of popular print media to praise the European civilising mission in Africa and its 'eradication' of the Arab slave trade, Leopold effectively shielded a biopolitical regime of terror (Foucault and Senellart, [1979] 2011). Growing disquiet and international awareness of atrocities and abuse in the Congo however, saw this particular narrative challenged.[17] After a concerted international humanitarian campaign and well-reported exposes into the abuses of the Congo Free State, Leopold II officially surrendered control of the colony in 1908. The now

memory of the colonial state in *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies and Reverie in Colonial Congo* (Nancy Rose Hunt, 2016).

[17] E.D. Morel's investigations into abuses led him to establish the Congo Reform Association (CRA) in 1904 which lobbied internationally against Leopold's regime. Alice Seeley Harris's images of Congolese workers with amputated limbs became the iconic images of the CRA's international campaign and Roger Casement's investigation and parliamentary report, brought the abuses of the Congo Free State to the world's attention. The findings of the Casement report irrevocably damaged Leopold's carefully crafted image of philanthropist and benevolent colonial ruler.

renamed Congo Belge (Belgian Congo) as a result, fell under the administrative control of the Belgian government.

Leading reformists such as E.D. Morel, whilst indefatigable in their campaigns against Leopold's rule, were uneasy about self-rule and full Black political emancipation and ceased their humanitarian efforts with the transition of power to the Belgian government. Indeed, Hochschild's popular history of abuses in the Congo Free State, *King Leopold's Ghost* (2012), problematically lionises campaigners such as Morel and Casement in their fight against Leopold's rule placing them within a narrative of maverick and anti-establishment heroes.

The individual heroic narrative of *King Leopold's Ghost* with its focus on Leopold's crimes and abuses, detracts from the simultaneous racism and exclusion of Black people from 'modernity' within liberal, reformist circles and the effects of such political movements in stymieing radical alternatives of freedom and self-governance for colonised Africans. Hochschild's focus on Leopold is reversed in Bofane's novel *Congo Inc. Bismarck's Testament* (2018) in which colonial oppression is viewed from the perspective of systemic and algorithmic logic as opposed to the actions of remarkable individuals. For Bofane, there is a fundamental banality to the systematic colonisation and dispossession of the Congolese people. Indeed, he describes it as 'a mechanism of the most common sort' (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 175) that has determined Congo's experience of capitalist and colonial modernity.

The transition from the Congo Free State to Congo Belge was to be challenged once again however, and by the early 1950s, demands for freedom and political independence from Belgian colonial rule had gathered apace. Ghana's independence from Britain in 1957 saw the spirit of anticolonial independence and Pan-African liberation ripple across the continent dampening the Belgian Government's proposals for a gradual thirty-year transition to independence under the 1955 Van Bilsen plan. Increasingly dissatisfied with the procrastinations of Brussels, Patrice Lumumba, acting as president of the *Mouvement National Congolais* (MNC) dispensed with his formerly conciliatory attitudes towards the colonisers and demanded immediate and unconditional independence.

The assassination of Lumumba in January 1961 by Western security forces saw the hope of a free and independent Congo unravel into political authoritarianism with the West's backing of anti-communist dictator Mobutu. The collusion between American, Belgian, and British elites to stop Lumumba protected Western economic interests, but also accepted that the old colonial order had died through the installation of a Congolese

political proxy. According to Jean-Claude Willame, this political shift takes place in the wider political context of Western imperialism:

> shaped by the transformation of mercantilism into industrial capitalism, by Cold War tensions and conflicts, and by the dominance of Western democratic ideologies in world politics (Willame, 1972: 7).

The assassination of Lumumba and the sabotage of the Congolese nationalist movement to fully take back control of the country's economic wealth allowed colonial powers to install a proxy regime in which a programme of cultural nationalism as opposed to true anticolonial liberation and economic sovereignty was instigated. Lumumba's core determination –in his independence speech (See Ch. 5)—that it would be the 'children of the Congo'(Lumumba, n.d.) who would benefit from the natural wealth of the country contrasts strikingly with the bottomless rapacity of Mobutu's kleptocratic regime. A regime that was lubricated by the financial institutions of the West.[18] Rather than a return of Congo's natural wealth to the children of Independence, Mobutu's campaign to rid the Congo of all colonial vestiges through the policy of authenticité went hand in hand with mass economic looting thereby, reframing decolonisation as a process of cultural resignification as opposed to a fundamental transformation of the economic power relations established through colonisation. Ever since this crisis, authoritarianism, economic pillaging, and civil strife have enmired the Congo, leading aforementioned scholars to declare the Congo either a 'failed' or 'invisible' state.

Within this period of postcolonial disillusionment, university campuses became a particular flashpoint in Mobutu's Zaïre. During his long rule, violent clashes between students and security forces erupting in February 1989 and May 1990. Similarly, in January 2015, protests by students took place following Joseph Kabila's controversial decision to alter the constitution and extend his time in office. The protests and violent suppression of generations throughout Congo's history, from Belgian imperialism to Mobutu and now Kabila, supports Gramsci's theory that 'when the new cannot be born […] a great variety of morbid symptoms appear'(Gramsci et al., 1971). It is startling that the Congo has shifted from being the colony that would place the Belgians on the imperial

[18] Siba N. Grovogui argues that the kleptocracy of Mobutu was enabled by 'Swiss banking institutions […] shielded by state-enacted secrecy regulations, provided the channels for these transactions' ensuring a 'net transfer of power and wealth from places in Africa (Congo) to Europe Belgium and Switzerland'(Grovogui, 'Postcolonial Sovereignty: Experimentation with statehood and self-determination' in Adler-Nissen and Gad, 2013: 25-38: 35).

world stage to becoming the beacon of hope for Third World liberation to finally epithets of 'failure' and 'invisibility'.

By the end of the Cold War, anti-communist African dictators such as Mobutu had served their purpose of dutifully enforcing US hegemony in Africa and quelling any form of leftist, communist political influence. The subsequent embrace of democratic reform across Africa in the bastions of anti-communist authoritarianism saw Mobutu's political power and base crumble overnight. Acts of aggression from Congo's neighbours capitalised on Congo's weakened political state leading to the encirclement of the Congo, launching full scale invasions, and arming different rebel groups. These acts of military aggression and territorial expansion into Congo were made all the more crushing by the fact that, as René Lemarchand points out:

> the wholesale plunder of Congo's mineral wealth is what enables both Rwanda and Uganda to sustain their war effort at minimal cost; in effect, the Congolese are supporting the financial burden of their own occupation by foreign armies (Lemarchand, 2009: 254).

Exempting the anticolonial insurrection and nationalist moment, the modern history in the intertwinement of the Congo Free State, Mobutu's client state and the 'failed state' is one of continuous dispossession and violent extraction through the conscription of people and land to the system of racial capitalism and colonial modernity. The continuation of colonial control of Congo's economic resources throughout the postcolonial period, alongside the capture and elimination of radical agents proposing political alternatives, underlines both the logic of coloniality and Gramscian interregnum at work in the history and political conception of the Congo as a 'failed state'.

Lumumba's promise that the truth of history will come when 'Africa […] write[s] its own history' resurfaces in powerful ways through the epistemic erasure of the failed state narrative within Western scholarship. As already mentioned, the three forms of discourse that have typified Western knowledge production on the Congo – early colonial, modernist and 'failed state' discourses - reverberate and mirror one another in their recycling of imperialist tropes of the Congo. Contemporary discourses on the Congo as a 'failure' and as a state that is in the process of disintegrating through cycles of vicious ethnic conflict have their roots in imperialism in which it is the 'native' characteristics of the Congo that is responsible for the failures of the state. It is also important to note that such discourses erase histories of popular struggle and anticolonial resistance to secure different forms of political existence and statehood, such as those proposed by Lumumba, as well as the calculated sabotage of such efforts by colonial powers to

prevent the formation of alternative political systems (De Witte, 2002). Locating Lumumba within this cosmology of Black radical movements challenges the pathologizing of Congo as underdeveloped and ill-equipped to self-govern by conceptualising the struggle for Congolese independence as a vital part of the struggle against the material extractions of global capitalism and epistemic erasures of coloniality.

The spectre of Conrad

The discourse of the 'failed state' erases anticolonial histories and through this epistemic erasure ushers forth the spectre of Conrad. This resurgent politics of Conradian cultural imperialism draws upon a deeply entrenched 'heart of darkness' cultural topography. The reframing of Conrad's gothic text documenting colonialism's disintegration into greed, psychosis and barbarity to contemporary Congo sees the text and its particular codes of representation transformed into the 'real' condition of contemporary Congo.[19] It is the persistence of Conrad as a reference point for the Congo and the African continent writ large, that has made it a point of deep contention and prompted writers such as Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o to rewrite Conrad's narrative in their respective works *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *A Grain of Wheat* (1967).

Both the Congolese postcolonial state and the contemporary 'failed state' have been expressed through a Conradian lens producing a time-warped vision of Congolese political struggle. However, what is often missed in such deterministic narratives is the functionary role figures such as Mobutu played within the wider geopolitics of the Cold War era. V.S. Naipaul directly reinvokes the Conradian mythology to understand the authoritarian spectacle of Mobutism and the failure of anticolonial struggle. For example, he writes in *A Bend in the River* that the Congo:

> is still like a journey through nothingness […] so little has the vast country been touched: so complete, simple and repetitive still appears the African life through which the traveller swiftly passes (Naipaul, n.d.).

Heart of Darkness is thus presented as the intrinsic truth of Africa across time and history. Where Conrad locates inhumanity and dysfunction in the figure of the imperialist gone rogue, for Naipaul Kurtz's true progeny is the Lumumbist rebel leader Pierre Mulele who led the Simba Rebellion (1963-65) against the Mobutu regime:

[19] Notable examples include Michaela Wrong's *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz* (Wrong, 2001) and V.S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* (Naipaul and Li, 2020).

> seventy years later, at this bend in the river, something like Conrad's fantasy came to pass. But the man with the "inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, no fear" was black, and not white; and he had been maddened not by contact with wilderness and primitivism, but with the civilization established by those pioneers who now lie on Mount Ngamliema, above the Kinshasa rapids (Naipaul, 1981: 210).

In Naipaul's account, the figure of Kurtz reveals himself as the rebel leader Pierre Mulele (1929-1968) driven to madness through his 'contact' with European civilisation. For Mulele and the Simba rebels, the challenge of fighting neocolonialism - its invisibility, and its enactment of power through Congolese intermediaries - marked a critical difference with the colonial period. As Mulele struggled to find ways of fighting an increasingly hidden enemy, Naipaul invokes the rebel leader as the next incarnation of Conrad's gothic tale, thereby gifting his text with a revelatory and realist power whereby Mulele is positioned as psychically adverse to the influences of Western civilisation. Ngwarsungu Chiwengo challenges this enveloping of Congo's postcolonial history into the *Heart of Darkness* narrative and pushes against the resilience of the Conradian legacy as a readily available metonymic signifier for the Congo:

> but can the DRC actually speak or appropriate language when its voice, along with its population, has been so marginalised and constructed as the 'primordial Other', distinct from its rational and organised neighbours […] Can the Congo's wounds tell their stories as long as the country remains associated with atavism, the practice of cannibalism and a 'return to the jungle'?(Chiwengo, 2004: 92-3).

These binaries of modernity and anti-modernity frame the Mulele rebellion as a tale of Conradian recidivism and psychosis as opposed to a determined rejection of US and Belgian neocolonialism that drew on both millenarian and nationalist political movements. The epistemic violence of Conrad's original text is here retooled to discredit and dehumanise the anticolonial movement and compress the history of the Congo into the imperial lexicon of Conradian discourse, elevating in turn, the status of Conrad's text from popular gothic fantasy to visionary realism: 'Conrad - sixty years before, in a time of great peace - had been everywhere before me' (Naipaul, 1974).

Naipaul's transformation of the Simba rebellion into a Conradian narrative erases the struggle in the Congo against counterrevolutionary neocolonialism asserting instead, the inherent 'primitivism' and 'darkness' of Africa. Where Naipaul affords Conrad a prophetic wisdom and truth in the Congo, Lumumba contends that the truth of history will come when 'Africa […] write[s] its own history'(Lumumba, 2009). Thus, for Naipaul,

the 'truth' of Africa is located in the genius of Conrad whereas, for Lumumba, the 'truth' of Africa is deferred and conditional upon it being self-authored.

Selection of texts and chapterisation

As already noted, the three forms of dominant discourse that have typified Western knowledge production on the Congo – early colonial, modernist and 'failed state' discourses - reverberate and mirror one another in their recycling of imperialist tropes of the Congo. Subverting these dominant representations however, we can see writers, artists, cultural producers politically engaged with the Congo looking to histories of anticolonial resistance and imaginaries to interrogate not only the dominant politics of representation but the imagination of the Congolese state free from the historical nexus of colonial power and capital accumulation. The epistemic erasure and finality of Herbst and Mills' argument is contested by these alternative readings of 'failure' that are not only imbued with the weight of history, but, more importantly, refuse to forego hope and promise for the future. My thesis examines a number of works by cultural producers working in the Congo as individual case studies. The case studies I have selected in this thesis are heterogenous with some contributing to the resurgence of neoimperial discourse on contemporary Congo and others seeking to unsettle and critique these codes of representation.

My first chapter explores visualisations of the 'failed state' in the work of conceptual documentary photographer Richard Mosse and Congolese artist Sammy Baloji. Baloji's uses Mudimbe's idea of *reprendre* to expose the intersecting histories of capitalism and racism in shaping the Congo today, connecting the original designs of the Congo Free State to a broader taxonomy of colonial power. Baloji's reprendre make the historical links and colonial durabilities of the past and present inescapable for his audiences. While Mosse utilises military technology to produce 'new' images of the Congo that have the power to shock audiences into engaging with the realities of conflict in the Congo. Chapter 2 starts by contrasting the resurgent Conradian narrative in neoimperial travelogues with the subversive literary fictions of three modern Congolese writers: Alain Mabanckou, Sony Labou Tansi and In Koli Jean Bofane. I have chosen these three texts because they utilise different forms of literary experimentation to disrupt the existing dominant narratives on the Congo as a place of timeless 'darkness'. Indeed, there is an unquestionable banality of power that runs through these three texts, Mabanckou through his characterisation of the ill-fated postcolonial picaro Moses, Tansi in his

portrait of the postcolonial tyrant and Bofane through his representation of the Congo as the decimating centrifuge of modernity.

My third chapter turns to the politics of representation in the context of Congolese women. Often used as a metonym for the 'failed state', I examine four texts that reveal the problematic erasure and mediation of Congolese women focusing particularly on the figure of anticolonial activist Andrée Blouin. Such erasures and mediations of anticolonial radicals such as Blouin enable a superimposed representation of Congolese women in texts such as Lisa J. Shannon's *A Thousand Sisters* (2010) that ignore histories of (neo)colonial power and violence in producing conditions of extreme economic and social precarity for Congolese women. The image of Congolese women have furthermore, been utilised extensively by NGOs working in the central African region, a subject I turn to in Ch. 4.

The widespread presence of NGOs working in the Congo is viewed as symptomatic of its condition as a 'failed state'. The NGOs that I have selected are heterogenous with some such as the Eastern Congo Initiative and Renzo Martens' Institute for Human Activities reproducing an imperialist politics of language and representation and others resisting exactly these forms of knowledge and power. The shift in the role of NGOs from supplying basic needs and services to active cultural producers has been observed by a number of different scholars. For example, Allen and Seaton note that as the 'professional media coverage of Africa has declined, so NGOs have stepped in to supply images and representations of Africa in general'(Allen and Seaton, 1999: 292). This shift from reporting and professional media coverage to NGOs has unquestionably altered the politics of representation and knowledge production. It is for this reason that I turn to the dominant forms of representation in NGOs and international aid organisations such as USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and the Eastern Congo Initiative focusing particularly on the discourse around Congolese women as the major drivers of the global political economy and the 'future' of the Congo. This positive form of representation around women's economic labour silences how Western policies of economic liberalisation and structural adjustment far from advancing women's political and economic power has, in fact, disproportionately exploited female labour across the Global South.

My final chapter examines the speeches of Lumumba focusing particularly on his prophetic mode and the exigencies of this utopic futuristic mode within a contemporary reality shaped by the predations of late capitalism. The legacy and haunting of Lumumba

is evident in the Congolese-Belgian rapper and theatre practitioner Pitcho Womba Konga's play *Kuzikiliza* (2016) which uses Lumumba's independence speech as an entry-point into a far-reaching meditation on colonial violence, exoticisation of African culture and the political exclusion and marginalisation of the African diaspora in Europe. The muted figure of Lumumba is in constant attendance in these tableaus of postcolonial violence and degradation making the final reading of his speech all the more powerful at the close of the play.

The rendering of Congo as a 'failed state' erases the history of anticolonial struggle and liberation in fundamentally challenging both the colonial state and the neocolonial political apparatus of the postcolonial state. This particular encoding, in which the Congo is doomed to a Kurtzian repetition so characteristic of contemporary exhortations of the Congo in contemporary culture, depends on the excision of the anticolonial movement as fundamentally opposing this political reality. Denying, furthermore, its break with colonial epistemic violence in search of radical political alternatives.

The 'failed state' represents a site of irrevocable damage and ruination, this also indicates a clear failure of political imagination to envision an alternative to the decapacitating systems of (neo)colonial oppression that have shaped Congo's contemporary realities. This thesis therefore rejects the erasures and silencings of the failed state discourse and turns instead to a wider corpus of visual imagery, literary fiction, plays and speeches to challenge the epistemic violence of contemporary prescriptions that the 'Congo does not exist' (Mills, 2013).

My Interventions

The representation of contemporary Congo as a 'failed state' prompts a return to the promise of Congolese nationalism as articulated by Lumumba and an exploration of how this history of an alternative future resonates today. This I see as the primary critical intervention that this thesis makes: it resists the epistemic erasures of the 'failed state' discourse and locates the history of Congolese nationalism and liberation struggle in a constellation of internationalist, anticolonial struggle. In doing so, this thesis disrupts the homogenous Eurocentric conception of statehood and examines, instead, the different modalities of the Congolese state and statehood from the prophetic speeches of Lumumba to the utopic mixed-media sculptures of Bodys Isek Kingelez. Moreover, the thesis shows the potential of Gramsci's idea of the interregnum to properly valorise the prophetic discourse of Lumumba's vision of a future of the Congo in the post-independence period.

At the conceptual level, I have explored and found ways to deconstruct a discourse that has been used to problematic ends. The highlighting of the Congo as a 'failed state' has undoubtedly reasserted fatalist and nativist attitudes towards Congolese politics in the mode of Conrad. Through identifying the neoimperial subtexts of the 'failed state', I have situated this discourse within a broader history of imperialism, colonialism and coloniality. The epistemic erasures of the failed state discourse and the concomitant resurgence of cultural neoimperialism underlined the importance of retrieving histories and politics of anticolonial struggle in order to highlight their continued power in the present. Indeed, the paradox of the Congo has been its centrality to the 'progress' of global capitalism and colonial modernity and its simultaneous exclusion from 'modernity' through dominant Western discourses of early colonial 'savagery', modernisation theories and finally, iterations of 'failure' and non-existence.

Through looking at the discourse of the 'failed state' and the vying politics of neoimperialism and anticolonialism, I see this thesis as speaking to debates around the 'postcolony', postcoloniality, and anticolonial hauntings drawing on the work of scholars such as Jean and John L. Comaroffs, Jacques Depelchin, Achille Mbembe and Gayatri Spivak.

Methodologically, I have analysed a culturally diverse body of works and brought a corpus together that identifies the pulses of history that carry on into the present in works such as Baloji's 'The Past in Front of Us' (2015) and Bofane's novel *Congo Inc. Bismarck's Testament* (2018). Structurally, the thesis moves from identifying the hidden subtexts of neoimperialism in works such as Mosses's *Infra* (2012) and contemporary travelogues to restorative modes of prophecy and romance through the anticolonial theatre of Lumumba's speeches.

Chapter 1 Shadow and glow: visualising the 'failed state' in the images of Sammy Baloji and Richard Mosse

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the work of Congolese artist and photographer Sammy Baloji and the Irish conceptual documentary photographer Richard Mosse. Both these artists work on documenting contemporary Congo and experiment with traditional visual and photographic forms in order to interrogate the limits of representation. By eschewing the traditional realism of photography and photojournalism, their images take on a textual quality that craft particular narratives about the representation of Congo in contemporary culture. Through their conscious straying outside of the traditional forms of photography and photojournalism, especially when it come to the politics surrounding the photographing of conflict and suffering, both artists re-evaluate the representation of the Congo in contemporary visual culture.[20]

These questions of narrative and representation are key preoccupations for both artists and it is for this reason, that I approach and examine their works as both visual and textual documents. This chapter will compare the work of these artists whilst making a detour via Malcolm X's theory of the 'science of imagery' written in response to the ideological manipulation in the media's reporting on the Congo Crisis (1960-65).[21] It focuses specifically on the relationship between formal reinvention and narrative affect and, further, examines how these 'textual' images offer particular readings of the reasons for the crisis and conflict in contemporary Congo.

The importance of photography to the function of empire is interrogated by Baloji's visual bricolage of the colonial archive and modern photography. Photography itself is a medium steeped within colonial history which reverberates today in the fact that many Congolese express a deep antipathy towards having their photograph taken by foreigners, conscious of a transaction taking place in which they receive little to none of the economic reward. This relationship between photography and colonialism was

[20] Here I follow Henry John Drewal's definition of the term 'visual culture' as 'referr[ing] to all forms meant to be experienced primarily, although not solely, through the sense of sight. To study visual culture is to analyse and interpret the history, significance, and impact of visual environment as it shapes and is shaped by historical processes and cultural ideas'(Drewal, 2006: 334).

[21] The Congo Crisis refers to the period of political crisis following Independence from Belgium in 1960, which resulted in a proxy war with the US and the Soviet Union supporting rival factions.

memorably characterised by the critic Okwui Enwezor: 'for more than 150 years, photography has been an intractable ogre in the visual life-world of modernity' (Enwezor, 2006: 12). Moreover, as Paul S. Landau points out, following European colonial rule in Africa, 'carbon copies, telegraphy, typewriters, and printing continued to be critical to the everyday functioning of colonial institutions' (Landau and Kaspin, 2003: 141). Aside from the everyday functioning of empire, photography also became one of the means in which Europeans in the colonial metropole could see and access knowledge of the colonial territories.

In Baloji's work, we see the web of colonial history and the track-marks of exploitation and dispossession projected upon the post-industrial wastelands of Congo's mining regions. Where Baloji's multimodal work occupies a more liminal space both in terms of form and pre-established modes of cultural representation, Mosse's work has been viewed by a number of critics as a bold reinterpretation and challenge to the traditions of twentieth century photojournalism (Brancaleone, 2013; Goodwine, 2017). However, despite these formal differences, both artists interrogate the politics of representation in the Congo and elect to use anti-realist styles of experimentation, fragmentation, and alienation in order to produce alternative visual narratives on the Congo. Both artists dispel a natural register and actively draw attention to the construction and artifice of their work.

Mosse frames eastern Congo as a site of vicious conflict and anarchy in which capricious guerrilla armies are locked into a deadly competition for political and military control. In Mosse's representation, the collapse of the state has created a terrifying vacuum in which different interest groups vie for political power and legitimacy. Mosse, meanwhile, capitalises on the Congo's representation as a modern-day 'failed state' and as a place that rests outside the normal civil-juridical order; a phenomenon that calls for a new aesthetic form in order to be truly realised. Indeed, Mosse actively seeks out the Congo as a 'wreckage' and the site of modernity's disintegration:

> These photos are the result of months of online research, skimming forums, Youtube videos […] emailing wreck chasers, and cold-calling bush pilots. I'd even surf the web for jpegs of plane wrecks […]. I was searching for accidents so disintegrated and remote to civilisation that they only really exist in the virtual imagination of transient and anonymous online communities (Manaugh, 2009).

Meanwhile, in Baloji's work, the absence of functioning political and economic systems and infrastructure in the Congo is not exploited for aesthetic effect and is, rather, directly

linked to the ongoing determinations of the colonial state in the contemporary. Thus, these two artists narrate the story of the conflict, failure and decay through similarly experimental forms but ultimately produce entirely oppositional narratives.

Baloji's work embodies, in many respects, Achille Mbembe's theory of the 'postcolony' and other decolonial theorists who argue that we live in a time that remains shaped by the ideological and material forces of colonisation. Mbembe's concept of the 'postcolony' (Mbembe, 2015) returns to the site of colonial history and examines its entanglement with the present. An entanglement that conditions, in a number of ways, the contemporary shape of political and cultural life of the African state:

> enclos[ing] multiple durée made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelope one another: an entanglement' (Mbembe, 2015: 15).

Baloji's series, *Mémoire,* which I discuss later in the chapter, encapsulates this disfiguration of temporality to illuminate the imbrications of colonialism in the present. Baloji and Mosse offer two radically different visions, the former staging the entanglement of history and the latter inducing a sensation of estrangement of time and place. Thus, whilst both artists elect to experiment with form and adopt a non-realist approach to visualising the Congo, they ultimately produce profoundly different narratives on the reasons for Congo's supposed modern-day 'failure'.

1.2 Figurations of contemporary Congo

The spatial and temporal codes within both these analyses of contemporary postcolonial Congo as either a 'failed state' or 'postcolony' articulate different imaginal geographies. Baloji's work provides a visual expression of Mbembe's idea of the postcolony whereby the past is brought into a stark visual confrontation with the present. Throughout his work, Baloji explores the historical experience of colonisation and neocolonial exploitation using multimedia aesthetics and photography. In contrast, Mosse capitalises on the perceived 'otherness' of the Congo and creates a visually disorientating grammar with which to elucidate this parallel reality. Thus, in these two artists we see, on the one hand, the historical texture of colonialism in the present through the use of archival material and, on the other, aesthetic alienation of formal experimentation.

As discussed in the introduction, the Congo has been marked in much of contemporary discourse as a 'failed state' and its calamitous political reality has been tied specifically to the overwhelming 'failure', corruption and dysfunction of the Congolese state as

opposed to the global economic and political systems rooted in colonialism, neocolonialism and global capitalism. This formulation is disrupted by Mbembe's idea of the 'postcolony' and Baloji's visual bricolage which instead posits the interlacing of these histories. Looking at the styles of Mosse and Baloji, we can see how these artists map on to these overarching conceptual formulations of failure in the nation-state and visions of 'anti-modernity' alongside the 'postcolony' as a particular spatial-political formation of African history in its encounter with Western colonial modernity.

Each conceptual framework positions the Congo within a different temporal and spatial imaginary. Where the idea of the 'failed state' flattens the history of the Congo into a singular and essentialised narrative of anti-modernity through visual portraits of dysfunction and corruption, Mbembe challenges the spatial and temporal character of colonialism as finite historical phenomena. His use of the term colony along with the direct prefix of 'post' challenges the division of history into neat categories of colonial and post-colonial bringing the colonial system and the post-colonial African nation-state into jagged alignment. The lack of hyphenation in the term postcolony further proposes the posteriority of the colony as well as its immediacy opening up a space to work with what Ann Laura Stoler has termed the 'toxic imperial debris' (Stoler, 2013: 221) in the present. As Baloji commented in 2019, 'I'm not interested in colonialism as a thing of the past, but in the continuation of that system' (Madsen, 2019).

For Mbembe, the history of the postcolony must be seen in the *longue durée* for its particular historicity cannot be conceptualised along the lines of the individual and the nation-state. Mbembe's argument that African societies cannot be theorised in isolation and assessed through empirical categories, rooted as they are in the epistemic moulds of colonial modernity, is unequivocal.[22] The postcolony and the 'failed state' thus constitute distinctive critical topologies and imaginative geographies. The former underlines the history of colonialism and its 'entanglement' with the present, and the latter erases such histories and thereby reasserts an Enlightenment philosophy in which European liberal democracy and statehood represents the universal standard and summit of human progress to which other nations must heed.

[22] It is important to note the distinctive character of Mbembe's notion of decoloniality as opposed to that of members of the Latin American School such as Walter Mignolo and Aníbal Quijano. Where these theorists analyses are heavily indebted to Marxist and Nationalist Liberationist thought, Mbembe critiques precisely these modes as heralding from the 'intellectual ghetto' and dismissing them as 'false philosophies'(Mbembe cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015: 491).

This abandonment of the nation state enables Mbembe to emphasise the instrumentality and continuation of the colony as the organising structure of contemporary political reality despite the ostensible shift from the colonial to the post-colonial. The residual structure of the colony, as opposed to the African nation-state, determines the relations of power and decolonisation as only a nominal reality. Consequently, the perceived 'failures' and obdurate political realities of the Congo are directly linked to the continuation of the logic of the European colonial project and its imbrication within the present.

The active sabotage of Congolese self-determination and the anticolonial liberation through the assassination of Lumumba, the aiding of secessionists and the financial supporting of a decades-long dictatorship, frames this 'failure' of the nation state very differently. In comparison, the notion of the 'failed state' highlights the failings of certain states to 'properly' emulate Western conceptions of liberal democracy and civil society. For Mbembe, therefore, the evaluation and construction of African nation states from within the codes of colonial modernity prefigures Africa's 'failure' and 'lack' further consolidating the political and epistemic hegemony of the Western conception of the nation-state. The discourse of the 'failed state' effectively severs the history of Western involvement and interference in Africa, whereas Mbembe's theory attends to the continued implications of this involvement. The idea of the postcolony thus draws attention to the colonial and post-colonial state as a continuum rather than a true political transformation. Likewise, in Baloji's work, we see the mapping of colonial violence and expropriation on to the contemporary Congolese landscape similarly underlining the instrumentality of colonialism in the present.

1.3 New wastelands: 'failed states' in the contemporary political imaginary

For many artists, the concept of a 'failed state' is a provocative one and ushers forth ideas of wastelands and post-war modernist anguish. It reinvokes a particular genre which saw many European writers and artists, particularly in the aftermath of the First World War, seized by a feeling of exhaustion and despair over Western modernity. As a consequence, they looked to Africa as a source of respite and rejuvenation. This desire for a radical departure from tradition, saw writers such as T.S. Eliot, Virginia Wolf and D.H. Lawrence drawn to Africa as a potential source of both cultural and spiritual regeneration. Through its perceived 'primitivism' and detachment from modernity, Africa constituted a place that could serve as an artistic refuge from the onslaughts of modernity.

For these writers, Africa symbolised humanity's 'primitive' desires and therefore offered a potential escape from the angst and suffocation of Western modernity. For example, the German writer Ernst Jünger, wrote that, in Africa, one can see, 'the magnificent anarchy of life, which even in its wild manifestation fulfils a profound and tragic order, and toward which every young person feels drawn at some time' (Jünger cited in Nevin and Nevin, 1996: 29). It is remarkably ironic that Africa was positioned as the escape from modernity within this post-war moment when we see the Afro-Asian inspiration of many of modernism's canonical texts. The African and Asian influences of canonical works of modernist art and literature have been historically downplayed in order to maintain Eurocentrism and the binaries of 'primitive' and 'civilised'. Consequently, scholars have pointed to these cultural influences to challenge the Eurocentricity of modernity and modernist cultural expression. Locating the forms of modernism and therefore, modernity, into what Michel-Rolph Trouillot calls the 'north-Atlantic universal' (Trouillot, 2002).[23]

Rather than looking at the history of modernity as an interconnected and global phenomenon, Mosse resurrects this binary of the 'modern' and the 'primitive' through his *Infra* series. Through this binary, Mosse also finds what Jünger referred to as the 'irresistible anarchy' in Congo's eastern regions that have inflamed and destabilised the region since the Rwandan Genocide in 1994. On the conflict in the east of Congo, Mosse observes that,

> its war seems essentially intangible. It is a protracted, complex, and convoluted conflict, fought by rebels with constantly switching allegiances. These narratives, though brutal and tragic, are not tales that are easily told (Mosse and Hochschild, 2012: 129).

Thus, the allure of the Congo is its inherent 'intangibility' and its perceived displacement from the normative (read Western) cultural and political environment of the artist.

What Mosse sees as the 'intangibility' of the First and Second Congo Wars and the failure of political resolution to end these conflicts emboldens him, as an artist, to seek new forms of cultural expression that can act as a political substitute and take on a substantive political role in confronting the crises of the nation-state. His description of the conflict as one 'fought by rebels with constantly switching allegiances' (129), implies

[23] Examples of the often forgotten Afro-Asian roots of certain canonical modernist texts include the Confucian influences in Ezra Pound's manifesto 'Make it New'(Qian, 2006) and Pablo Picasso's slippery recall of seeing African masks in the context of his painting *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (Chave, 1994).

the impossibility of any meaningful political process in addressing the causes of the conflict if the combatants involved are ruled by nothing more than caprice. Henceforth, the impotence of politics in the face of conflict is transformed into an opportunity for the artist.

Figure 1: Richard Mosse 'Vintage Violence' (2011)

In Mosse's 'The Impossible Image', he defines the conflict in the Congo as a series of 'small vicious wars' producing a socially and historically fragmented representation of the conflict (Mosse et al., 2013). But, as René Lemarchand remarks, it is 'only by taking into account the *longue durée* dimension of the crisis can one gain a proper handle of the dynamics of violence in the Congo' (Lemarchand, 2013: 418). This fragmented view of the conflict is obscured by the totalising aesthetic of the photographs. His infrared aesthetic merges otherwise remarkably different images into a deceptive unity of form. However, if the viewer looks beyond this ostensible aesthetic unity, the images present a fractured and disjointed picture of the Congo. Through the juxtaposition of portraits and aerial view landscapes, images such as 'Vintage Violence' (fig. 1) and 'Safe from Harm' stand at odds with the eerie silence of 'Platon' and 'Beaucoups of Blue' (Mosse and

Hochschild, 2012). The juxtaposition of empty depopulated landscapes with individual portraits of soldiers that jarringly evoke the forms of portraiture in high fashion photography all gives the impression of the photographer embarking on a safari tour of the eastern Congo.

Mosse explores experimental techniques such as infrared technology to capture this intangible truth and generate alternative realities that he argues come closer to understanding the crisis of the present. In doing so, Mosse speaks to the artistic and cultural demands of the present, whilst at the same time inserting himself into a canonical literary and artistic tradition. In short, Mosse's work sees the primitive aesthetics as the literary terrain of twentieth century modernism reimagined in the contemporary moment of political crisis and conflict in the Congo.

Whilst his allusions to his chosen forbearers Joseph Conrad and Roger Casement are clearly foregrounded in the accompanying essays and interviews to *Infra*, the idea of spiritual regeneration and artistic escape that many modernist writers and artists located in Africa is not present in quite the same way. Mosse does not stake the same claim to personal and spiritual emancipation through the study of Africa. Although, he does derive a sense of artistic emancipation through looking at the Congo as a 'failed state' and as a radically different polity. For Mosse, the clear failure of politics and the reimagination of the Congo as a 'failed state' provides fertile territory for the artist to provide new ways of seeing beyond enervated and sterile political discourses. The Congo is not a site of artistic escape but rather artistic innovation.

The notion of the 'failed state', far from being scientific and objectively empirical, necessarily evokes images that are informed through the cultural imagination of the state and governance as the political arena and cultural inheritance of white, European man. It is no surprise, therefore, that the rise of the 'failed state' discourse has been accompanied by an equally powerful resurgence of imperialist language and tropes. Mosse's *Infra* is indicative of this new cultural aesthetic that is problematically imbricated within the technologies and histories of imperialism. Specifically, it utilises these technologies to create new ways of seeing Africa in the contemporary moment of violent, political upheaval.

Through his use of infrared light technology, Mosse delivers a dream-like wonder to the narrative of the 'failed state'. This technique allows him to re-engage with seemingly disconnected and inured Western audiences whilst, at the same time, situating himself within the same literary and political tradition of Casement and Conrad as a politically

and socially engaged artist. In positioning himself within this literary space, Mosse highlights a continuity between his work and the work of Casement and Conrad in what was the Congo Free State, and, thus, repurposes this tradition of artistic engagement and journalistic documentation in contemporary Congo. Despite these allusions to the histories of political engagement and reportage in the Congo, Mosse's work remains a deeply personal exploration of identity, reality, and consciousness:

> my waking dreams verge into the conflict that I have found myself, this state has pushed me further out. It's a pursuit of the sublime, a very personal one, but dressed in the uniform of the documentary photographer (Mosse et al., 2013: 5).

Here, we see a reinterpretation of the modernists' search for artistic emancipation and regeneration through African 'primitivism' into a problematic 'pursuit of the sublime' in a state riven by conflict. In both cases, Africa is the site for the Western artist's journey of self-discovery which follows Mbembe's argument that 'Africa still constitutes one of the metaphors through which the West represents the origin of its own norms, develops a self-image'(Mbembe and Hofmeyr, 2015: 13).

Mosse's call for new ways of seeing the Congo is not concerned with locating power and the structures of exploitation. Instead, he presents a vision that is purposely structureless, ahistorical and amorphous which allows him to experiment with form and aesthetic. Mosse claims that we need new ways of seeing and, as a result, his subliminal visions of the Congo are highly distinctive from the archival materiality of Baloji's work. Mosse's desire to establish a continuity with a Conradian politics of representation through asserting the inherent 'otherness' and 'intangibility' of the Congo is challenged by Baloji, who uses multi-media aesthetics of contemporary photography and colonial archives to point to the colonial and neo-colonial construction of contemporary wastelands.

For Baloji, the inability to see and locate power relations and oppression in the neocolonial state, as opposed to the colonial state, is a unique feature of neocolonialism. This invisibility thus constitutes the central challenge of the contemporary artist working in the Congo. The clear artifice of Baloji's work in pointing to the continuities of colonialism in the Congo to his audience contrasts to the contemporary invocation of Conrad to describe the contemporary condition of the Congo . This form of knowledge production obscures precisely the power relations that Baloji seeks to illuminate through his visual bricolages. By contrast, Mosse wraps the Congo in a timeless 'heart of

darkness' narrative, in which the original insights of Conrad remain ever appropriate and relevant to images of conflict and suffering.

In this sense, Mosse's work consolidates and canonises Conrad's legacy in the Congo, cementing a veritable 'regime of representation' (Hall, 1989: 70) transforming Conrad's text to a metonymic signifier for the Congo and all of its history. Mosse's argument that the modernist innovations of Conrad must be recaptured is a problematic proposition if we are to challenge fundamentally the foundations of coloniality and epistemic violence in the representation of the Congo. For, indeed, Conrad's investment in the British imperial project was arguably strengthened through his writing on the Belgian Congo.

1.4 Imperial redux: visualising the 'failed state'

Mosse's aforementioned statement of intent to create 'new' ways of seeing the Congo, directly implicates both the paralysis of politics as well as the tradition of conflict imagery and photography in the Congo for our contemporary age of conflict and political failure. Composed of a series of images and critical meditation on how to document conflict, *Infra* (Mosse, 2012) captures Congo's eastern regions with local militias on patrol, victims of war, deserted homes and eerily quiet natural landscapes all filtered through the strange pinkish glow of Kodak Aerochrome infrared technology. Infrared colour was a technology first developed by the US military during the Second World War to detect movement beneath the camouflage of the jungle. Reminders of its original purpose for military surveillance and reconnaissance are constantly present in Mosse's images and the spectator is forced to see the Congo through a militarised gaze. Through extracting his subjects and situating them in an altered reality, Mosse replicates early colonial photography which sought to portray African subjects as 'primitive' and outside the modern world. This imagination of the Congo creates a paradoxical space in which the prevalent condition of war and hostility becomes a liberatory space of freedom and reinvention for the Western artist.

The fact that Kodak Aerochrome was developed specifically to detect movement beneath the camouflage of the jungle produces a disturbing form of objectification in which the Congolese themselves become targets as opposed to subjects. Infrared light further highlights the use of American weapons to destroy guerrilla armies using the ecology and environment for camouflage and protection.

Figure 2: Richard Mosse 'Poison Glen' (2012)

The unpopulated stillness of *The Poison Glen* gives the viewer the sense that we are witnessing the aftermath of military strike or natural disaster. The strange red pinkish glow of the image is suggestive of the fallout of an ecological catastrophe or a post-nuclear apocalypse. The disturbing effects of these images brings to the fore the original function of this technology and the 'cultural memory of wilful destruction' in the American bombing campaigns in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos (Brancaleone, 2013). Mosse's decision to use the Kodak Aerochrome technology originated in his own struggle with his position as a European man and the traditional form of conflict photography and photojournalism:

> I felt Aerochrome would provide me with a unique window through which to survey the battlefield of eastern Congo. Realism described in infrared becomes shrouded by the exotic, shifting the gears of Orientalism. The film gave me a way of thinking through my role as a white male photographing Congo with a big wooden camera. By extension, it allowed me to begin to evaluate the rules of photojournalism, which always seem to be thrust upon me in my task of representing conflict, and which I wished to challenge in my own peculiar way (Mosse and Hochschild, 2012, p. 130).

Mosse's haunting, post-apocalyptic landscapes sit next to portraits of Congolese soldiers emerging from the forest in military formations and posing individually. They share a jarring similarity to the portraits of the Congo Reform Association (1904-1913).[24] Where

[24] Formed by E.D. Morel and Roger Casement, the CRA was active in raising international awareness about human rights abuses in the Congo Free State. The CRA used photography as one of the key methods to expose the crimes of the Congo Free State to a global audience.

in the portraits exhibited by the CRA, we find a careful construction of innocence, childhood and trauma intended to capture the sympathies of Western audiences, in Mosse's portraits, however, the subjects are made to appear menacing and threatening. In his images, we see his subjects staring intently and brandishing their guns and weapons. For this reason, their ages are difficult to determine. In 'Rebel Rebel', a young soldier is wearing a cartoon printed t-shirt while holding a weapon and glaring ahead. The face of the subject is expressionless and the normalcy of violence that the image suggests creates a chilling effect. The title itself is dehumanising and purposely gives the photo's subject no name, or identity. Instead, the caption of the image alienates the subject by referencing culturally incognisant Western pop music.

In this way, Mosse creates subjects that appear to the viewer as bandits and criminals in the style of a classic western or commercial advertisement. The caricature of these soldiers and the fantastical elements of the image together also reject the traditional realism of conflict photography. A departure that takes the viewer into not only a surreal obscurantism but a dangerous mythology of Black African males as the threatening 'other'.

According to Mosse, the hyperreality of Kodak Aerochrome is the perfect way of visualising the Congo for he sees it as radically different and essentially unknowable. Hence, realism must be adjusted in the face of the Congolese wars. In this sense, spectacle and the departure from traditional forms constitute necessary means to accurately capturing the Congo:

> I originally chose the Congo because I wished to find a place in the world, and in my own imagination, where every step I took would be reminder of the limits of my own articulation, of my own inadequate capacity for representation. I wished for this to happen in a place of hard realities whose narratives urgently need telling but cannot be easily described. Congo is just such a place. Its war seems essentially intangible. It is a protracted, complex, and convoluted conflict, fought by rebels with constantly switching allegiance. These narratives, though brutal and tragic, are not tales that are easily told (Mosse and Hochschild, 2012: 129).

In this passage, the boundaries of representation and articulation are initially located within Mosse as the white, European outsider, but quickly become transposed to the Congo itself on account of its 'intangible' wars and perceived complexity. He begins by saying that the effect of the Congo upon the Western artist is to be ceaselessly reminded of their limits of expression and representation; a physically laborious experience that

affects his 'every step'. However, the limits of expression and representation are quickly displaced from Mosse and located in the 'hard realities' of the Congo.

The contradictory language of Mosse's writing, wherein the Congo is both a place of 'hard realities' as well as 'essentially intangible', points to the mutable boundaries of language and representation that he constructs in order to privilege his own moral narrative. By prefixing his construction of the Congo as an 'unspeakable world', with an emphasis upon his own limited powers of representation, Mosse makes the denial of speech and language appear to be the mutual condition of this unequal encounter: 'My photography there was a personal struggle with the disparity between my own limited powers of representation and the unspeakable world that confronted me' (Mosse and Hochschild, 2012: 133). However, the denial of speech and language to the Congo evokes a deeply troubling colonial legacy and the struggle for expression inevitably ends with Mosse's discovery of an innovative and radical aesthetic to represent the 'truth' of the conflict in the Congo.

Despite the colonial legacies of photography in Africa, particularly in colonial anthropology and ethnography, Mosse maintains that the image is a vital tool of documentation for critical engagement with the conflict in Congo. If audiences are now inured to the shock of traditional twentieth century conflict photography purely through its repetition and iconicity then it falls to the artist to increase the 'shock' and 'spectacle' of such images. One of the justifications for his radical departure from documentary realism is the idea of 'image fatigue', which postulates that audiences have become desensitised to images of suffering through their sheer volume and repetition across history. This desensitisation represents an ethical problem, where the affect and empathic response of images of suffering wanes in the face of their increasing ubiquity and normalisation. The idea of image fatigue thus calls for new ways of documenting suffering that allow audiences to reconnect and respond to the suffering they are witnessing. In this respect, he mirrors the German filmmaker Werner Herzog's *Lessons of Darkness* (Herzog, 1992) which shows burning Kuwaiti oil-fields with very little commentary or framing to the images in order to more effectively alienate audiences. For Herzog, like Mosse, there is a sense that traditional forms of capturing war and suffering have left audiences desensitised and it is therefore up to the artist to re-engage and 'penetrate deeper than CNN ever could' (Prager, 2010: 97).

Mosse sees art as playing a crucial role in 'shocking' and can be used as an effective tool of mobilisation. By challenging the traditional form and style of conflict photography, it

is no accident that Mosse chooses the Congo where the first so-called 'atrocity photography' was developed to spread awareness about the terror and brutality of Leopold's regime. Mosse's portraits of soldiers are reminiscent of the genocide photography of the CRA in terms of their elaborate and thematic staging and the unflinching forward gaze of the photographer's subjects. The history of colonisation and violent modernity in the Congo is underpinned by a huge visual archive and marks the first instance of photography used to create international awareness of the abuses of the Congo Free State. Portraits of Congolese people with amputated limbs constituted the first so-called 'atrocity photographs' and were circulated to audiences throughout Europe and North America. The images of the CRA were displayed to European audiences through 'magic lantern' shows that employed early projection technology to spread the word and build political momentum against Leopold (Sliwinski, 2009). These portraits were highly constructed images in which children were sat facing straight ahead and dressed in plain white clothes. It is the constructed aspect of the CRA's portraits which, as Aubrey Graham argues, foretells the genesis of a particular form of representation of the Congo:

> through the interplay of a subject's agency and the photographer's goals, the complex and ongoing social life of the Congolese is systematically removed from the photographic frame, rending the depictions of suffering and arms-wielding violence prominent in representations of what Congo is, and for over hundred years, has been (Graham, 2014: 141).

Figure 3: Richard Mosse, 'Rebel Rebel' (2011)

Moreover, they both articulate and superimpose a unity of form in order to affect Western attitudes. However, the 'otherness' of the subjects is also continually highlighted, as John Peffer writes, 'spectacular lantern shows visually defined the supposedly exotic or degraded condition of those 'other' communities'(Peffer, 2008: 63). Peffer's criticism is equally relevant to Mosse's photography and his use of Kodak Aerochrome which resultingly alienates the subjects of his images from any familiar or recognisable world.

This relationship between African spectacle, imperialism and reformism is reproduced in Mosse's contemporary photojournalism. Both the images of the CRA and Mosse seek to awaken a new form of consciousness yet, position their African subjects in familiar frames as either child victims or, menacing adversaries. Thus, the subjects are enmeshed within colonial subjectivities of either paternalism or essentialised and threatening 'difference'. Mosse's reframing of his artistic mission as a quest for sublime truth ignores these historical continuities in the forms of representation that characterise Africa and the West. What is key to both Mosse and the images of the CRA is the use of spectacle in which to shock the consciousness of the viewer. However, what is distinctive in Mosse's images is the direct employ of the modes and technologies of military imperialism in order to heighten the sense of spectacle. In this sense, we can see a continuity between the early atrocity photos of the CRA and Mosse's use of military technology in order to recapture the visceral shock of these early images. Whilst the sentiment and pathos at work in the CRA's images is not apparent in the images of Mosse, the demand for spectacle when it comes to visual representations of the Congo undoubtedly links these two archives.

In the campaign literature of the CRA, the Congolese are placed in the category of victim in order to accentuate the tyranny and amorality of Leopold's regime. The innocence of the victim underlining the tyrannous and amoral character of the colonial system. For Mosse, however, the Congolese lose their status as 'victims' and become far more ambiguous figures. Thus, the puritan and chaste register that is evident in the CRA's photography is here replaced by a visual grammar of exoticism, threat, and alienation. The embrace of spectacle as a tool of reform stops far short of radical politics, however,[25] and the termination of the Congo campaign with a more palatable system of colonial

[25] Indeed, the CRA disbanded in 1913 following the Belgian Government's annexation of the Congo in 1908 forming the Belgian Congo causing Morel to declare that 'the native of the Congo is once more a free man. His elementary rights have been restored to him, he is once more free to gather the natural products of his soil' (Mitchell, 2014).

power and control reveal the historical intersections of humanitarianism and imperialism in preventing radical and emancipatory political transformation.

This experimentation with style has opened Mosse up to charges of aestheticizing violence and has struck several critics, reluctant to break with the traditional black and white realism of photojournalism, as ethically problematic (Goodwine, 2017; Frizzell, 2015). In response to this stylistic 'break' with traditional conflict photography, Mosse argues that such traditional forms are no more constructed and contrived than his own work. Rather, his concern is to constantly challenge the boundaries of form and representation:

> I have struggled with the idea that documentary photography regardless of the photographer's concerns, arrives pre-loaded with an implicit assumption of advocacy. My work is not a performance of the ethical. I'm concerned less with conscience than with consciousness. And so I became enthralled by Aerochrome's inflation of the documentary, mediating a tragic landscape through an invisible spectrum, disorientating me into a place of reflexivity and scepticism, into a place in consonance with my impenetrable, ghost-like subject (Mosse and Hochschild, 2012: 131).

On the question of ethics, Mosse is, at the very least, ambivalent if not overtly contradictory. For example, in *The Enclave,* Mosse speaks of eliciting an ethical response from the viewer as an imperative for the conflict photographer. However, in this passage, he states that his work is 'not a performance of the ethical' (131). The privileged status of beauty in producing a response from the viewer restricts the question of ethics to the audience's response as opposed to the photographer's mode of praxis and representation. Indeed, no matter the wider politics of representation if an image is seen to provoke a response from the viewer, it is often credited with ushering forth an ethical engagement between the viewer and subject.

Mosse's statement that his work is 'not a performance of the ethical' (131) is the only unambiguous utterance in a self-reflection that, otherwise, seeks ambiguity and the blurred boundaries of form. What is clear, however, is that Mosse seeks out an ethical relationship through the alienation and disorientation of artistic method that allows him to reach a 'place in consonance with my impenetrable, ghost-like subject' (131). Where Mosse presents himself as entirely elusive, the Congo and his photographic subjects are captured through military technology and projected into a strange and alien wilderness. Mosse promotes a form of alienation representing the Congo as a place beyond a knowable reality and fundamentally 'other' in order to achieve concordance between his own subject and the reality of the Congo. The radical aestheticisation of Mosse's images

allows him to retain a level of documentary realism whilst engaging in the spectacle of the racialised, 'exotic Other'.

Mosse's recovery of Kodak Aerochrome to reinvigorate the power of photojournalism, sees military technology effectively repurposed as an ethical-cultural imperative against increasing desensitisation to images of conflict and suffering. Technologies of American imperialism and militarism are here enlisted in search of the sublime 'truth' of the Congo, with the spectator seeing the Congo 'anew' through an imperialist and militaristic gaze and effectively silencing the role of US imperialism in determining the conflict and economic exploitation that exist in the Congo today.[26] These material realities that link these different cultural contexts of imperialism which as Mbembe eloquently surmises reveal 'a past slow to end' (Mbembe and Hofmeyr, 2015: 15).

What we see in Mosse's 'pursuit of the sublime' (Mosse et al., 2013: 5) however, is the necessary silencing of history. The fact that Mosse uses military technology to capture new ways of seeing conflict is a cruel irony. He later remarks that when touring the eastern regions of the Congo, he found the Congolese generally unwilling to be photographed. Or, in other cases, he notes how the subjects indisposed to the camera, often struck 'defiant' and 'macho' poses. The active resistance of his subjects to his gaze is reduced, however, to a performance of masculinity, as opposed to the power relation between photographer and subject.

Mosse confesses his surprise at what he sees as the 'performative' responses of his subjects; their threatening glares, defiant poses, and their handling of lethal paraphernalia are all noted by the artist. However, it is revealing that Mosse is oblivious to the performative aspect of his own subject, and overlooks the fact that he, and his subjects engage in equally performative roles. Whilst his work ostensibly deals with the aesthetics of violence and representation, Mosse himself enacts a performative narrative in which he occupies and reinvents the space of Conrad's Marlowe. Such a performative reinvention of Conrad is emblematic of the 'neo-Conradian quest narrative' (Clark, 1999: 166). This element in Mosse's work is most visible in *Infra:*

[26] In silencing the 'productive politics of US imperial culture' (Dworkin, 2017: 15) in his images, Mosse follows other artists such as the filmmaker Eleonora Coppola, who, in 1991, shot *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse,* a documentary film exploring the making of *Apocalypse Now,* in the Philippines during the time of the Marcos regime.

> Like Marlow on the steamer; I was pursing something essentially ineffable, something so trenchantly real that it verges on the abstract…'(Mosse and Hochschild, 2012: 129).

In his invocation of Conrad, Mosse strikes a decidedly romanticised tone of imperial nostalgia through maintaining the myth of Africa as a continent that exists beyond language and words. Mosse contrasts the performative aspect of travel with his pursuit of the 'ineffable' and the 'verg[ing]-on abstract'(129). Mosse's tracing of the reasons why he chose the Congo echo the novel's opening. Conrad's novel begins with Marlowe recalling his childhood fascination with maps, and the infinite places and possibilities they offer him. In this retracing of the text, the map in Conrad's novel mirrors the camera as offering both a mimetic and interpretive function.

The limits of language and representation form the central rationale behind his search for alternative forms of representation. Mosse explains that he chose the Congo because it represents a place at the limits of language and understanding. Mosse deliberately evokes *Heart of Darkness* for its enactment of the idea that humanity is capable of behaviour that defies language and representation. His desire to 'represent narratives so painful that they exist beyond language' demonstrates what Mbembe notes as the central metaphor of Africa in Western cultural life. J.M. Coetzee further describes the curious typology of Africa as the inexhaustible 'image-bank' of the West as we see with Mosse reinvention of Conrad through *Infra* (Coetzee, 1987: 19).

For Mosse, the question of how to represent the Congo can be elucidated through the contrasting styles of Casement and Conrad, and a return to Conradian modernist innovation over Casement's analytical taxonomy of colonial crimes:

> Compared with Casement's exhaustive factual research into Belgian colonial activities, *Heart of Darkness* is laden with classical references, and written in a language so experimental it pushed the literary form almost to the breaking point […] The difference in approach between Roger Casement's humanitarian research and Joseph Conrad's 'awful fudge' can be seen as a dialectic of conscience and consciousness, art and activism. It is the problem at the heart of my practice (Mosse et al., 2013: 5).

Using the comparative artistic and political praxis of Conrad and Casement, Mosse positions the innovative artist as a figure inherently more capable of social and culturally transformative intervention than the social and political activist. Conrad and Casement are made to embody opposing poles of 'conscience and activism' and 'art and consciousness' (Mosse et al., 2013: 5). This somewhat rudimentary paradigm overlooks,

however, the nuances of form and representation and the problems of asserting such bounded categories.[27]

For Mosse, as previously mentioned, the role of the artist is to push the limits of form, to renounce the analytical and be swept away to the 'unspeakable destination' to which such artistic endeavours lead. Clearly, there are problems with Mosse's projection of such bounded assumptions upon an African war-zone. Not least that it produces a work that is rigidly addressed to the Western canon, exhibited to a Western audience, and concerned with the discovery of an authentic subjectivity for the Western artist.

Mosse, and his work in the Congo, thus becomes a form of artistic predestiny. Mosse's neo-gothic representation of the Congo in its artificial suffused glow and his invocation of Conrad in particular is deeply problematic, particularly when we examine the forms of epistemic violence in the original text and the ambiguous relationship of Conrad to the imperial state, which I will briefly outline before turning to Baloji's counter-move within the imperial archive that challenges the Conradian representation of the Congo as a place of timeless darkness.

The representation of the Congo as the threshold of civilisation and humanity exercises an unparalleled influence on the contemporary culture and the wider politics of representation that envelope the Congo today such as the neo-primitivism and neogothic aesthetics of Mosse's images. Within *Heart of Darkness* and the reformist literature of CRA's founders Morel and Casement, we can see a recurring ambivalence and anxiety about the moral defensibility of European imperialism.[28] What is clear is that all three of these figures write, albeit, often anxiously from within an imperialist lexicon in which the logic of racialisation and the epistemic violence of Western Enlightenment thought

[27] Michael Taussig explores the overlaps and imbrications of Conrad and Casement as a more critically productive space, testing the respective 'rhetorical power and political effect of social realism and mythical realism' (Taussig, 1992: 142).

[28] As Kennedy points out, 'compared to […] vituperations about Russia and Germany, Conrad's explicit attitude to British imperialism outside his fiction is more moderately critical' (Kennedy, 2012, p. 181). Indeed, in Conrad's work there is an idealisation of English political culture and sentiment, which he saw as being tragically forsaken: one is tempted to exclaim […] "il n'y a plus d'Europe." But as a matter of fact in the old days England had in her keeping the conscience of Europe (Conrad et al., 1988, p. 96). It is these ambivalences in the text over the nature of imperialism that make Conrad's decision to refuse an overt political stance against Leopold and the Congo Free State unsurprising (Meyers, 1973). Fobbing off Casement's attempts to recruit him to the cause of the CRA, Conrad declared that: 'I would help him but it is not in me, I am only a wretched novelist inventing wretched stories and not even up to that miserable game' (Conrad cited in Grandin, 2018).

are continually reproduced.[29] Whilst *Heart of Darkness* represents a departure from the masculine triumphalism of Stanley during the Conquest of Africa, the racial hierarchy of European modernity as well as a belief in a redemptive imperial project define both Conrad and other political reformers of the CRA.

Where Mosse's eschewal of realism and experimentation with Kodak Aerochrome reproduces a neoimperial aesthetic of primitivism and exoticisation of the Congolese, in Alain Gomis 2017 film *Félicité* (Gomis, 2017), realism is challenged but to an entirely different end. Gomis' film sees the fragile peace and independence of its titular heroine following her son's injury in a car accident. As Félicité attempts to find the money to pay for her son's treatment, the audience is given an insight into the everyday indignities and brutalities of poverty and failing systems of health and social care. Woven into these scenes of everyday Kinshasa, Gomis interlaces rural dream sequences of Félicité far from the urban cacophony of Kinshasa. Within these interludes, we see Félicité as an ethereal and silent figure gliding through the night. The shift in register and tone between these scenes disrupts the ostensible social realism of the piece.

Where Mosse's eschewal of realism alienates and estranges his subjects, *Félicité* makes clear its political solidarity with the heroine and through its use of a neorealist aesthetic casts the heroine into a mythical and cosmological space. The neorealism of Gomis' film and its focalisation of Félicité marks a strong contrast to the alienation and estrangement of Mosse's subjects. Moreover, Gomis's film is replete with symbolism and iconography of Congolese culture from the okapi that wanders alongside Félicité as a spiritual-like animal to the musical score of the Kasai All Star and the Orchestre Symphonique Kimbanguiste. As Gomis writes, these cultural references and the music of the piece are integral to the framing of the piece and the characterisation of Félicité. This focalisation of character into a distinctive cosmology of Congolese cultural and political life sits entirely at odds with Mosse's images, the titles of which intentionally revoke and estrange the subjects through their references to Western popular culture.

The centralisation of female struggle for independence in Gomis' neorealist portrait of the female, working class experience in contemporary Kinshasa sits in direct opposition to Mosse's retracing of Casement and Conrad through his travels to Eastern Congo and

[29] This time of imperial atrocity and international reform campaigns against the Congo Free State saw Conrad, on the one hand, lament England as the lapsed moral core of Europe and Casement, on the other hand, take up arms against the British state with fellow Irish nationalists. Following his reform work with the CRA, Morel went on to write inflammatory, racist polemics during the inter-war period, warning against the sexual threat of Black soldiers to European women (Reinders, 1968).

neoimperialist politics of representation. Gomis' intersplicing of modern day Kinshasa with a cosmological vision of Congolese struggle shares an experimentalism with form evident in the work of the Congolese photographer Sammy Baloji. Baloji makes a counter move and travels to the colonial archives of Europe, and cuts and intersplices visions of both the present and past in contorted and painful juxtapositions. Baloji's work channels the idea of the postcolony, and sees a countermovement back into the archive, to highlight the fundamental rupture of colonialism and its material reverberations in the present.

Mosse's claim that his work's lack of an overtly political character, in the manner of Casement for example, is belied by the fact that he uses military technology to create his particular vision of the Congo. Within Mosse's work resides a fundamental paradox between disavowing an openly political engagement with the Congo and the use of technologies of visual capture invented by the US military. Indeed, Mosse's argument that his work sits on the borderline of aesthetics and politics ignores the histories of imperialism and empire in contemporary representations of conflict and political failure in the Congo which allow him to construct his particular vision of the Congo. This co-constitution of the human and the technologies of imperialism in representations of the Congo in Mosse's images and the archives of reveal the deep historical connections between humanitarianism and imperialism. For Conrad, the colonisation of the Congo did not turn him towards anti-imperialist politics but, rather, served as a warning to 'proper' imperial nations on the potential danger of its excesses outweighing its original virtue. What Mosse's series demonstrates is that the 'failed state' enables artists to use militarised technologies of reconnaissance and surveillance for the production of knowledge.

It is the workings of these 'hidden' imperial technologies and histories that not only allow the Congo to once more be represented as a place of 'primitive sublime', but, also, erase the history of European imperialism and US neocolonialism in ensuring the continuation of hegemonic power relations between Africa and the West. The exploitative relationship to mineral resources remains what it was in the colonial era, and these resources, rather than enriching the lives of Congolese people, have enabled the US to develop the weapons and technologies it needed to become the world's military superpower. The fact that Mosse turns to these very technologies, rooted as they are in the neocolonial exploitation of the Congo, to engage in a 'pursuit of the sublime'(Mosse et al., 2013: 5), reveals a troubling complicity between aesthetics, neoimperial technology and militarisation. I

turn next to thought of Malcolm X to further develop these ideas on the relationship between imagery, humanitarianism, and imperialism.

1.5 Trick image: Malcolm X and the science of imagery

Mosse's reinvention of traditional conflict photography posits that aesthetic experimentation has a beneficial effect on our collective consciousness and engagement. Writing in another context, Malcolm X argued that images documenting violence, war and suffering exercised a far more dangerous function. As Ira Dworkin notes, Malcolm X saw the circulation of images of colonial violence as a far from innocent form of knowledge production. He argues that the manipulation of ideology through image-based discourses was critical to shaping dominant attitudes in the US towards the Congo Crisis away from international Black solidarity towards a patriotic nationalism. What he saw unfold during the Congo Crisis (1960-1965) led him to theorise the 'science of imagery' (Malcolm X cited in Dworkin, 2017: 257). For Malcolm X, the circulation of images of colonial and neocolonial violence without first understanding the 'science of imagery' posed a serious problem to the international Black freedom struggle. As such, he dedicated significant time to theorising the ideological manipulations of images during the global revolutionary convulsions of the 1960s.

Malcolm X commented extensively on the Congo Crisis and saw the workings of image and ideology as playing a key role in determining the outcome of the crisis. For Malcolm X, the story of the Congo and its articulation is integral to any analysis of US hegemony and its impact on African-Americans and colonised people across the world. In one of his last speeches before his assassination, Malcolm X spoke on the question of Black Revolution and international Black struggle at the height of the Congo Crisis. His speech, 'Not Just an American Problem' (Parks, 1965) is a call to arms and an important deconstruction of race, imagery, and ideology. Malcolm X focuses specifically on the construction of the Congolese nationalists as enemy and other during the height of the Congo Crisis. It is here that Malcolm X draws a parallel between the construction of Black criminality in America to the American sanctioning of military bombings in the Congo. It is through using Malcolm X's framework that we can see how histories of neocolonialism in Africa were crucial to American military dominance and white minority rule in Africa. This history fades from view with the return of neoimperial aesthetics and the imagination, once again, of the Congo as a wild borderland at the edge civilisation in which the western artist can search for 'truth' in the aesthetic of radical otherness.

According to Malcolm X, the trick of imagery and its active role in ideological control was exposed through the political machinations of the US during Congo Crisis: 'today your bag of tricks have absolutely run out. The world can see what you're doing' (Parks, 1965: 8). Here, Malcolm X draws out the relationship between Black Americans and the Congo Crisis as emanating from the same mechanisms of oppression. For Malcolm X, the science of imagery by which he means a predominant visual, cultural mode of framing moral and 'justified' violence enables state and militaristic violence against Black people at home and abroad the status of a legitimate and patriotic exercise.

Where Mosse identifies an exceptionalism in Congo's history, Malcolm X sees a uniform legibility of racism and imperialism from the US to the Congo. The elucidation of relations of power between national and international contexts finds its antithesis in the deliberate obscurantism with which Mosse characterises the First and Second Congo Wars. Through this shared experience of anti-Black state violence, Malcolm X proposed an ethical relationship and identification that crossed the borders of the nation-state. Through his dissection of the imagery of the Congo Crisis, Malcolm X demonstrates how hired killers are presented as humanitarian agents and Black resistance fighters are transformed into suspects. The science of imagery thus serves as a tool of ideological control of white supremacy and neocolonialism enabling US bomber planes and mercenaries from apartheid South Africa to appear as agents of humanitarian aid:

> they're able to do all of this mass murder and get away with it by labelling it "humanitarian," an act of humanitarianism. Or "in the name of freedom," "in the name of liberty." All kinds of high-sounding slogans, but its cold-blooded murder, mass murder. And it's done so skilfully, so you and I, who call ourselves sophisticated in the twentieth century, are able to watch it, and put a stamp of approval on it. Simply because it's being done to people with black skin, by people with white skin (Parks, 1965: 7).

The 'science of imagery' creates consent and legitimises the most egregious crimes as justifiable and enacted in the name of humanity. Here, the forces at work in the Congo could not be clearer and they stand in fitting contrast to Mosse's analysis of the present conflict in Congo as an 'intangible reality'. Malcolm's speech resolutely dissects the American view of the Congo Crisis and the production of imagery and knowledge. He continually returns to the image of a Congolese village bombed by American planes as a call to arms and a catalyst for an internationalist Black Revolution. Malcolm X's speech provides his audience with an aerial view of the forces of American imperialism and its disposable Black victims. Surveying this battlefield of American militarism and indiscriminate killing, he entreats his audience not just to identify with those Congolese

victims, but, also, to see how the exploited labour and tax dollars of African-Americans are funnelled into building bomber planes used to suppress internationalist Black revolutionary movements in Africa. What concerned Malcolm X, in the imagery of the US bombing of the Congo during the 1960-65 crisis, is reproduced in Mosse's work as nothing more than an experiment with form and aesthetics.

Malcolm X's indictment of US neoimperialism in the Congo, as a trick image of ideology, is silent in Mosse's work. Here, the violent realities of the Congo are an entirely dissonant reality, constituting rather, a detour into the abstract and intangible. Malcolm X's visceral description of a bombed out African village powerfully resonates as a Guernica-like image and global call to arms. Where Malcolm X breaks down the politics of race and imagery into their constituent parts to explain how it functions to legitimise violence and neocolonial oppression, in Mosse's work, the Congo ceases to yield these elucidating insights and instead pushes the artist to the limits of speech. For Malcolm X, the Congo Crisis exposed American imperialism to the world and symbolised a historic moment for international Black struggle. In Mosse's analysis, however, there is no structure or system of oppression that accounts for the conflict and violence of the region. Instead, the Congolese are cast as an amorphous band of rebels and agents of chaos with questionable loyalties. In this way, Mosse takes the conflict in the Congo from any historical context of oppression, exploitation and neocolonialism and instead it is the Congo itself in its innate character responsible for the turmoil it finds itself.

1.6 Remastering the archive

Baloji consciously enters the colonial archive and stands decisively askance as an interloper and outsider. His work frequently returns to the rupture of colonisation and this experience is represented through the jagged cuts of archival images sutured to contemporary Congolese landscapes. Whilst continually signalling the reverberations of the past in the present, Baloji states that there is something distinctive going on in the present. The undercurrent of anxiety over understanding power in the present and the limit of the archive accompanies this archival reconstruction. Indeed, the space of the archive is inherently unstable. As Mbembe writes, whilst it is designed to give the illusion of 'totality' and a closed off history, it remains an active site of power, knowledge, and state-building (Mbembe, 2002: 19). Baloji's work highlights the expansive materiality of the colonial archive versus the destruction and denudation of colonised lands and people. When we view the colonial archive alongside these vistas of colonial extraction, we can immediately see the intertwinement of the 'failed state' and the colonial archive.

In this way, reports of extreme poverty, conflict and casualties, that remain the dominant discourse on the Congo in mainstream media, are contextualised within histories of global capitalism and colonial violence.

Baloji's suturing of the archival and the historical to contemporary derelict African landscapes is more complex than its initial suggestion of continuity between past, and present. Baloji's method illustrates Mbembe's rejection of the archive as linear. Instead, he argues that:

> the archive is fundamentally a matter of discrimination and of selection, which, in the end, results in the granting of privileged status to certain written documents […] the archive is, therefore, not a piece of data, but a status (Mbembe, 2002: 20).

Baloji's conceptual reframing of Congo's history through visual bricolage, disrupts the dominant narrative of the postcolonial state as a linear story of cohesive movement and progression. Instead, Baloji presents us with a radically dissonant visual narrative through his use of archival documents and the visual recording of contemporary wastelands in the sprawling networks of Congolese mining towns.

His use of style and form not only disrupts prevailing narratives of progress and development under neoliberal capitalism, but, confronts his spectators with the question that if the present and past remain indistinguishable realities, then who is benefiting from this situation and who, ultimately, bears responsibility? Baloji's remastering of the archive, through bricolage and mixed media techniques, is not simply an experimentation with form, but rather, an exploration of questions of truth, knowledge and responsibility that can be found through these artistic techniques of entanglement and rupture.

Baloji's work is primarily interested in the space between image and discourse and how working within this space has the potential to create political charge and disrupt the dominant ideologies and visual grammars into which Africa and the Congo are situated and constructed. Before his turn to photography as his main artistic medium, Baloji worked producing comic books. This professional background led to Baloji's curiosity with the interplay between image and semantics. His later experimentation with form and aesthetics stems from this early interest with the relationship between image and story, and how the semantics of image-based discourses can influence modes of perception.

Baloji's documentary film, *The Past in Front of Us* (Channel, 2015a) follows his discovery of an archive of negatives in the offices of a mining company from the colonial period, and the skull of Chief Lusinga in the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences. These stumbled upon images and artefacts pave the way for his exploration into the politics of narrative and affect. Baloji's film presents a series of works exploring the concerns of his work and his route as an artist to his subject matter.

Tracing his own family's roots to the southern province of Katanga, Baloji relates his shock in finding old negatives of a colonial administrator in a mining office containing a history that, 'we never learnt about'(Channel, 2015a). The active role played by discourse is a central preoccupation in *The Past in Front of Us,* and maps Baloji's attempt to critique and disrupt the dominant narratives and conceptual lenses through which Africa is traditionally imagined. For Baloji, the question centres on how images can be manipulated to 'make a fiction' through using 'photography as narrative'(Channel, 2015a). What strikes Baloji upon discovering this archive of negatives, containing the images of Congolese workers during the colonial period, is their simultaneity with the present conditions in Katanga.

Katanga today is a place which remains shaped by the same 'link to mineral resources', with 'micro-societies' forming around the major mining companies working in the area, improvised social spaces determined by the needs of global capital, and a makeshift home to both migrant workers from neighbouring African countries and detained workers forced into the mines. It is for this reason that Baloji describes the space of the mine as one of 'deportation' and 'slavery'; a space in which the past constantly reverberates. Baloji thus uses the archival images and colonial negatives with contemporary images to create a 'presence that looks to the past'(Channel, 2015b).

His manifesto echoes the literary critic György Lukács' writings on the form of the historical novel, which, when executed successfully, brings 'the past to life as a precondition of the present' (Lukács, 1965: 23). In Baloji's work, the industrial ruins and derelict remains of colonialism that, together form the backdrop of his images, draw a causative relationship between past and present. The abuse and exploitation of Congolese labour are rematerialized in derelict and empty sites underlining the capitalist logic of profit and extraction through the exploitation of Congolese labour. The re-materialisation of the archival and the historical, through the form of visual bricolage, reverses this process of extraction in order to create a 'presence', spectral and ghostly that draws forth lost and undocumented histories hidden in colonial archives.

The genesis of *The Past in Front of Us* constitutes an intriguing blend of personal and anecdotal histories, interwoven with hidden colonial archives and artefacts, rendered to the present reality. Upon discovering the archive of colonial negatives, Baloji remarks how these dehumanised images brought forth the spectre of slavery and colonisation and laid bare the violence of 'colonial rationality' (Channel, 2015a). Indeed, discourses of colonialism offered multiple 'rationales' to instituting colonial domination, enabling the appropriation of land and the construction of racialized ethnic identities within the social hierarchies of colonialism. In *Mémoire* (2006), we see the full-length profile shots of individual workers transposed to the industrial ruins of contemporary Katanga. The workers stand lined up with identification numbers stamped across their emaciated figures. The effect is one of ghostly presence in a deserted and apocalyptic ruin of colonial industrialism.

Figure 4: Sammy Baloji, Memoire (2006)

Baloji's unsettling of place, time, and context, through the alteration and fabrication of frames and borders disorientates the spectator and creates a sense of simultaneity of experience across history. The juxtaposition of the archival images and the industrial landscapes of Katanga serves to place 'new pictures in confrontation with the past'(Channel, 2015b). Baloji's work thus offers audiences a dissenting narrative, suggesting through the parallelism of past and present that, 'from the colonial period until now, it is the same reality'(Channel, 2015b).

Figure 5: Sammy Baloji, Untitled #25, (2006)

Baloji's focus on history and storytelling is in direct opposition to the media's coverage with its images of Africa which typically switch between rapturous narratives of development, or stereotypical images of inexorable conflict and political corruption. His attentiveness towards the continuing legacy of colonisation eschews these insidious narratives.

Baloji's images visually stage this entanglement, wherein the claims to a world order freed from the violent tyranny of colonial rule is directly called into question. Indeed, Baloji's image of labour exploitation under Belgian colonialism, and modern labour conditions in the mines of Katanga, directly challenges the idea that Congo's history, pre and post-Independence, are entirely distinguishable historical experiences. It further problematizes the Western concept of economic development and liberalism promising civil liberties, human rights, and individual freedom, forcing the viewer to look at the interconnections between capitalist 'development', colonialism, and labour exploitation. Baloji's work offers what Sam Okoth Opondo has defined as the 'counter-narrative', which questions the 'conventional narratives of nation building and international relations', evident in the predominantly statist approach of policy-makers, national and international institutions' (Opondo and Shapiro, 2012: 2).

Baloji unsettles the liberal narrative of Africa as a beneficiary of economic liberalisation and global development. Instead, his images foreground the exploitation and expediency of the 'extractive economy' and the precarious forms of labour and livelihood that exist in and around these sites. In many instances, however, Baloji's visual archive and its preoccupation with story, objectification, and memory reaches beyond offering a 'counter-narrative'. His multimedia bricolages engage in a wider praxis of 'epistemic resistance' against discourses of colonial rationality. Mineral exploitation, conditions of

migrant labour, and the impact of neoliberalism on Africa, are here articulated in narrative form. Whereas in Mosse's work, these forces of economic capture and exploitation are entirely absent, imagining eastern Congo as an undisturbed, pre-capitalist wilderness.

Baloji's second discovery of Chief Lusinga's skull, in the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, provokes a different meditation on the relationship between object and narrative. The hidden and sequestered archive of colonial workers is here replaced with the open display of colonial violence as a museum curiosity. The skull belonged to Chief Lusinga who was killed in 1890 by a Belgian capitalist. For Baloji, its display in the museum sees the violent history behind the killing and capture of the Chief disappear. It is the framing of the skull therefore, which determines the story told. In the museum, the Chief's skull is displayed alongside African masks, making it appear like an object of purely anthropological or aesthetic interest rather than an unabashed display of colonial violence and theft in the heart of the colonial metropole. The presence of the skull in the museum for Baloji has an entirely different meaning, and, by reframing and relocating Chief Lusinga's skull, the meaning is changed completely. The chief's skull rests in a liminal space between materiality and immateriality, subject, and object.

Baloji's confrontation with the collections of European archives as an African artist opens up a space of conflict and antagonism, not visible in the same way in the artistic intervention of Mosse, who, as previously argued, uses the Congo to stage a dialogue between himself and other canonical Western writers. Here, aesthetic alienation is replaced by the urgent question of how to respond to the form and materiality of the ethnographic archives of Europe as an African artist. Viewing the skull leads Baloji to ruminate on what is absent from the story; the occlusions, and erasures produced by its presentation as a singular ethnographical object. Meanwhile, Mosse continues the search for new forms of representation and realisation within the pre-established codes of literary and ethnographic representation.

The themes of fate and predestiny that frame the intertextuality operating in Mosse's work sit in striking contrast to the role of accidental discovery and encounter that constitutes the starting point of Baloji's work with archives. Baloji's use of photography and ethnographic objects represent a fragmented archive haunted by absences that allude to the disjointed shape of the present. Where Mosse seeks to push form to the breaking point, Baloji carefully reconstructs fragments of archives, colonial history, and cultural memory, without ever disturbing the truth and power of the absent. Baloji's

starting point that 'Africa is a European concept' suggests a prior scepticism towards form and knowledge production in the western canon. Moreover, his use of multimedia forms and use of archival artifacts work towards undermining the epistemology of western form and tracing an African agency within the colonial archive through attending to both the exhibited of the colonial archive and the silenced.

The construction of post-independence Congo as a 'failed state', resting outside the norms of Europe, sanctions its use as a site of experimentation in form and aesthetic by Western artists. Moreover, to circle back to the traditions of Casement and Conrad to the present day, erases present forms of colonialism at work in the relationship between Africa and the Global North. Baloji counters this idea and argues that we need to see the old, the archived, the missing, consciously disappeared in order to suture these different realities. What Mosse's work attempts to evade and silence, Baloji deliberately draws to the fore, jarring the viewer into an irresistible consciousness of history in the present.

The types of subjectivity we see in Mosse's photographs and, particularly, his portraits of soldiers as threatening 'others', is reversed in Baloji's portraits of miners in Katanga. Aubrey's argument that the social life of the Congolese has historically been left outside the frame in order to suit the desires and needs of the Western artist is clearly at work in Mosse's portraits. Baloji's portraits, on the other hand, capture the interior and social lives of the miners who live in the micro-societies formed around the extraction economy of global capitalism. Indeed, Baloji's images of contemporary mining industries in Katanga highlights how contemporary postcolonial artists can work within the colonial archive to produce stories and discourses that challenge the dominant ideology. Baloji's photos fundamentally interrogate the semantics of images, and the stories and narratives that are articulated through image. The juxtaposition of colonial documents with the present labour conditions in Katanga subversively stages the past and present, opening a space of tension in which conventional narratives of colonialism, the nation state and neoliberal development reside uneasily.

1.7 Conclusion

The reinvention and experimentation with form evident in both Mosse and Baloji's work imply either the limitations or, problems, of traditional modes of representation when it comes to capturing truth and reality in the Congo. Visual histories and modes of representation are at the forefront of both artists' methodology – Baloji, through his process of collecting material histories of labour in colonial Congo and Mosse, through

his conscious experimentation and reinvention of the form and style of traditional photojournalism.

Whilst both artists use innovative techniques, the resulting styles and visual grammars of their works produce a remarkable aesthetic incongruity and dissonant politics of representation. Baloji's conscious retrieval of the histories of labour and exploitation, and his decision to relocate them in derelict sites of colonial modernity, refutes Mosse's aesthetic proposal that the Congo is a place that demands a radically new language. A proposal in which the history of the Congo is evacuated from the frame, and, instead, projects the Congo into a stylised hyperreality. Thus, the work of Mosse and Baloji offer not only oppositional politics of representation but radically different artistic proposals over how the Congo should be represented today.

Chapter 2 Undoing epistemic violence: subversive forms in the fictions of Alain Mabanckou, Sony Labou Tansi and In Koli Jean Bofane

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore how literary form, style and the wider politics of representation are subverted in three Congolese novels. The authors of these texts Alain Mabanckou, Sony Labou Tansi and In Koli Jean Bofane all disrupt and destabilise expressions of epistemic violence through the use of subversive literary strategies. Bofane destabilises dominant Western narratives, from early colonial representations of barbarity to iterations of failure and erasure, by centering the Congo as a 'testing ground' and centrifugal point in the history of capitalist modernity 'supply[ing] the whole world with rubber' in the First World War to providing the uranium for the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Bofane and De Jager, 2018, 174). His novel *Congo Inc. Bismarck's Testament* (2018) traces the nightmarish repercussions of the West's experiment in the Congo as it unfolds across the Ituri rainforests and the smog-filled cities of the Global South. Meanwhile, Mabanckou elects to use the picaresque form in *Black Moses* (2017) returning to scenes of his childhood in Pointe Noire (Republic of the Congo) at a time of revolution and encroaching authoritarianism. Finally, Tansi, writing under the repressive regime of the People's Republic of Congo (1969-1992), explores the body of the sovereign and the politics of the grotesque as an allegory in order to critique postcolonial power and tyranny in his 1981 novel *L'etat Honteux/The Shameful State* (Tansi, [1981] 2016). Whilst these texts are written in different styles and situated in different historical contexts and locations, they each subvert the traditions of literary form to deliver searing critiques of power using these different strategies and formal devices.

Using these different forms, all three authors explore the possibilities of agency, power, and knowledge through the subversion of epistemic coloniality. The complexity of the postcolonial picaro, the 'desacralisation' of the sovereign body and the representation of the Congo as the centrifuge of history all disrupt the universal narratives of Western modernity and epistemic racism that position the Congo as the 'degree zero'(Mirzoeff, 1998: 171) of progress and civilisation. All three texts question and unravel dominant ways of seeing and thinking about the Congo, encapsulated by neo-Conradian discourses, through the exploration of the limits of form and the reimagination of the literary

tradition. Before exploring these texts in more depth, I examine the epistemic violence of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and neo-Conradian discourses to understand how they re-assert the epistemic violence of Conrad and European imperialism on contemporary Congo.

2.2 Rearticulating Conrad's epistemic violence in imaginations of the 'failed state'

The abuses of the Congo Free State were the subject and backdrop to Joseph Conrad's canonical 1899 text *Heart of Darkness*, which traces the journey of Christopher Marlowe up the River Congo unravelling, in turn, the story of the feared and enigmatic Mr Kurtz. Whilst *Heart of Darkness* has been read as an anti-imperialist text by some critics (Watts, 1983; Hawkins, 1982), this claim remains contentious. I argue that it is better understood as a text of gothic imperialism, which supplants the hitherto dominant heroic narrative of colonisers such as Henry Morton Stanley and Leopold II, with depictions of colonialism's transgression, psychosis and excess.

The gothic landscape of the text and its experimental modernist style has lent itself to contemporary representations of the 'failed state', which we see most explicitly in Mosse's work. As previously argued, the invocation of Conrad by contemporary artists and cultural producers working in the Congo is an already problematic proposition due to the racialised tropes and epistemic violence within the original text. What is clear is that the Congo was simultaneously constructed in the global imagination as the performative site of a superior form of white colonial masculinity in the mould of Stanley and its ultimate transgression in the gothic imperialism of Conrad. Despite this dual signification, the racism and epistemic violence of colonial modernity unite these two imaginaries and shape both these tales of 'moral' deeds and gothic misdeeds. Here, I want to briefly outline how epistemic violence functions in the text through characterisation and the use of gothic modes of representation and how this particular style is reproduced today in discussions of the 'failed state'.

The widespread contemporary rearticulation of Conrad and allusions to the Congo as the 'heart of darkness' is typically justified on the grounds that the politics of the novel are at heart, anti-imperialist. However, the anti-imperial politics of the novel are debatable and do not detract from both the epistemic violence and racist characterisations of Conrad's text. The transgressive figure of Kurtz is interwoven with racialised depictions of the Congolese. For instance, Kurtz's African mistress appears to Marlowe 'like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose' (Conrad, [1899]

2015: 66). Crucially, such depictions locate the Congolese within the gothic environment of the forest, as opposed to the steamboat, an environment responsible for luring Mr Kurtz from his previously honourable life as a colonial officer into an unrecognisable tyrant. It is these racialised tropes of the 'inscrutability' and 'wild' nature of the Congolese and the generalised logic of racialisation that runs throughout the text which undermine the text's claim to a politics of anti-imperialism.

Critics like Watts and Hawkins, who read *Heart of Darkness* as anti-imperialist, understand the gothic morphology of Kurtz as the result of the corruption and malaise of the imperial psyche. However, Conrad signifies Kurtz's transformation and his transgression through his assimilation to the behaviours and customs of the natives. For example, Marlowe's view of the Congolese as being in any way proximal or equal to him produces an illicit thrill and fear:

> they howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity - like yours - the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being meaning in it which you - you so remote from the night of the first ages - could comprehend (Conrad, 2015: 39).

In this passage, the representation of the Congolese is one of barbarity, 'wild' excess and primeval desire. As a gothic imperial text, *Heart of Darkness,* simultaneously expresses its disquiet about empire as a civilising mission whilst exercising an epistemic violence against its Black African characters in whose representation is entirely bodily as opposed to cerebral.

Conrad's representation of the African jungle and the Congolese sit firmly within the imperialist lexicon of late Victorian and early modernist writing reflecting the logic of racialisation that stemmed from the 'widespread desire to "scientifically" prove the superiority of the white' (Barringer and Flynn, 2006: 167). Conrad's image of the Congolese in the novel is not without allure, however, and the faintest traces of human commonality that Marlowe accords this spectacle is a moment of shocking realisation; one that Marlowe claims as a test of masculinity, reaffirming both his status as a modern and civilised man and his elemental affinity with the spectacle of 'primordial' Africa.

Conrad presents the reader with both the colonial mind that is 'diseased' through the representation of Kurtz and the idealised European man in the self-possessed and moral

character of Marlowe. A character who, to a certain extent, humanises and redeems Kurtz through demonstrating equally his disapprobation and empathic connection with Kurtz. Marlowe's empathic connection with Kurtz stems from his recognition that in the Congo he could also transform into Kurtz.

The meeting of Kurtz and Marlowe brings the colonial ideal and gothic into the same fictional space locating the terror and violence of imperialism as the potential fates of both men. The presentation of Marlowe and Kurtz as mirroring figures – one idealised and the other his gothic and fabulous counterpart - reifies Africa as a site of imagination and seduction in which the temptation to 'violence' and 'terror' is either resisted or acquiesced. Thus, Conrad both critiques the coloniser's surrender to forces of violent tyranny as well as reasserting the strength of European man's ability to overcome the central challenge of Africa as the terra nullius of Western 'civilisation'. Colonial violence is thus rationalised through the construction of Western 'civilisation' and Africa as the 'dark continent' and the danger of 'crossing-over' the racial, epistemic boundaries of colonial modernity. As Marlowe learns of Kurtz's death, he ponders the fragile distinctions between them:

> It is in his extremity that I seem to have lived through. True, he had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. And perhaps in this is the whole difference; perhaps all the wisdom, truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible (Conrad, 2015: 77).

Ultimately, what divides Marlowe and Kurtz is whisper-thin and both men are involuntarily summoned to either side of the 'threshold'. Conrad positions Kurtz and Marlowe as prisoners to this place as opposed to its architects and functionaries. In doing so, Conrad universalises and iconises the fascistic impulse of Kurtz in which we all hover on the same threshold.

Epistemic violence in the neo-Conradian genre

The first imperial narratives on the Congo such as Henry Morton Stanley's *The Congo and the Founding of Its Free State,* were preoccupied with the idea of 'discovery' and the final exploration of African 'terra nullius'. This exploration and 'discovery' of the Congo was done so with the explicit objective of exporting 'civilisation' to the Congo. The so-called 'civilising mission' and discovery quest offered a romantic genre in which the brutal realities of the colonial regimes could be concealed and 'sold' to the public (Stanley, 2011). The representation of the Congo as a blank terra nullius continues today. For

example, echoing Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Tayler describes an all-consuming obsession with the Congo that begins with the imagination of the territory through the enormous maps he lays out before him:

> I laid out the charts on my living room floor and they stretched from wall to wall. Zaire is roughly a quarter the size of the United States. In its monotonous green expanses, what catches the eye, like some monstrous, half-extended claw, is the three-thousand-mile-long Congo River (Tayler, 2010: xvi).

In Tayler's text, the Congo is equal parts 'monstrous' and 'monotonous'. The River Congo, through Tayler's gothic reimagination emerges from the map as a 'half extended claw' (Tayler, 2010: xvi). This representation of the River Congo as one of gothic monstrousness stretches from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* to Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* as the ultimate source of 'darkness' and the zero degree point of 'primitivity'. Genres of realism and the gothic are interchangeable in the Congo, with the suggestion that it is the unique topography of the Congo which lends itself to imaginative excess in the Western writer and not the cultural predeterminations and excesses of the Western imaginary when it comes to representations and knowledge produced about Africa. To suggest the latter would be to undermine the fundamental colonial epistemology of European modernity that asserts the supremacy of the European male character and civilisation as one of rationality and science as opposed to the 'uncivilised' state of African and other non-European cultures.

Whilst the relationship between literature and imperialism has always been multifaceted, Talal Asad contends that 'imperializing power has made itself felt in and through many kinds of writing, not least the kind we call "fiction"'(Asad, 1990, p. 240). The expansive corpus of neo-Conradian fiction and neoimperial travel writing that retraces and reproduces the politics of representation of *Heart of Darkness* attests to this continuation of 'imperializing power' on the borderline of fictional and non-fictional writing.

Contemporary reproductions of this form like Tayler's erase the political contexts and motivations of their production and dissemination. This erasure goes hand in hand with an overt celebration of the imperial quest as a narrative genre. A form that replaces modes of colonial discovery with 'self-discovery' thereby reaffirming the authorial position of the male, white subject in contemporary culture. In this way, these texts are divorced from the sinister political contexts of their initial production and presented as innocuous form of nostalgia. This nostalgic form is insidious in its dehistoricising

impulse, particularly when we know that Leopold II was himself keenly aware of the importance of literature to the establishment of the Congo Free State and sought out figures such as Stanley to control the narrative on Congo and its violent and duplicitous acquisition.[30]

Within neo-Conradian literature, the essential differences between the West and Africa are reproduced in which Africa is the metonymic signifier of 'darkness' and the West Enlightenment and civilisation. The anthropologists Jean and John L. Comaroff argue that the historical distinction between the cultural products of the West and non-West persists to this day. This distinction demotes the non-Western world to:

> reservoirs of raw fact: of the historical, natural and ethnographic minutiae form' providing a stage in which 'Euromodernity might fashion its testable theories and transcendent truths, its axioms and certitudes (Comaroff and Comaroff 2015: 1).

Depelchin examines this enduring hegemony of cultural distinction determining the production and reception of knowledge. He argues that it is this characteristic which constitutes the main 'syndrome' of Western culture, namely the conviction among its carriers that knowledge as defined, understood and practiced by them cannot be modified by knowledge contained in the 'discovered societies' (Depelchin, 2005: 7). These distinctions between knowledge production in the West and non-West are upheld through these epistemic boundaries and totalities in which the knowledge of the non-West is seen as bounded in tradition, regressive and non-agentive.

This overriding logic not only distinguishes the cultures of the West and the non-West, but actually, demotes them to a lesser form of cultural and epistemic value. This logic is reflected in literary representations of Africa and the Congo in recent Western travelogues and novels such as Jeffrey Tayler's *Facing the Congo* (2000) and Marcus Stevens's *The Curve of the World* (2008). Tayler's text contains elements of both travelogue and memoir and represents the Congo as a space of spiritual and cultural renewal or, as the Comaroffs argue, a 'reservoir of raw' knowledge.

[30] Leopold's coveting of Henry Morton Stanley to bolster his bid to gain control of the Congo are documented by Ira Dworkin who notes that 'Stanley's career demonstrates the deep entanglements of literary work and imperialism […] his [Leopold's] editorial markings remain visible in the margins of Stanley's The Congo and the Founding of Its Free State' (Dworkin, 2017, p. 36).

In Tayler's travelogue, the author is compelled to travel to Zaïre with the overwhelming feeling that his life has lost meaning and direction. At the beginning of the text, Tayler is in the midst of an existential crisis and his spiritless disconnection with his normal everyday reality consequently spurs his decision to make an impromptu visit to Zaïre. For Tayler, Zaïre represents the unlikely, yet most promising, answer to his existential crisis.

The weaving of travelogue and elements of memoir and autobiography creates two distinctive registers in the novel. His life in Moscow is beset with feelings of angst and depression whilst in Zaïre, we see Tayler revitalised and emboldened in his connection to the world. Zaïre, tellingly, exists separate to his normal 'life' and rather, represents a necessary and 'dangerous' detour which ultimately enables Tayler to return to his own life in Moscow with a revitalised sense of purpose and self-worth. Tayler's text presents the Congo as a formless and dangerous place that, in turn, demands the rational energies of the Western subject:

> in Zaïre, long infamous in the West as the "heart of darkness" […] the tendency to exaggerate would be equally pronounced. I would rationally assess risks and surmount them (Tayler, 2010: xvi).

Tayler's exercising of these rational energies and his shift into survival mode are all crucial to the recovery of his sense of identity and purpose. The author crafts a sense of mutual dependency in the relationship between narrator and place. The relationship functions to restore order both in the internal psyche of the narrator and Zaïre as the metonymic signifier of Africa's 'darkness' and 'chaos'. The continuation of these signifiers point to what Charlotte Mertens describes as contemporary 'frames of empire' that are inscribed upon the Congo which work to affirm the authority of the white male subject within the imperial imaginary of darkness, chaos, and disorder (Mertens, 2017). Here, the Congo marks a space in which the internal psychological world of the narrator and the socio-political reality of the Congo and the concomitant forms of memoir and travelogue are interwoven in order to restore the spirit of the western male subject.

In Tayler's text, Zaïre remains an 'infamous' place riddled with danger in which the author cannot afford to drop his guard and, furthermore, entrust his rational spirit if he is to overcome the risks and dangers it poses. The depiction of the Congo as lawless and dangerous and its juxtaposition with the superior reason of the European demonstrates the author's channelling of Conrad and Stanley. However, as Rob Nixon suggests, the reproduction of Conrad within non-fiction genres, such as travel writing, has distinctive

cultural effects and has successfully elevated Conrad's discourse from 'one fin-de-siècle fictional representation of an African colony into the "factual" rhetoric of travel literature'(Nixon, 1991: 178). Conrad's gothic tale of madness and imperial angst is thus transplanted into the realm of memoir, non-fiction, and travel writing conferring upon its representation of Africa, and the Congolese, who are portrayed in the lurid and grotesque form of the genre, a degree of 'facticity'.

Bofane satirises the use of Africa as a 'solution' for the existential crisis of the Western subject and the ubiquitous appearance of this trope across the modern Western literary canon. In his novel *Congo Inc. Bismarck's Testament,* the appearance of outside travellers such as the character of Aude Martin, a Belgian social anthropologist on field research, are a source of suspicion and mockery. Their high-minded attitude is given short shrift by the protagonist of Bofane's novel, Isookanga. In one scene, an increasingly combative conversation between the protagonist and the Chinese migrant worker Zhang Xia leads Isookanga to declare that 'You're like everyone else: you need Congo to develop yourself'(Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 141). Meanwhile, Martin dispenses prejudiced generalisations about the Congo whilst pursuing her research studying the Ekanda clan to which Isookanga belongs. She makes the following offhand comment to Isookanga 'I wonder what the Congolese would do without their music […] it's all you have, but what a treasure'(Bofane and De Jager, 2018, 120). Bofane's poking fun at the egocentricity of the Western subject and the representation of the Congo as the formative challenge to the Westerner's development is disrupted through the style and form of his novel which I will explore in more detail later in the chapter.

This idea of Congo as a testing ground for the 'theories and transcendent truths of Euromodernity', as well as a stage to showcase the fortitude of the white, male, European as the embodiment of 'Euromodernity', is a recurring narrative convention from Conrad to Tayler. A politics of representation that has traditionally encircled the Congo crossing literary and visual culture to advocacy and the media. For Bofane, the neo-Conradian traveller is a recurring and unavoidable cultural phenomenon given the transformation of the Congo as a site of literary pilgrimage for disaffected and alienated Westerners; his disdain for which is made clear through Isookanga's sardonic response to Xia.

In addition to Tayler's text, the discursive construction of the Congo as a site of development, challenge, and realisation for the Western subject is utilised in Marcus Steven's novel *The Curve of the World* (2008). Stevens' novel narrates the adventure of Lewis Burke, an American businessman, who finds himself embroiled with rebel armed

groups and is forced to survive in the Congolese rainforest. Stevens' narrator, Lewis, is a figure of alienation until he finds himself in the Congo following an emergency landing on his return flight home. The challenges faced by Burke, in the Congo, serves to reignite his spirit and connection with the world. Like Tayler's *Facing the Congo*, this text invokes many of the tropes of neo-imperialist writing, he carries with him a copy of Henry Morton Stanley's *Through the Dark Continent* (1878) and the Congo represents less 'an actual country, a real place, more of an ominous river coiled in a hostile jungle' (Tayler, 2010: 10). Moreover, the similitude of the tropes and narrative conventions of these texts demonstrates the ability of Conradian mythology to traverse fictional and non-fictional modes with the positioning of the Congo as outside reality.

Like Tayler, Stevens uses the colonial gaze and the narrative conventions of the imperial genre. As Lewis contemplates the passing African landscape through his cabin window, he finds only 'unappeasable darkness and merely his imagination to illuminate it' (Stevens 2008: 2). The conventions of which see the mental and physical challenges posed by the 'unappeasable darkness' successfully overcome by the protagonist affirming the authority and vitality of the male, white subject.

The reproduction of the traditional colonial role through the characterisation and narrative conventions is evident in both Stevens and Tayler's texts. This is reflected more widely in mainstream literary and media culture, where we find expressions of nostalgic longing for the authoritative male figure through popular rewritings of imperial adventure and 'heroism' in the style of Henry Morton Stanley. A figure of imperial nostalgia embraced once again amidst the underlying anxieties of the shifting dynamics and power of race, gender, and masculinity in contemporary culture. Across fiction and non-fiction, narratives of masculine triumphalism in the face of Africa abound in popular culture that either celebrate the achievements of imperialists, with examples such as *Into Africa: The Epic Adventures of Stanley & Livingston* (Dugard, 2003), or attempt to recreate the identity and narrative of such imperial accounts in contemporary settings, which we see in the cases of Tayler and Stevens.

In Tim Butcher's *Blood River: A Journey to Africa's Broken Heart* (2019) the Congo is represented as a dilapidated ruin, in which the local people have become inured to deprivation through the successive tragedies and brutalities of history:

> I walked by myself down to the water's edge and thought about the river […] the river was the thread running through the continent's bloody history, connecting me not just to Stanley, but to Leopold, Conrad,

> Lumumba, Mobutu and other spectres of Africa's dark past (Butcher, 2019: 342).

Here, the history of the Congo is collapsed into 'darkness' and 'spectres' through the threads of time and history symbolised by the River Congo. The image of the Congo as occupying a particularly fraught place in the Western imagination is clear in Butcher's text. Indeed, on arriving at his hotel the response of a night-watchman to the author's anxious call is immediate hyperbolised 'it was the tone of the Congo, drilled into its people first by gun-wielding white outsiders and then by cruel local militias' (Butcher, 2019: xii). This simultaneous celebration and contemporary reproduction of imperialism, through the representations of Africa as a tragic vista of ruins and 'darkness' in *Blood River,* demonstrates the continuing epistemic violence of knowledge production on Congo.

Surveying the cultural production on the Congo across different contexts and genres reveals a distinctive literary topography and central antagonism running between literature *about* the Congo from a Western perspective through neo-Conradian lens and literature and cultural production *from* the Congo by Congolese authors and artists. Indeed, these two contexts of cultural production construct distinctly antagonistic narratives about the Congo, its characterisation and representation in the global imagination. Of course, different cultural markets as well as the varying forms of transmission and circulation that shape audiences and patterns of cultural consumption massively inform the construction of different representations and characterisations of the Congo in the global imaginary.

The culmination of these antagonistic cultural forces is perceptible in the contentious space of cultural and literary production around the Congo and Africa more widely. This is evidenced through the struggle of African authors firstly to gain access to publishing markets and, secondly, to be properly remunerated for their work. The often contentious relationship between African authors and the predominantly white, Eurocentric publishing industry[31], specifically in relation to artistic autonomy and creative control, is

[31] The false choice between local publishing as a potentially bankrupting process for the African author and the paternal-like attitudes of international organisations is echoed by the Nigerian author Wole Soyinka, who dubbed his former publisher, the then prominent Heinemann African Writers Series, as the 'orange ghetto' (Zvomuya, 2008) in reference to the iconic orange titles of its publications and its problematically narrow conception of African literature. Today, campaigning groups, such as the 'Front de Libération des Classiques Africains', have called upon French publishing houses to relinquish their control of African literary classics published during the colonial era (Gary, 2019).

soberingly outlined by the Ghanaian poet Atukwei Okai. He gave the following reflection on the perils of publication, both locally and internationally, in the early 1970s:

> If you [the writer] set out to print anything on your own, the printing costs will stagger you. If you manage to print, the distribution difficulties will blow your mind. If you give your stuff to a local publisher, you will sympathize so much with his problems that you may not write again…So all our best work […] appears first to an audience which either regards us like some glass-enclosed specimen […] or like an exotic weed to be sampled and made a conversation piece […] or else we become some international organization's pet (Ashcroft, 1997: 481).

These struggles over the control of the African literary market are taking place at the same time in which literature about the Congo, exemplified by authors like Tayler, is predominantly employing a mode of nostalgia and pastiche to retrace the journeys of erstwhile imperial authors and colonisers. Thus, we see the imperial vestiges both in the literary reproductions of Conrad in popular culture, as well as, the dominance and control of European publishing houses in relation to African literature.

2.3 Picaresque subversion in Mabanckou's *Black Moses*

Within this cultural environment of imperial nostalgia, with its desire for strong, white, masculine heroes, Alain Mabanckou's postcolonial picaro, Moses, represents a radical subversion. Through his resurrection of the picaro, Mabanckou's novel uses an early modern literary form to explore coming of age under postcolonial authoritarianism in the People's Republic of Congo and the interplay of power, knowledge, and madness within the authoritarian system. Whilst not chronologically the first text to be published, Mabanckou, by reinventing the picaresque form, constructs in his prose a strange temporality that recalls both the picaresque satires of nineteenth century works such as, Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1850), and the darker and more experimental mode of twentieth-century modernism and African postcolonial fiction. It is this synthesis of traditional and experimental forms which makes its subversive capacities a useful starting point.

The novel opens with the hero Moses, who lives in an orphanage in Loango under the increasingly dictatorial rule of the director, Dieudonné Ngoulmoumako. Whilst looking out for his younger and more vulnerable friend Bonaventure, Moses's tussles with rival orphan Little Pepper and his gang of bullies. The harsh and disciplined existence that Moses leads at the orphanage is interrupted by a handful of eccentric, kind, and

rebellious characters such as Papa Moupelo, Sabine Ngiu and Doukou Daka who inspire Moses to imagine a different life beyond that of Ngoulmoumako's pious dictums.

Following his escape from the orphanage, Moses travels to Pointe Noire and joins a gang of thieves where he begins his campaign to become a legendary outlaw in the mould of the thirteenth century hero of English folklore, Robin Hood. Mabanckou's novel follows the traditional function of the picaresque narrative as primarily a form of entertainment for the reader. Furthermore, his picaresque hero subverts virtually all the traditional categories and leaden tropes of the hero in the neo-Conradian genre espoused by Tayler and Stevens. Moses, the picaro of Mabanckou's novel, is a local and provincial character, as opposed to the global and cosmopolitan subjects of Tayler and Stevens.

The heteronormativity of these traditional subjects is further subverted through the gender-fluid identity of Moses. For example, in the consultation scene with Dr Lucien Kilahou, who Moses visits in an attempt to heal his amnesia, Moses immediately confounds the doctor with his first question: "'Are you a man or a woman?' Without hesitating I replied 'It depends on the day on the month'"(Mabanckou, 2017: 168). Mabanckou reclaims a form of subversive agency through the postcolonial picaro who inhabits his own distinct moral universe and is unmoved by the pressure to conform and follow prescribed codes of thought and behaviour set out by the director of the orphanage Dieudonné Ngoulmoumako, who believes 'the President was on a par with Jesus Christ' (2017: 29). Moreover, as fitting the literary tradition of the picaro, Moses belongs to the lower classes and lives on the fringes of society, first as an orphan in Loango and then as a justice-crusading, semi-vagrant in Pointe Noire. Meanwhile, the heroes of Tayler and Stevens texts represent figures that are supposed to symbolise law and order juxtaposed with the 'chaos' of Zaïre/Congo.

The paradoxical nature of the neo-Conradian hero and the African picaro is further evidenced by the radically averse narrative trajectories of these characters. Whilst both Tayler and Stevens follow a linear trajectory towards narrative resolution and self-affirmation, Moses follows an altogether different narrative journey. In Mabanckou's novel, we see the unravelling of the postcolonial subject through the picaresque narrative which captures the absurd and terrifying conditions of life under an authoritarian one-party state. The overwhelming power of the state to dictate the conditions of life is relayed early in the novel in which, we discover that Moses is telling his story in the present day from the insides of a prison that stands in the ruins of the

orphanage in which he was born: 'I write these lines, imprisoned in this place that was once so familiar, but is now so very different' (2017: 8).

The character of Moses symbolises the spirit and romance of the outlaw amidst the oppressive structures of power in the postcolonial state from the orphanage to the authoritarian mayor Francois Makélé. As well as this symbolic effect, Moses's dreams of grandeur and his frequent misfires, in pursuit of this ambition, provide an important comedic element to the overarching pathos and symbolism of the text. Moses's determination to chart a moral path and bring justice to Pointe Noire through inhabiting the role of legendary English outlaw Robin Hood leads to a series of comic situations, as opposed to any profound directional change in the overall narrative arc of his character:

> Now I was the one dreaming of being Robin Hood, adopting his name, possessing […] that character's generous heart. And if by chance I found a mango thief being chased down by some redneck from the Grande Marché, I'd chase the pursuer, I'd helpfully put out my foot and the redneck would go down, while the delinquent, to my huge satisfaction, was able to scarper, jabbing his right thumb at me to express his thanks (Mabanckou, 2017: 110).

Mabanckou frequently pokes fun at Moses's gleeful efforts to redistribute wealth amongst the inhabitants of Pointe Noire with the knowledge that these 'goods […] had been accumulated by the wicked capitalists in our midst' (Mabanckou, 2017: 110). Moses's simultaneous determination and guilelessness produces a distinct and comical moral fictional universe that allows him to celebrate Moses as both an everyman and unlikely hero.

For Moses, the social underbelly of Pointe Noire constitutes a landscape infused with myth, fantasy, and old-world traditions. To Makélé, however, this coterie of rebels and bandits represent the 'mosquitos of Grande Marche'(113) and his election campaign promises to rid the town of their 'infestation'. Against the weapons of the powerful elite, Moses and his band are powerless. In response, they beat a hasty retreat to the Côte Sauvage where they re-establish themselves and hunt the local animals. Where in traditional folklore, the hero always wins in a battle of wits and valour, Moses and his comrades suffer a different fate at the hands of their opponents and are hounded out of town by 'militia armed with water guns, coshes and tear gas' after being labelled as 'pests' and 'vermin' that need to be eliminated from the city (113). Mabanckou thus depicts a world that is overall far less forgiving and amenable to romantic narratives of valour and heroism in the fantasy worlds of myth and folklore.

As such, everything which gives Moses joy and communion is steadily stripped away from him until he suffers a nervous breakdown. Mabanckou constructs the romance of the outlaw in order to demonstrate the impossibility of this mode of existence both inside and outside the authoritarian system. In the final scene of the novel, Moses returns to the orphanage, which is now, tellingly, a facility for the criminally insane. Thus, in Mabanckou's interpretation, the picaresque hero is celebrated, but, equally, condemned by the system, subverting the traditional picaresque form in which the hero presides over a just settlement and corrects all prior wrongdoing and injustice in the narrative.

2.4 The global and the picaro

Before I explore the novel in more detail, to show how Mabanckou uses the picaresque form to comedic and subversive effect, as well as social commentary, I want to briefly situate Mabanckou's use of the picaresque form within his diverse literary œuvre and explore his decision to use this genre at this particular point in his celebrated literary career. I suggest that Mabanckou's choice of the picaresque genre in *Black Moses* and his construction of the picaro appears at a deliberate distance from his own cultural status as a 'global' African writer.

Across his many works of literary fiction, Mabanckou has disrupted traditional modes of recognition when it comes to the long-held distinctions posited between African and European cultural products. This disruption materialises through his subversion of literary form, genre, and the conceptualisation of his own identity as a writer. Moreover, his choice of the picaresque form, at this point of his career, eschews the cultural idiom of the global and cosmopolitan to focus on scenes of provincial and urban African life. As an author who has deftly reinvented several different genres and forms, Mabanckou's bypass of modern literary forms and his decision to adapt the pre-modern picaresque narrative for *Black Moses* sees him distancing himself from more typical realist and modern literary forms.[32]Mabanckou's portrayal of Moses as the picaro subverts the 'globalised subjects' of neo-Conradian fiction and instead looks to other traditions of knowledge and storytelling from oral storytelling to folklore and myth.

The figure of Moses as a misguided yet, well-intentioned, crusader is distinct from Mabanckou's earlier use of the anti-hero in his 2009 novel *Black Bazaar* (translated into

[32] Modernist western literature's preoccupation with Congo and Africa is striking. This central preoccupation casts a long literary shadow. For example, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* Graham Greene's *A Burnt Out Case* (1960) and Evelyn Waugh's *Black Mischief* (1932), all represent Africa as a place of literary and artistic escape as well as a land of 'barbaric' custom.

English in 2012). Whilst *Black Moses* uses the picaresque form to critique the continuing oppressions of postcolonial states and colonial legacies upon the African subject, the two novels nevertheless share a similar literary style. A style that consists of imaginative and exuberant satire that expresses a searing criticism of the corruptions of both colonial metropole and former colony.

Black Bazaar looks to the tradition of the anti-hero and refuses to give his narrator 'the buttologist' any emotional gravity. An African immigrant, sapeur and aspiring writer, his friends rename him 'the buttologist' due to his belief that 'you can understand human psychology from the way people shift their rear ends' (Mabanckou, 2012: 65). However, the comedy and levity of the novel's protagonist is effectively juxtaposed with the underlying commentary on the burdensome political stakes of the present. Like Algerian author Tahir Wattar's repellent antihero of *The Earthquake* (Waṭṭār, 2000), Mabanckou provides his readers with an overwhelmingly fallible guide, enabling him to weave a complex picture of France and the Congo that exists in part within the very limitations of the protagonist. Wattar's antihero, Shaykh Abdelmajid Boularwuh, also encapsulates the problems of the inaugural postcolonial state, openly displaying his distaste and antipathy for his fellow citizens: 'forcefully, he pushed away the hand of a beggar woman who got in his way, then took his shoes and headed towards the door of the mosque' (Waṭṭār, 2000: 30). The buttologist's lack of sincerity and the rank hypocrisy of Boularwuh demonstrate the unconventionality of the narrative hero within postcolonial fiction as a wider indictment on the failure of anticolonialism and the retrenchment of power within post-colonial states such as Algeria and the Republic of Congo.

In this sense Mabanckou, like Wattar, refuses to give postcolonial state any grandeur, preferring instead to present it as every bit as complex and problematic as the colonial metropole. This utilisation of a postcolonial anti-hero enables authors like Mabanckou to produce political critiques whilst avoiding the traps of a facile idealisation of the postcolonial subject. Not surprisingly, irony is a favoured literary weapon of postcolonial authors, enabling them to neatly sidestep the pomp involved in being hailed as 'leaders' of the nation. Moses's aspiration to be a heroic leader is not only side-tracked by the actions of the authorities, but, also, by his own guileless character, that is often driven to distractions by obscure questions of ethics and grammatology.

The satirical productions of Mabanckou and other postcolonial writers veer away from the revolutionary heroism found in works of anti-colonial literature. Fanon's poignant description of 'the wretched of the earth' is, in writers such as Mabanckou, recycled as

the contemporary flawed subjects that both guide and are guided by the postcolonial present. This sense of being at sea in the world effectively mirrors the essential predicament of the postcolonial writer, where nothing is secure and nothing can be assumed. Fanon's 'wretched of the earth' (Fanon, 1990b) have here returned, elevated to devastating effectiveness at unveiling the complexity of the postcolonial world.

If the subjects of Mabanckou's novels have been hitherto flawed and morally corrupt, or at the very least, corruptible, Moses represents an interesting departure within his œuvre. From the very beginning of the novel, Moses's instinct is to protect his vulnerable peer Bonaventure:

> I don't know why I always felt I was much older than him, and had a duty to protect him, even to raise my voice to him when necessary (2017: 52).

Moses struggles to explain why he feels 'much older' and where his sense of 'duty' comes from automatically assuming this parental-like role. With no knowledge of his family background, Mabanckou's orphan hero is a blank canvas with only a 'kilometrically long name' (2017: 3). A name that is bestowed upon him by the unorthodox priest Papa Moupelo who believes that a name should carry one's destiny. Mabanckou derives much humour from the pretensions of Moses's real name in his encounters with the citizens of Pointe Noire. For example, Maya Lokito, also known as Madam Fiat 500, a prostitute originally from Zaïre living in Congo-Brazzaville, upon hearing Moses's full name demands 'what idiot lumbered you with a pretentious name like that?' (2017: 125).

Underneath the humour of his 'pretentious' name, however, is his marking as an exceptional person and as a protector figure. Moreover, in the coercive world of the orphanage, the difference signalled by his name inspires fear amongst the party apparatchiks. Indeed, as he later learns from Nigaui, Moses is marked from birth as a threat to the system:

> [he] told the caretaker and corridor wardens to keep a very close eye on you, even at night, because he thought that around midnight or one in the morning you slipped out of your baby skin and turned into a northern giant, with a great big beard, like a member of the Resistance' (72).

Mabanckou reverses the traditional formulation of picaresque forms like *David Copperfield,* where the hero rises from his low class position to receive the recognition and just settlement he is due. In *Black Moses,* the threat that Moses represents at his birth is contained once more after Moses return to the orphanage, robbing him of both his freedom and future prediction as a 'giant' of the resistance. At the end of the novel, his

portentous name, and the predictions of his birth right amount to little, his power and social influence remain marginal and the towering edifice of the orphanage prove irresistible. Moses's journey from the orphanage and his eventual return to the same site as an adult prisoner, underlines the irresistible power of the authoritarian state in post-colonial Africa. Mabanckou's use of the picaro to map the multiple and irresistible workings of power in the postcolonial state echoes Judith Butler's argument on the figure of the prisoner as a 'state actively produced, maintained, reiterated, and monitored by a complex and forcible domain of power' (Butler and Spivak, 2011: 10). Indeed, Moses is subject to multiple forces of institutional and political apparatuses of power that restrict the mobility and freedom of the traditional picaro of early modern literature.

Mabanckou's subversion of literary expectation and his peregrinations as a writer have perhaps led to claims and counter claims on Mabanckou's role as a 'global writer' (Soumaré, 2016). His own meditations on identity and globalisation make a strong argument for cultural heterogeneity and inclusion as the only sustainable mode of existence for the writer:

> In France, people will consider me African, but when I meet them here in the United States, seeing me speaking French, they are going to say, "Thank God someone is speaking French," and they are going to call me a French guy. But back in France, they will think of me as someone who is speaking French with an accent, an African accent etc. So identity changes if you move from here to there. At the same time, I think that we need to add other cultures to our culture in order to become globalised without losing your mind (Soumaré, 2016).

Mabanckou's commentary speaks of the difficulties of being at 'home' in the global, particularly as a Black, African man. Inclusion as conditional on the perception of national identity, 'race' and otherness is reflected in his characterisation of Moses, who constitutes a shape-shifting figure adrift in the rapidly changing environment of the People's Republic of Congo. The experience of the Black man in the 'global' and urban/provincial setting are thus, despite their ostensible opposition, resonant of one another. Mabanckou's experience of racism and cultural chauvinism undercuts the idea of globalism and postmodernity as a fundamental transformation from the governing ideologies of Western modernity in regard to race, nation, and identity and the idea of 'belonging'.

For Mabanckou, the cost of negotiating these borders of race, nation and identity is high and prevents more critically nuanced ideas of 'global' and 'modernity' in contemporary culture that look beyond the Western canon. Mabanckou's shifting status, in the eyes of

his audience, reveals the racialised exclusions and hierarchies embodied in ideas of the global. It is these realities that fracture the liberal, cosmopolitan, and multicultural self-perception of the West. In the cultural idiom of postmodernism and within some postcolonial scholarship - in which we have 'all' moved to becoming global and cosmopolitan subjects - we see an increasingly prevalent cultural anxiety about fixing and locating African writers as either 'Western' or 'Non-Western'.[33] Thus, the concurrence of 'coloniality' within nominally decolonised and post-colonial states with the cosmopolitan imaginaries of postmodernism, postcolonialism and poststructuralism has produced a productive friction and tension on the question of how we conceive and challenge the hegemonies of colonialism and racial capitalism.

In 2015, the Ghanaian writer Taiye Selasi lamented the all-encompassing need to resolve the issue of identity and the location of the writer before any critical or literary engagement. She recounts her own experience of:

> [sitting] on a panel with two other female writers. A question was asked almost immediately: do you consider yourself an African writer? It seems that every new writer with any remote connection to the continent of Africa, either willingly or unwillingly, has first to wrestle with this question of identity before talking about what should matter most: their book (Selasi, 2015).

It is interesting that the rise of the 'global African writer' with the international success of writers such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Taiye Selasi has led to an even greater anxiety about fixing the identities and cultural geographies of African writers.[34] Something that is now an unavoidable cultural phenomenon according to Selasi. It is especially noteworthy that this anxiety often arises in the typically transnational and cosmopolitan spaces of book festivals, tours, and cultural events. The Comaroffs posit an epistemic distinction between the cultural products of the West and the non-West, which produces a global aesthetic alongside residual cultural anxiety about identity, culture and belonging. Indeed, this debate takes on new meaning in the wake of the Rhodes Must Fall movement and the fightback against imperial vestiges such as the CFA Franc across

[33] Sara Marzagora (2016) identifies the historically contentious relationship between African intellectual thought to the 'posts' of critical theory (postmodernism, postcolonialism and poststructuralism) and Sabelo Ndluvo-Gatsheni argues that discourse of this kind 'concealed global imperial designs' so that 'postcolonial states […] have remained hostage to the immanent logic of colonialism and coloniality' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012).

[34] The term 'African writer' has become a divisive topic of debate. The Kenyan writer Mũkoma wa Ngugi sees it as a term that holds little personal meaning beyond a geographical designation whilst the Zimbabwean writer NoViolet Bulawayo embraces the term arguing that 'if I deny the label, my work will scream otherwise'(Flanagin, 2013).

Francophone Western Africa which has placed renewed attention on decolonisation ("Macron," 2017).

These acts of naming and fixing writers within specific cultural geographies recalls the underlying rationalism and logic of colonial epistemology. This type of logic saw the creation of ethnic and national identities through the instrumentalization of scientific racism and the racialised ideologies of colonialism. Indeed, the impulse to geographically fix contemporary African writers within these categories that originate from colonial histories, constitute neocolonial acts of bordering and epistemic violence. Hence, why Mabanckou writes poignantly of 'becoming global without losing one's mind' (Soumaré, 2016). Mabanckou here also qualifies the assumption of freedom and mobility that is linked to the acquisition of a global readership and cosmopolitan cultural cache. Indeed, within this cosmopolitan framework, Mabanckou demonstrates how the logics of race, culture and identity are always in a state of flux.

In his travels as a global literary author, Mabanckou observes how he is treated in different ways according to the place. Mabanckou's globalism is one, however, that deliberately disrupts the colonial categories and cartographies of difference and exclusion. Moreover, his political sensibility underlines the necessity of cultural heterogeneity and vigilance against the durabilities of racism and cultural hegemony in the so-called 'liquid times' (Bauman, 2007) of post-modernity and globalisation. The fact that an author such as Mabanckou can be hailed simultaneously as a global writer and subject to acts of labelling and subjectification that reify the boundaries of literature, nation, culture demonstrates the durabilities of racism and coloniality within the 'globalised present'.

Mabanckou's picaro enters this cultural landscape as a figure who is fundamentally at odds with this way of thinking identity and belonging. He moves between different places, reinventing himself and finding a community of fellow misfits. His mutability thus make him impossible to fix within traditional literary conventions and narratives. Despite the mutable form of his character, however, the pervasiveness of colonial knowledge and influence is inexorable for Moses disturbing his autonomous and anarchic state of existence following his departure from the gang of rebels in Pointe Noire. In a state of near total abjection, Moses tends to six spinach plants which constitute the sum total of his possessions. His interfering neighbour, Kolo Loupangou, derides Moses's horticultural attempts and urges him to read classical French theory on gardening in order to become a 'success'. Even when Moses turns towards the very

margins of society to carve an entirely self-sufficient existence through growing his own food, he is never entirely free from the dominant systems of power and knowledge rooted in colonialism. Dominant systems that ensure Moses's disconnection with the earth and traditional culture. Mabanckou's exploration of the psychological interior of society's outcasts and non-conformists is suggestively reproduced in his own positioning as a global, postcolonial writer, and particularly in his refusal to serve as apprentice to hegemonic cultural forces and the alternative forms of identity, collective history, and memory within his novels.

Mabanckou's identity as a writer and public intellectual has often run counter to the expectations of what the role of a public intellectual and writer should be within the dominant culture. In 2018, Mabanckou penned an open letter to the French president Emmanuel Macron, refusing his invitation to become an ambassador for his newly launched Francophonie policy (Mabanckou, 2018a). In doing so, Mabanckou refuted the Western perception of the 'proper' role for the African postcolonial intellectual – namely to create spaces of cultural cohesion and concord across the Francophone world. This linking of African postcolonial literature and Francophonie tacitly recognises the sovereign cultural power of the colonial metropole.

Mabanckou's refusal and outspoken rebuttal is unsurprising, given his search for alternative connections that delink from Europe as the 'zero-point of epistemology' through his fiction (Mignolo, 2010: 159). According to Lydie Moudileno, the intertextuality and heterogeneity of his texts 'all contribute to the integration within the stories of a transnational and cosmopolitan library of world literature' (Moudileno, 2016). Moudileno's characterisation of Mabanckou as a custodian of 'world literature' and his outright refusal to act as an ambassador for the French government's Francophonie policy paints a more nuanced and critically self-reflective impression of Mabanckou's literary globalism ("Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français," 2007). His determination to disrupt Western cultural sovereignty, evident in his overt non-compliance with Macron's Francophonie policy, is reflected furthermore in his critique of the imperial use of language within the wider cultural debate between decoloniality and Francophonie.

On the complicity between literary production and imperialism, Mabanckou is clear. He points out that it was the French geographer Onésime Reclus who first coined the term 'francophonie' in his book *L'achons L'asie, prenons L'afrique* (Mabanckou, 2018a). Reclus used the term to soften what was, in actual fact, a desire to 'lancer dans une veritable

expansion colonial'(Mabanckou, 2018a). Moreover, he deemed this a necessary act in order to 'perennesier la grandeur de la France'(Mabanckou, 2018a). This full-scale and seemingly unlimited ambition to colonial expansion rested upon 'deux questions fondamentales 'ou renaître, comment durer?'(Mabanckou, 2018a).

A century later, with Macron's relaunched Francophonie policy, Mabanckou counters 'what is different today?' (Mabanckou, 2018a). He points out the absurdity of the perception of the French language as endangered, and therefore, in need of cultural protection and sustenance through the redoubling of efforts by its former colonies. This turn to former French colonies, as the new frontier of Francophonie, is problematic given that the French language and culture continue to denote a singular cultural and economic capital over indigenous African languages. This colonial legacy of French culture and Francophonie remains divisive. Reflecting on the 2013 Étonnants Voyageurs festival held in Brazzaville, the writer Siddhartha Mitter commented,

> for all the African topics and speakers, this was, in key ways, a French event. Its infrastructure arrived from Paris, including sound equipment and the personnel to run it, interpreters for the English speakers, and a mobile studio for France-Inter, the public-radio station, which devoted a day to live broadcasts. While local volunteers helped with logistics, the radio hosts, technicians, interpreters, and moderators were almost all French, giving many events a peculiar feel, with African panellists questioned and mediated by white people in various capacities. This underscored, almost to the point of caricature, how much France continues to shape arts production in its former colonies (Mitter, 2013).

The tension between new decolonial struggles in Africa and the contemporary revisioning of Francophonie, is articulated by the Congolese writer Bienvenu Sene Mongaba who rejects the framing of Congolese culture as part of the 'Francophonie': 'le Congo Kinshasa n'est pas un pays Francophone. On ne se forme pas dans une langue étrangère' (Mongaba, n.d.).[35] Mongaba thus argues that Congolese culture supersedes the narrow definition of Francophonie entirely.

Mabanckou's resistance to Francophonie stands in marked contrast to former defences of such cultural projects by some of the first generation of independence leaders and thinkers. For instance, Leopold Senghor, Senegal's first Prime Minister and one of the leading thinkers of the Negritude movement, saw the principle of 'francité' as something unique and indispensable to the identity of the postcolonial Francophone African subject. The idea of political decolonisation and cultural accommodation that marked

[35] Trans: 'the Congo is not a Francophone country. We are not formed from a foreign language'.

Senghor's thought and Mabanckou's refusal to comply with the Francophonie project demonstrates the cultural shift between the first generation of anti-colonial leaders and public intellectuals and contemporary figures such as Mabanckou (Diawara, 1990).

For Senghor, adherence to the rules of French grammar was of uppermost importance. He inveighed against Thomas Sankara's resistance to French cultural influence during the Burkinabé revolution (1984-87). For Senghor, to creolise and hybridise languages was tantamount to 'showing an inferiority complex' (Diawara, 1990: 83). The centrality of the French language to recovering an 'authentic' postcolonial African identity is reversed by Mabanckou in *Black Moses*.

Mabanckou's position of alterity and difference is revealed both through his rejection of Francophonie and through his characterisation of the picaro as a subject who is both entirely authentic to his own character, yet also one who mutates and changes throughout the novel, taking the identities and characteristics of others.

Mabanckou's refusal to serve as a literary ambassador partly stems from the longstanding complicity between literature and colonial appropriation in the context of the Congo. In the debate between decolonisation and Francophonie, Mabanckou's political sympathies are clear. However, within his literary texts, the freedom to make such choices and resist is attached to great personal sacrifice. Through his novel, he wrestles with the limits of the text and its power to understand and adequately represent the trauma of colonisation and how language and literature is itself always complicit within this history. For Moses, the legacy of colonialism and its particular ramifications in the silencing of dissent, social cleansing, and xenophobic violence, are inescapable and the novel's ending bears witness to this.

In *Black Moses*, the final location of the prison is representative of colonial durabilities that continue to exist and define the postcolonial state and overpower the everyday heroism of a postcolonial picaro. The freedoms and mobility implied in the moniker of 'global writer' here are brought into question through a narrative that appears both endlessly moving and forever trapped.

Senghor's attempt to mediate French culture and African postcolonial identity reveal the anxieties of class, culture and education that underpin the politics of identity. For Senghor, to challenge the fundamental epistemological traditions does not demonstrate power and autonomy, but rather the opposite, revealing an 'inferiority complex'.

Senghor's objection to Sankara's revolutionary politics supports Julietta Singh's argument that:

> across anticolonial discourse the mastery of the colonizer over the colonies was a practice that was explicitly disavowed, and yet, in their efforts to decolonize, anticolonial thinkers in turn advocated practices of mastery – corporeal, linguistic, and intellectual – toward their own liberation' (Singh, 2018: 2).

Meanwhile, for Mabanckou, this form of elite politics is doomed only to repeat the political oppressions of the past. Indeed, his satirical portraits of authority figures are set against a desolate landscape of punitive authoritarianism and dispossession. It is this central juxtaposition of the romantic figure of the picaro amidst a political system of tyranny and repression that destabilises the dominant narrative of the Congo, in which the despotism and chaos of the African state is put to rights by the neo-Conradian traveller.

The literary device of the picaro is antithetical to 'practices of mastery' (Singh, 2018: 2). For example, in the orphanage, Moses quickly sees through the 'high flown rhetoric' (2017: 42) of the Orphanage Director, and parodies the slavish behaviour of his three nephews, who act as the thuggish enforcers of his rule. Observing their comical imitation of the two Northern leaders of the 'Union of Socialist Youth of Congo', Oyo Ngoki and Mokélé Mbembé, Mabanckou reveals the shameless pandering and nepotism within the culture of the dominant political system:

> copy[ing] their way of speaking, using the same expressions, which they didn't understand and in which every sentence contained the word 'dialectic,' or, as an adverb, 'dialectically'' (2017: 27).

Ngoki and Mbembé are also ridiculed by Moses and the orphans as 'members of the Union of Youth' who have 'hair […] whiter than manioc flour' and 'spoke to us as though we were two - or three-year-olds, or they used their own special language which one of them had picked up in Moscow , the other in Romania' (2017, 26). In this scene, the Party members' self-aggrandisement is parodied through their verbatim performance of Western cultural capital from the obscurest dialectics of Marxist theory to their mastery of the Russian language.

Mabanckou constantly satirises the performative use of Western cultural capital by African elites as a signifier of cultural superiority and higher intelligence. Moses's literary function as the picaro is the perfect foil to this display of cultural pretension and

supercilious elitism. He not only sees through their pretensions but, quickly, masters cunning and insincere ways of securing favour from Ngoulmoumaka. For instance, he earns glowing praise through 'recit[ing] his [Ngoulmoumaka's] latest editorial from *Pioneers Awake!*' (2017: 42) underscoring the vanity and vacuity of his superiors and the meaningless gestures of difference and distinction upon which power and privilege is based.

While, Moses is adroit at negotiating the violent and oppressive system and hierarchies of the orphanage, the effect of institutionalisation and propaganda have nullified his own sense of self, place, and history. It is the secondary characters who in their fully formed narratives fill in the pieces of Moses existence. Moses thus becomes a curious portmanteau of the supporting characters around him.

This representation of the hero diverges from the traditional hero of the neo-Conradian form in which the Congo acts as a conduit to the hero's resolution and self-affirmation in the world. For example, in *Facing the Congo,* we find Tayler a lost and purposeless soul: 'at thirty-three one's direction in life should be clear and mine was not' (xiv) but by the end, we see him happily settled after '[exorcising] demons through action' (Tayler, 2010: 323). Tayler's self-presentation constitutes a stark contrast to Moses, who is involved in a sequence of comedic escapades in an environment of intensifying political authoritarianism. The political foreshadowing of the novel is thrown into relief by Moses, who remains constant in his artless guile. Moses's moments of crisis and self-awareness are equally absurd, unlike the profound existential angst of Tayler.

Following his escape from the orphanage and his ultimately thwarted attempts to lead a normal life in the Grande Marche of Pointe Noire, Moses convinces himself that his sudden misapprehension of grammatical rules is the reason behind his memory loss:

> perhaps my memory is no longer reliable because I've lost most of my adverbials! Or maybe I don't know where to put them in my sentences! If my adverbials aren't there when I need them, I won't be able to remember the time, place, or manner etc., and my verbs will be all alone, they'll be orphans like me, which means I'm getting no information about the circumstances of the actions I perform (2017: 171).

This is a wry comment on the stylistic form of the picaresque narrative with its traditional use of a continuous sequence of actions and the thrall of a fallible narrator to the wider social and political forces at work in the novel. Here, Mabanckou's metaliterary detour suggests that the life of picaro encompasses an altogether different grammar of life. A narrative form that is ill-served by the constraints of traditional French grammar

and syntax. He also complicates the question further through Moses's self-awareness of the limits and arbitrariness of language and form. A self-awareness that actively prevents him from going beyond the *surface* of the text to fully mastering his own destiny. Indeed, the quest narrative of Tayler's text and his pursuit of purpose and self-knowledge along the Congo River contrasts directly with Moses's thwarted attempts to find a grammar that could sufficiently account for his particular life experience:

> […] I could pick up some adverbials in the street, because some people just throw them away when they've used them, but I'd need to pick up some that correspond to the ones that I've lost. Which would be difficult, because I'm not the only person looking for them in this town and even when I find one, it never seems to be the same as I had before, so I…(2017: 171).

Mabanckou's image of a town consisting of people trying to heal the rupture of syntax and semantics not only underlines the inability of the picaresque text to return but, also, underlines the wounds of colonialism through the destruction of cultures, languages, and memory. In comparison, Tayler's text follows a linear narrative trajectory of development and resolution with his return and subsequent reunion with his family, whereas, Mabanckou's flattened picaresque style destabilises exactly these kinds of familiar narratives. These reflexive gestures in the text underline the fact that Mabanckou is not merely retelling the picaresque form and the figure of the picaro but, in fact, reinventing the form to a situated knowledge and experience of colonization and authoritarianism. This flattened style of commentary and prose is discernible in Moses glimpse of the 'prisoners of the revolution' who appear to him 'altogether more decent, better-formatted, obedient' (2017: 41). This disturbing image of 'better-formatted' sees depth and perspicuity in the novel replaced with stark and singular reports of torture and imprisonment. Moreover, Mabanckou regularly uses ellipses so that these scenes of depredation trail off with the narrative promptly continuing. These stylistic features of Mabanckou's novel illustrate how he uses the picaresque to construct the political and narrative world of Moses, growing up under the People's Republic of Congo.

In Mabanckou's novel, the psychological journey of the hero is subverted so that typical modes of character development, conflict and resolution are substituted for a different narrative mode. In accordance with the typical picaresque narrative, the hero belongs to a lower social class and undergoes little demonstrable change throughout the narrative. Moses as the novel's picaro, instead, functions as a mirror to the culture and society of the People's Republic of Congo.

The particular class origins of the picaro allow the text to be rooted in the diverse experiences of the socially marginalised. Mabanckou eschews a more universal narrative, whereby the Congo acts as the restorative remedy to the Western subject's alienation from society. Instead, Mabanckou engages in a particular form of narrative in which the role of the hero functions as a conduit to a broader social satire and commentary on the postcolonial Congolese state. The choice of picaresque satire is a subversion of the markedly more conservative, neo-imperial narrative on the Congo, which serves to reinforce the agency and authority of the white, male subject. As a consequence, Mabanckou's novel frustrates the coherence of this relationship through destabilising the colonial gaze of imperialist writing and the relationship between form and authorial voice.

The serial narrative of Mabanckou's text not only echoes the picaresque literary style of Dickens and Cervantes but also upends, entirely, the typical Congo modernist narrative, which works towards narrative resolution and affirmation of the narrator-hero. Indeed, the picaresque narrative can be read as a form of antinovel in its refusal to provide the reader narrative-comfort and resolution. The traditionally plotless and episodic form of the picaresque narrative is punctuated by moments of suspension and weighted portent. Niangui, the maternal figure in Moses' life warns him:

> For everything you pay a price in this world, my friend. A moment will come when the wind will drop, and the weather cock can't turn, and will stand idle. That will be the end of everything, and I can feel it coming…(2017: 71).

Niangui is one of the many characters of the novel who falls foul of the authorities and subsequently disappears from Moses's life and the orphanage, without any further explanation. Moses' compares this shrinking world to pages scattered and torn from a book: 'the page telling the story of her time in the orphanage had just been torn out too' (2017, 78). The image of pages ripped from the spine of a book functions as a leitmotif for the novel. Moses, as the picaro, functions as the witness-bearer to these fragmented and marginal lives. Moses becomes a guardian of their memories and the amnesia that results from this continuous trauma of loss demonstrates the heavy burden and unceasing nature of this task, undercutting the brevity of the prose achieving, as a result, a rare blend of lightness and depth through his narrative style.

As Niangui's trajectory is reproduced through the narrative, the serial narrative of the novel take on an increasingly sinister form and meaning as, one by one, Moses' friends and comrades fall victim to the repressive forces of Makélé and his campaign to 'clean'

the streets. Tellingly, Mabanckou leaves nearly all of the fates of the departed characters in an ambiguous narrative suspension. Following his hero's return to the orphanage, in the wake of his foiled attempt to assassinate Makélé, all the characters that Moses' encounters outside the orphanage disappear from the narrative. This circular narrative arc ends with Moses' reunion with his childhood friend Bonaventure, who is the only character to reappear by the end of the novel.

The secondary characters of the novel appear and disappear in the narrative in quick succession. Serialisation in narrative and character formation creates a sense of transitory existence for Moses and emphasises the fundamentally rapacious nature of the regime. Each individual character, aside from the sobering discovery of Madame Fiat and her girls, is given little by way of final word or, conclusion, in the novel's denouement. Mabanckou's silence on the disappeared is juxtaposed with the final grisly revelation of a mass grave in which the bodies of Madame Fiat and the prostitutes are discovered; a revelation that brings Makélé's campaign, 'zero Zairian whores in Pointe-Noire' (2017: 197), to a chilling conclusion. This final image of a mass grave stands as a cipher for the collected fates of Mabanckou's cast of misfits, rogues and picaros. This is reported in a stoical and dispassionate tone, building a sense of inevitability, in which the intersection of power, xenophobia and the postcolonial national state reaches its deadly resolution:

> The whole operation turned into a blood bath because of the hatred between our country and Zaire, fanned by politicians in the run up to elections (2017: 198).

The episodic form of Mabanckou's novel reverses the colonial gaze that supposedly brings order to the chaos of the outside world. The use of this episodic form works to establish an overall coherence between the authorial voice and the external social world, whereby, the fragmented life of Moses, holds a mirror up to the realities of life under an authoritarian regime. Mabanckou represent his hero's aimlessness and confusion in a comic image that captures both the absurd and the abject reality of the hero:

> because I was going round and round in circles, like a snail caught in the spiral of its own slime, I needed some little trick for working out where I was when I was wandering (2017: 158).

Mabanckou's embrace of the absurd and the satirical is an effective tonic against the cartographic rationalism and authorial voice of the neo-Conradian text. Mabanckou subverts this construction by presenting the reader with an everyman hero whose desire

to do good remains steadfast throughout the novel. Moses dedicates himself to the collective good in spite of his often-haphazard execution of such actions under the tightening grip of political tyranny. The reversal of Moses's trajectory following his assassination of Mayor Makélé's results in his imprisonment. His actions ultimately lead to his return to his childhood in the Loango orphanage. The satirical prose and comedic elements of the narrative are belied by this regressive journey and the irresistible will of the authoritarian system over the picaro. The totalising effects of the regime and its silencing of all dissent and non-conforming characters is a blunt rebuttal of the formal conventions of the picaresque form, particularly its levity and serialized form. Mabanckou's use of the picaro as a literary device allows him to explore multiple spaces and locations throughout the novel. Thus, through the peregrinations of the picaro we see Mabanckou's construction of postcolonial space as an ever-tightening prison for the picaro.

Representation of postcolonial space

Whilst Mabanckou's novel is set in the post-independence period, the colonial past haunts the narrative throughout. In Mabanckou's representation of postcolonial space, the image of the orphanage is at the centre of the narrative and functions as a symbol of the trauma of colonialism and the failure of national liberation. It is the inversion of the matrilineal pre-colonial societies of Queen Nzinga which Daka describes to the children. As a site of historical silence and violent coercion, it is also a symbol of colonialism's ongoing effects and the resistance embedded within. Its transformation into a prison for the criminally insane is signalled early on in the novel, when Moses spies prisoners engaged in manual labour from his window. It is an ominous portent of Moses' future that acts as a counterweight to the deceptive mobility and lightness of the traditional picaro role.

Mabanckou represents the orphanage as a microcosm of the colonial and postcolonial regime. The director's invectives against 'local lackeys of imperialism' (2017: 20) as a devious means to advance his own political interests, attests to the deep and lasting effects of colonial violence in the political paranoia of the state. Furthermore, the shadow of the colonial regime is most acutely portrayed in the regimented existence of the orphans and the frequent use of punishment and violence; a coercive violence thus shapes the orphans into acquiescent subjects of the new regime: 'there were three hundred of us orphans, three hundred parrots, in fact, our heads stuffed full of things of no apparent value' (2017: 41). Despite the heavy irony with which Mabanckou paints the

orphanage's authorities, he is unsparing with his portrayal of a brutal system and its violent extraction of political consent and compliance.

The orphanage stands in the ruins of the former African kingdom of Loango. We learn that Loango was a thriving African capital brought to its knees by slavery. Moses' history teacher Doukou Daka remarks bitterly that the 'Vili took the people of my own ethnic group into slavery and sold them to neighbouring Kingdoms!' (2017: 35). Daka dispenses his history lessons despite being 'worried he might be overheard' (Mabanckou, 2017: 34). The fear of surveillance and reprisal in the orphanage reveals the anxieties inherent within the authoritarian state. The spatial hierarchy of the institution and the watchful gaze of the corridor wardens reimagines the orphanage as a Benthamite Panopticon, in which a generalised paranoia of surveillance leads to the self-regulation of the orphans' social behaviour. Daka's teachings cause Moses to revaluate his judgement of Loango as an unremarkable hinterland 'separate from the rest of the Congo, in fact from the whole rest of the world' (2017: 37). Daka disturbs this barren reality, impressing upon the orphans, that despite the ostensibly anodyne and coercive environment of the orphanage, 'we lived in a place that was drenched in History' (37). Mabanckou, thus, demonstrates the effectiveness of the institution in creating a self-governing citadel of alienation and disconnection capable of neutralising threats to its authority at every turn.

Like Papa Moupelo before him, Daka is removed from the orphanage. His removal inspires Moses' lamentation: 'there was no more Kingdom of the Kongo, no more Kingdom of Loango […]' (2017: 36). Mabanckou makes it clear that this form of dissenting knowledge presents a danger and threat to the order and social hierarchy. Moreover, its stymying by the authorities further attests to the power of Daka's history lessons as sources of resistance and resilience against the ruling ideology of the Party leadership.

Daka is later denounced as an imposter, and his teachings are discredited, whilst the sterile lessons of the Monsieur Montoir and the French education system are accorded the status of legitimate knowledge in the wake of his departure. Significantly, legitimate and illegitimate knowledge are racially coded in their ascribed value: 'what he teaches you will make you more intelligent than the little white children of France' (2017: 38). The labelling of Daka as a fraud, and the exaltation of colonial systems of education by the orphanage's directors, demonstrate the pernicious continuities of mental subjugation under postcolonial dictatorships and the circling back to repressive forms of social control and stratification. Despite the repressive power mechanism and

oppressive structures of the orphanage and the state, Moses' inherent empathy with vulnerable characters, such as Bonaventure, demonstrate the forms of empathy and solidarity that creep between the cracks and subvert institutional power.

Moses displays an exceptional ability to inoculate himself against the ideology of the orphanage. Throughout the novel, he casts a caustic eye over the workings of power in the orphanage. The emptiness and elasticity of Moses as the picaro is, incidentally, the result of the orphanage and its inability to eradicate, entirely, the spread of dissent. Moses is, at different times, a model disciple of the regime and, a fugitive from its power and patronage. At the beginning of the novel, he quickly crafts ways to survive and find favour with the leadership. As a picaro, it is his adaptability to different environments that underscores the shifting locations of the narrative. Yet, the figures of the disappeared lend the text a gravity and portentousness that contrast with the comedy and absurdity of Moses. The ominous silence of the disappeared and the evanescent vitality of the picaro reside together, uneasily, in the novel. With Moses acting as a composite of the different secondary characters collecting their memories through the act of writing. By the end of the novel, Moses is, once again, renamed by the prison's priest who forbids anyone else calling him his name, in a violent act that speaks to the ongoing trauma of colonialism. Moses's commitment to writing '[filling] page after endless page' (2017: 197) resists this act of subject erasure within the punitive institution of the prison-orphanage.

Furthermore, the centring of the prison-orphanage as the site of imprisonment casts the world of Pointe Noire as a utopic space of freedom and self-acceptance; albeit one that is under increasing threat from the new mayor's desire to 'cleanse' the city of 'mosquitoes of Grand Marche' (2017: 113). Here, he meets local bandit Robin the Terrible who 'took to roaming the streets of Pointe-Noire, since for him street were like forests too' (2017, p. 106). There is a utopic impulse here in the imagination of the city as a space outside the reach of authorities, a reviving and self-sustaining ecosystem for the social underclass. For Moses, it constitutes a space of reinvention and imagination where he can fulfil his desire to become a legendary outlaw like Robin Hood.

Moses' friendships with the residents of the Grand Marche further celebrate this spirit of reinvention and radical anti-authoritarian belonging:

> not only had I changed physically, I also spoke like the other members of the gang, and had managed to cast off the cultivated speech required of us in Loango (2017: 109-10).

There is a perverse pleasure in the text in creating spaces of radical acceptance and belonging to outcasted members of society deemed criminal and disabled. As Moses relates:

> we accepted anyone in our gang. I got on very well with the paralytics, who thought it was ridiculous, shocking, quote possibly even unacceptable to have two legs; with the blind, who could find a needle in a haystack, or those with only one eye, who took turn to lend each other their good eye, in exchange for meals or a stash of beer (2017: 110).

Moses's role as the picaro, and his credulity in encountering the world of Pointe Noire, disrupt the traditional values and hierarchies of rich and poor, able-bodied and disabled whereby, it is Moses, as the runaway orphan with a 'kilometrically long name', who becomes a figure of amusement and mockery.

By decentring Moses as the moral hero, Mabanckou creates a fluid and more interconnected fictional world. Moses acts as the connecting thread running through the fragmenting and dissolving fabric of society under authoritarian repression. The rigid structures of the orphanage are offset by the rumbles of dissent, satire and stories of rebellion that surround the orphanage and find ways to disrupt and challenge the function of the 'laborator[y] of the Revolution' (2017: 63) and the faithful party apparatchiks. The romantic narrative of the outlaw powerfully contrasts with the Panoptican-like space of the orphanage and the extermination campaign of Makélé.

The secondary characters who represent formative influences on Moses, nurture the development of his subversive criticality of the regime. These characters are eventually reclaimed through memory and the act of writing. Moses's recovery from his trauma-induced amnesia is critical to his meta-functional role as the picaro, as the witness and literary conduit to a broader diagnosis of the configurations of power and life under tyranny. Moses remains throughout the novel, a figure who is uncowed by authority and incorruptible.

Moses' amnesia following the disappearance of Mama Fiat demonstrates the essential importance of these relationships to his sense of self, memory, and happiness. The loss of his friends results in the disintegration of his own psyche. Through this representation, Mabanckou champions a hero who is socially connected and attuned to the outside world and dependent on the social networks and solidarity, both in the orphanage and the streets of Pointe Noire. Thus, sociality and, more crucially the sociality and solidarity of those labelled undesirable and disposable by political elites, is

reaffirmed by Mabanckou in opposition to the traditional valorisation of the individual saviour and hero.

The fictional world of the postcolonial picaro in its representation of morality, masculinity and heroism is moreover remarkably distinctive from the neo-Conradian form. Mabanckou's picaresque prose subverts the form of the modern novel and particularly the neo-imperial quest narrative with its celebration of the individual (read white, male) spirit as encapsulating both moral redemption and psychological renewal.

Mabanckou mixes farcical absurdity with poignant leitmotifs to produce an innovative form. As a result, Mabanckou's novel conveys the light comedy of the picaresque along with the depth and darkness of postcolonial literature under dictatorship. Indeed, there is a tension between the free-flowing form of the picaresque and the oppressive power structures and figures, such as Ngoulmoumaka and Makélé, who steadfastly encroach upon Moses and other members of Pointe Noire's social underclass. The fluid narrative is juxtaposed with the violently fragmented and disjointed reality of Moses's world: 'I roamed like a wild dog through a town that seemed to crush everything and everyone' (2017: 119). Mabanckou instead presents us the reader with a circuitous narrative in which spaces on the social margins constitute brief heterotopias in a story that otherwise sees the graduation of Moses through different states of imprisonment and systems of coercive control where the idea of a human arc of experience, knowledge, and growth is all thrown into question.

2.5 Sony Labou Tansi's *The Shameful State*

In this section, I trace the dissenting and subversive discourse of Sony Labou Tansi and explore how this critique is coded through literary invention, linguistic experimentalism, and allegorical meaning. Given the realities of censorship and the cultural policy of the PCT regime, Tansi often pushes the limits of form; taking the reader into the territory of the absurd and grotesque, resulting in a literary style closely linked to Latin American literature that developed under similarly repressive political conditions. The political and geographical literary connections that transgress epistemic colonial traditions, such as Francophonie, is evident in Gilbert Shang Ndi's observation that Tansi's writing: 'blurs historical limits and geographical spaces, offering itself to a protean complexity that defies any parochial understanding of 'post-colonial' literature' (Ndi 2017: 210).

Tansi's use of allegory underlines the politically repressive conditions of the Congo; the tyrant of the novel presides over a fictitious African country and the narrative voice is

highly unstable in the text where the point of view often shifts within a single line. For contemporary readers, the question thus becomes, to what extent does Tansi deploy these techniques to obfuscate and thereby protect himself against agents of the regime, or, is his text better read as a nihilistic rebuke of authoritarianism? The innovative stylistic techniques of Tansi are necessitated by the extreme political repression of his particular socio-historical context and give rise to implicit and explicit forms of cultural defiance in the text. The ambiguous reception and interpretation of Tansi's work reveal how the political contexts of postcolonial African writers circumscribe modes of expression and discourse, in which literary experimentalism is not merely an avant-garde departure from the cultural mainstream but, instead a vital mode of existence for the dissident writer.

Born in the Belgian Congo in 1947, Tansi moved to the former French Congo at the age of twelve, and it is within this political space that Tansi embarked on his career as a novelist, playwright, poet, and theatre-practitioner. During Tansi's life, the former French Congo became the People's Republic of Congo and was ruled under the leadership of the Parti Congolais du Travail (PCT) as a Marxist-Leninist single party state but continued to have close relationship with former colonial powers. Unlike Mabanckou and Bofane, who have both received international acclaim, Tansi's career was marked by harassment, censorship, and violence at the hands of the regime. Indeed, Tansi paid the ultimate price for his political activism when the authorities revoked his passport as he sought treatment in France, along with his wife, for AIDS-related illness.

Tansi's writing captures the shift in African literature from the 'suns of Independence' to the nightmare of tyranny and dictatorship in the Cold War period. As Mabanckou writes in *Tears of the Black Man,*

> in no time at all, the suns of independence were clouded over the African skies by forbidding dark clouds. The proliferation of ethnic conflicts, political assassinations, and permanent coups d'états have become facets of African life (Mabanckou, 2018: 67).

It is in this storm that Tansi's novel, *The Shameful State (L'état Honteux),* conducts its dark satire, delivering a portrait of a tyrant who upon his ascension to the Presidency immediately commands that 'article 1: the fatherland shall be square; article 2: down with demagogy ; article 3 National Mom is everyone's mother' (Tansi, 2016: 5). Tansi's satirising of the absurdity of tyrannical power is set against its macabre effects on society. For example, in the scene of Lopez's coronation, Tansi writes from the view of the crowd: 'we applauded loudly: this was the first time a president had done such a thing

in the name of the people. We walked over all the dead bodies'(Tansi, 2016: 2). Thus, Tansi's novels combine both satirical elements that paint political elites as dangerous and infantile individuals and the wider social effects of this political environment which Tansi excoriates as a shameful nihilism.

The failure of Pan-African liberation in the Congo, following the CIA-sponsored assassination of Patrice Lumumba and the instalment of dictators in both the former French and Belgian Congo, is reflected in Tansi's depiction of power as banal and nihilistic. Tansi explores the problems and impossibilities with language and form to capture the experience of dictatorship and the tyranny of the one-party state. In many ways, the style of his novels is a more familiar register than Mabanckou's beguiling contemporary picaresque. In *The Shameful State,* Tansi interrogates the possibilities of language and form to capture the gross excess and violation experienced from living under tyranny. It is this feverish exploration for a fitting register that sees him so often subvert literary traditions for more experimental and innovative techniques.

Tansi frequently translates Lingala proverbs directly into French, something comprehensible to many multilingual Congolese speakers while, presumably, mystifying to non-Lingala readers. For example, the Lingala phrase 'mai ya moto etumbaka elambe te' ('don't let yourself be intimidated') was translated in the French version of the text as 'l'eau chaude ne brule pas le linge' ('the shirt need not fear the hot water')(Tansi, 2016: 10). The swapping of proverbs through these translations opens up dialogic spaces between the multiple translations of the text. However, this issue remains unresolved in the translation of the text and forecloses these dialogic spaces.[36] The novel's experimentation with language is an act of reclaiming that disrupts the colonial legacies of cultural production. Thus, it is all the more striking that Thomas, as the translator, declares the 'futility' of translating this distinctive element of Tansi's prose. Nonetheless, his defiance of the limits of form, genre and language creates an entirely different form of artistic and literary style.

The allegorical mode allows Tansi the freedom to explore the psyche of the state, and psychopathology of the sovereign power, whilst not explicitly naming real political figures. Colonel Martillimi Lopez could be based on a number of tyrannical figures from Mobutu Sese Seko to Augusto Pinochet. The character of Lopez, as a political allegory and

[36] Thomas comments that Tansi's experimentation with language is a 'defining feature' yet he declares that 'attempting to explain each and every translation choice would be futile' (Tansi, 2016, p. 10).

distillation of modern authoritarianism allows Tansi to strategically critique the violent excesses and psychotic pathology of the regime. Indeed, Tansi's political critique refuses a realist aesthetic and rather, enters into the notably darker territory of grotesque satire, debasement and the absurd: 'but this is the true story of the life of Colonel Martillimi Lopez, the son of our National Mom […] Mom's very own Lopez who now lies in state in a stone casket in the National Museum, his right eye permanently open, let him look at the fatherland for centuries to come, watch over us from his father's rotting sleep' (Tansi, 2016: 13). Tansi writes in the guise of a comforting national fable and steadily introduces grotesque and gruesome elements, in which the body of the patriarch is a rotting corpse held aloft by the nation.

The absurd and grotesque in Tansi's novel constitutes a painful revisionism according to Emmanual Yewah who argues that Tansi's literary innovations work 'to convey his own view of humanity abandoned to itself, caught in a cycle of crude violence in an oppressive inhuman world 'qui fout le camp' (trans: who gets the hell out) (Yewah 1996: 222). Tansi's use of the grotesque explores the limits of the imagination compared to that of the irrational and pathological violence of the state. Flora Veit-Wild argues that this is reflected in the literary style of Tansi:

> coherent authorial narration dissolves into the fragmented view of multiple narrative subjects, time and space lost their contours in the realm of dream, nightmare and fantasy (Veit-Wild 2005: 2).

Tansi's grotesque portrait of Lopez emphasises his tyrannical grip on power that is wielded through the body. The unilateral decisions of the despot are made in accordance with bodily impulses: 'that's the sovereign's decision of my hernia: the fatherland shall be square'(Tansi 2016: 3). The gross corporeality of power in the novel is counterposed with the language of death as speaking truth to power. For example, the 'traitor' Lansa Maria, addresses the President, using the 'words of dead man':

> Mr. President, these are the words of a dead man, and dead people don't know which language they speak and they've no other polite form of address than the smell of death (Tansi, 2016: 91).

Here, death represents a release from the false doubleness of language and the artifice of 'polite form':

> I'm speaking her now with the words of dead person. I've always spoken of love, fraternity, understanding…but today I realize that those things can't just be spoken, they must also be lived (Tansi, 2016: 91).

Only speech uttered in anticipation of death is trustworthy and sincere in its appeal to rectify 'this shameful state (by which I mean state as condition)' (Tansi, 2016: 91). It is for this reason that the critic Emmanuel Yewah, argues that Tansi 'conceptualises the hero as a process rather than as a physical entity' unable to be seduced by 'rampant corruption' (Yewah, 1996: 223). In the advertisement to his first novel, published in 1979, La *Vie et Demie,* Tansi decries 'à une époque où l'homme est plus que jamais résolu à tuer la vie, comment voulez-vous que je parle sinon en chair-mots-de-passe ?'(Tansi, 1988: 9).[37] Here, he despairs of counterbalancing two extreme forms: the revolutionary spirit as a purely idealised form and tyranny as corporeal excess, but sees no other way in which to capture the political reality surrounding him leading Veit-Weld to conclude that 'Sony's novelistic universe is indeed ruled by the flesh' (Veit-Wild, 2005: 235).

The grotesque is often a problematic mode of representation in the context of African literature. In his critique of Achille Mbembe's *On the Postcolony,* in an essay which draws together the Bakhtinian grotesque body and the workings of power in the postcolonial state, the critic Paul Zeleza highlights the problematic effects of grotesque forms of representation. Whilst Mbembe's text starts with the 'familiar African complaint about the devaluation and dehumanization of Africa in the western imaginary', he goes on to note that the Africa which Mbembe presents 'is equally beastly: he traffics images of Africa that are no different to those of Hegel'(Zeleza 2006: 115). Thus, according to Zeleza, Mbembe falls into the trap of reproducing exactly the same logic of representation that he sets out to critique: one that is equally damaging in spite of its self-proclaimed critical perspective. If Tansi's writing is indeed 'ruled by the flesh' then is the same charge of dehumanisation through the representation of the grotesque applicable?

In Tansi's novel, the bodily grotesque undercuts the sovereign figure, an unmasking of the phantasm of power which extends beyond Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque that 'these two areas [the bowels and the phallus play(ing) the leading role in the grotesque image…next to the bowels and the genital organs is the mouth, through which enters the world to be swallowed up' (Veit-Wild, 2005: 228). Within the space of novel, the arbitrary actions of Lopez are revealed through Tansi's excoriation of the grotesque body, highlighting arbitrary hierarchies of power and oppression that emanate from the body of the tyrant. This explains the often chaotic form of the novel which frequently

[37] Translation: 'In an era where man is more than ever resolved to kill life, how do you want me to speak other than in code words of flesh ?'(Tansi, 1988: 9)

switches tense sometimes between sentences and a narrative that is structured by a series of increasingly absurd scenarios engineered by Lopez.

In the forward, or 'forewarning' to the novel, Tansi expresses a certain discomfort with this form and, a tangible despair, at the imposition of the writer forced to confront such a degraded human condition:

> in my view, our so-called world is both a scandal and a source of shame, and I am only able to express it through several "ill-gotten words"(Tansi 2016: x).

In Tansi's text, the debasement of the sovereign seeps through society and ultimately contaminates everyone. For Eline Kuenen, Tansi's 'scatological and excremental writing are employed to mock the ruling class and to reduce the governors to what they are, to human beings''(Kuenen 2018: 189). However, whilst Tansi's representation of the grotesque sovereign does fulfil a mocking function, it also highlights the shame and humiliation of living under authoritarian rule without the political will to resist it. As the novel progresses, the sovereign's demands become steadily more outlandish. Indeed, the sovereign's surrender to debasement and vulgarity underlines his total lack of shame and, in the process, subverts Bakhtin's idea of the carnival and the grotesque sovereign as tools of a liberating resistance to the dominant culture. In his despondent and oblique primer to his novel, Tansi appears resigned to the fact that the work of the imagination must 'still have a place somewhere in reality' leading him to 'cry out, as a way of forcing the world into the world (Tansi, 2016: x). Thus, he is trapped in this logic of representation. Literary imagination and realism cannot be divided in this instance, leaving him trapped between crying of the shameful condition of the world and relinquishing his work as a few 'ill-gotten words' (x).

The agonised ventures of Tansi into the grotesque and the bodily politics of power contrast with the efforts of Western scholars to categorise and define this problematic literary aesthetic as something uniquely 'African'(Pageaux, 1985). This critical undertaking risks freely 'trafficking', as Zeleza notes, in the stereotypical and imperialist tropes of Africa. Indeed, the African grotesque is reminiscent of the problematic essentialisms of the Negritude movement. Zeleza's condemnation of the trafficking of grotesque imagery when it comes to Africa suggests a free and inconsequential use of an entrenched mode of representation which intentionally and unintentionally causes great harm. However, in Tansi's text, the recourse to the grotesque is a heavy weight on the writer, appearing as a prisoner to this new lexicon of the shameful and grotesque:

> Mon écriture sera plutôt criée qu'écrite simplement, ma vie elle-même sera plutôt râlée, beuglée, bolée que vécue simplement (Labou Tansi, 2009: 11).[38]

Bakhtin's theorisation of the carnival and the grotesque do not smoothly map onto the Congo and constructing an analogy between the techniques of medieval, feudal power and postcolonial authoritarianism, ignores the fact that the Congo constituted an experimental stage of power and influence throughout the postcolonial period and was subject to multiple technologies of power. Clearly, the recourse to the grotesque and debased is problematic and risks substantiating colonial ideology in the present. The paradox, for Tansi, is to lay claim to truth risks the epistemological violence of colonial language through the grotesque. This genre of representation was clearly a concern for Tansi, who pre-empted his critics in the introduction to his novel *La Vie et Demie* stating that:

> l'intention des amateurs de la couleur locale qui m'accuseraient d'être cruellement tropical et d'ajouter de l'eau au moulin déjà inonde des racistes, je tiens à préciser que La Vie et Demie faire ces taches que la vie seulement fait (Tansi 1988: 10).[39]

Throughout his writing, Tansi questions whether language and creative expression can ever truly comprehend and express the extreme political violence and repressive power that he was witness to throughout his life. Indeed, it is a paradox within Tansi's writing that, it is precisely, the dismissal of language that makes it so crucial to him. His writing constantly questions whether another mode of existence is possible and, in this way, his authorial voice often takes on a prophetic tone. For if, human life can be so easily expunged by the state, what power do words have to effect change? Hence, Tansi's voice vacillates between despair and a stubborn refusal to succumb to this feeling.

With his absurd and often surreal prose style, Tansi shares the concerns raised by the experimental French dramatist Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) and other writers from the post-war Theatre of the Absurd movement in Europe in the late 1950s. However, their relationship with language and the origins of their absurdist style arise from crucially different political circumstances. For Tansi, the language of absurdity and debasement is something he is forced to engage with, whereas for Arnaud, the choice to experiment

[38] Translation: 'My writing will be shouted rather than simply written, my life itself will be groaned, shouted, bawled than simply lived.'
[39] Translation: 'the intention of fans of local colour who accuse me of being cruelly tropical and to adding to a situation already flooded with racists, I want to specify that *La Vie et Demie* only does the tasks that life itself does.'

outside the boundaries of culturally accepted artistic production is an arguably aesthetic predilection, as opposed to political necessity.

In his foreword to *La Vie et Demie,* Tansi writes*:* 'moi qui vous parle de l'absurdité du l'absurde, moi qui inaugure l'absurdité du désespoir – d'où voulez-vous que je parle sinon du dehors ?' (Tansi, 1988: 9).[40] Here, Tansi is tied into the language of the absurd from the inside – the absurdity of the absurd, the absurdity of despair. For Artaud, on the other hand, language is 'an instrument of exclusion, silence and suppression, to be used against insurgent elements (Barber 2013: 41). Artaud's 'abandonment' of language appears somewhat facetious next to Tansi's search for a liberating discourse amidst the chaos and repression of an authoritarian regime.

His residual, yet tenacious, hope is detectable in the closing speech of his play, *Conscience du Tracteur* (1979), which deals with the sudden and mysterious deaths of citizens in a future city:

> Perhaps we are on our way to putting the world back in its place. We have the right to hope for everything: the rational revolution. There will be much to burn on the fire: mental attitudes, racism, rational supremacy, cultural prejudice. Very much. Undoubtedly, western civilisation. Perhaps we may have to give new meaning to things(Tansi, 1979).[41]

The doubt, in Tansi's mind, of the ability of language to destabilise the supremacy of western civilisation leads him to offer up a small caveat of hope that if 'new meanings' can be found something revolutionary could 'perhaps' be achieved.

The ambiguities of Tansi's texts, their coded messages, and experiments with form, have led to debate about the real creative intentions behind his writing in posthumous evaluations (Garnier, 2013; Bisanswa, 2000). Interestingly, Thomas and other critics have turned to the marginalia of his dictatorship novels in order to extrapolate his artistic/political intentions and commentaries. Moreover, he argues it is through this opening in the text that 'one can begin to discern the articulation of an autonomous postcolonial aesthetic paradigm' (Thomas, 2000: 83). Thomas uses the example of Tansi's fourth novel, *Les Sept Solitudes de Lorsa Lopez*, in which he states that 'My writing

[40] Translation: 'I who speak to you of the absurdity of the absurd, I who inaugurate the absurdity of despair – from where do you want me to speak if not from outside?'
[41] Original quote: 'nous sommes peut-être en train de remettre le monde à sa place. On a le droit de tout espérer : la révolution rationnelle. Il y aura beaucoup à mettre au feu : les attitudes mentales, les brimades raciales, la suprématie rationaliste, les préjuges culturels. Beaucoup. La suppurante civilisation occidentale. Nous allons peut-être devoir donner aux choses de nouvelles valeurs.'

will be shouted rather than simply written down' (cited in Thomas 2000: 83). Muted and marginal fragments of manifestos are embedded within his work, existing perhaps as retrievable messages of dissent under conditions of near-total censorship and tyranny.

Tansi's despairing tone that his writing should be 'shouted' rather than 'simply written down' (83) underlines the repressions of the one-party state and how these political conditions altered completely the tenor of writing of the time. The funnelling of funds into African writing within the theatre of the Cold War saw different organisations, such as the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Afro-Asian Writer's Association, vying for political and cultural influence on the continent (Saunders, 2013). In Mobutu's Zaïre, a cultural policy of authenticité was launched in which symbols of colonialism were to be replaced by African names and symbols. Meanwhile, in the People's Republic of Congo, the PCT launched a cultural manifesto that demanded revolutionary unity and carry out the will of the party. In this febrile atmosphere of ideological warfare and its shaping of cultural landscape, some critics have argued African writers were 'beneficiaries' of Cold War antagonism in Africa. However, in both Zaïre and the People's Republic of Congo, it was all too easy to fall foul of either cultural programme and be labelled as a national enemy or counterrevolutionary.

This profound division of writers, between those who were licensed by the regime and those who adopted a critical stance in the Congolese context, underlines the generally fraught position of the writer, whereby defiance of the cultural and literary prescriptions of the regime carried the risk of imprisonment or charges of treason. As Dominic Thomas points out, 'official writers' such as Maxime N'Debeka wrote sincere and stirring poems of greed and oppression of working people by elites that 'inadvertently [served] the official state ideology of an increasingly monolithic dictatorship that had nothing to do with socialism' (Thomas, 2002: 42). Thus, there is clear danger to the African writer both in an 'official' and 'non-official' capacity. To work within the structures of the party saw writers serving a dictatorial regime but existing outside the party and straying from the party line risked being designated as pro-Western elites and hostile to the interests of African working class. Thus, the 'benefits' of Cold-War rivalry are put into question when we see the fraught tightrope on which African writers were positioned. Moreover, the political threat is evident throughout in the ebullient form and style of Tansi's writing – his coded criticisms, allegories of place, the absurdity and dark satire allowed him to write a step removed from a direct attack on the tyranny of the regime.

The transition from the radical politics of anticolonial struggle and decolonisation to nationalism and the politics of the nation state saw the transformation of the writer from being the voice of the nation/freedom into being the chronicler and encoder of postcolonialism's nightmare authoritarianism. In Tansi's work, the space of the nation becomes a harsh and imprisoning place, in which the author must develop a subjectivity, agency and resistance that flies below the radar of the censors. Tansi speculates in the foreword to *The Shameful State* (*L'etat Honteux)* that 'the novel is, supposedly, a work of the imagination. However, this imagination must find its place somewhere in reality' (Tansi, 2016: x), and 'we've been made to plunge into a wholly shameful historic situation'(Tansi, 2016: 91). The alienation and dislocation that Tansi forces himself to write through mark a sobering contrast to the monumental and humanistic endeavour of DuBois' speculative *Encyclopaedia Africana,* that connote a very different political mood and boundless aspiration to imagining an Africa free from the chains of colonialism.

Neither the work of Tansi, or the writers supportive of African socialism, such as N'Dbeka, map easily onto simple binary models of truth/propaganda, aesthetic/politics, tradition/invention in the Congolese, Cold War context. Indeed, they point to the more glaring issues with applying Western theoretical models to African texts in this period. He summarises that that 'non-official writers […] have succeeded in producing texts which are firmly rooted in the tradition of resistance writing and in which the primary concern is with aesthetic considerations and not the 'Zhdavonite paradigm for socialist realism' (2000, 96-7). Meanwhile, he assigns writers, such as Tansi, to a universal tradition of resistance writing. His argument that the tradition of resistance can only be found in the writings of 'non-official' writers, reducing the literary expression of Soviet influenced African writers to simply mimicry. Moreover, to tie works like Tansi's to either realism or, experimentation, would be an oversimplification of the textual subversions at work.

Thus, Tansi's crisis of form and expression in response to his political surroundings points to the deeper problems of applying 'global' western theories to African literature. Justin Bisanswa argues that Tansi is 'conscious of the dilemma of the writing act that is sandwiched between the déjà-dit (the already said) and the dire quoi (the what to say)' (Bisanswa 2000: 131). Discussing Tansi's craft, Nicholas Martin-Granel (2014) notes that Tansi would always write his novels and plays in the same 300 page school notebooks. This image of Tansi occupying both the role of writer and pupil, underlines the

catastrophe of post-Independence as a process of undoing and beginning again in the wake of the tragedy of independence.

Tansi's representation of Colonel Lopez, as a figure of gross corporeality and egregious cruelty and self-pity, presents postcolonial tyranny as a theatre of the absurd. The equation of African postcolonial politics with theatricality and flamboyance does however produce problematic implications when utilised by Western writers. The crude bodily and psychic dimensions of power that Tansi lacerates, as the shameful condition of his time is different to the fascination with dictator figures and their flamboyant characters in mainstream discourses. Indeed, much historical and biographical scholarship of the period has focused on the lavish lifestyles and extraordinary corruption of African postcolonial dictators as a Shakespearian drama. This has often led to the marginalisation of the wider political context of Cold War politics, proxy wars and Western sponsorship and the impact of anti-communist ideological warfare outside of Europe and North America (Kuenen, 2018). Michaela Wrong's tell-all account of Mobutu's dictatorship, discussed in the introduction, is a prime example of this genre, with its focus on the depredations of his cult-like leadership and the madness at court in true medieval fashion whilst side-lining the politics of popular culture and protest that grew under Mobutu's regime (Wrong, 2001). This discourse thus constructs another exceptional pathology of power unique to Africa that is timeless and outside of history. This characterisation of the African despot, as a uniquely villainous and flamboyant figure, reproduces the cultural stereotypes of the African exotic.

2.6 In Koli Jean Bofane's *Congo. Inc: Bismarck's Testament*

In this section, I explore Bofane's use of the bildungsroman to offer a political critique of neocolonial capitalism in the Congo that is both polemical and reconstructive. Unlike the frequent mishaps and disasters that befall Mabanckou's hero Moses, the hero of Bofane's novel, Isookanga, demonstrates a singular will and resourcefulness to seek his fortune and place in the world. Both the form of the bildungsroman in *Congo. Inc.* and the picaresque narrative in *Black Moses* are reinterpreted in order to reject systems of political inequity and violence. Where Mabanckou and Bofane both offer the reader empathic portraits of underdogs confronting brutalising political realities, Tansi's experimental and satirical style orbits closely around the figure of the tyrant producing a narrative sensorium of the repressive and inescapable technologies of tyranny.

Unlike the selfless pretensions of Mabanckou's picaro, Isookanga, is motivated by a desire to make a fortune and join the war-economy of contemporary Congo.

Disenchanted with the responsibilities of becoming a tribal chief, he looks to join the ranks of profiteers and mercenaries in the febrile exploration and extraction of Congo's natural resources. The two authors thus provide the reader with two very different portraits of moral and political character. Where Mabanckou charts the thwarting of Moses's quest at the hands of the authorities, Bofane constructs a subversive bildungsroman which sees Isookanga turn his back on the systems of exploitation he initially yearned to participate in and make a journey of prodigal return. The fact that Bofane's novel ends with Isookanga travelling the River Congo, finally at peace with his life, constitutes an iconoclastic disruption of Conrad's reading of the River Congo as a journey into the unknown and 'uncivilised'.

In Bofane's novel, we follow Isookanga as his neoliberal fantasy steadily unravels in the face of its hellish effects on the people he meets. The journey from innocence to experience makes the novel typical of the bildungsroman genre. Bofane uses the genre of the bildungsroman to make a number of authorial interventions and asides in a similar mode to Tansi. Often, these interventions are made for the clarity of the reader; however, they also make clear Bofane's political sensibility and his acerbic commentary on the role of neoimperialism in the Congo. In this sense, the traditional bildungsroman form is reframed by Bofane to facilitate a comprehensive political indictment on the social conditions spawned by histories of colonialism and global capitalism. Isookanga's transformation from belief in the neoliberal system to jaded contempt is interestingly framed by interventions of Bofane. Mainstream political discourses that frame Africa as the chief beneficiary of free market capitalism and globalization are explicitly rejected by Bofane's novel. Uprooted and haunted figures, like the Chinese migrant Zhang Xia, function as important rejoinders to the myth of global capitalism as universally uplifting socio-economic conditions of the global poor: 'the young Chinese couldn't stop thinking, "Globalization is crap to me"(Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 141).

Isookanga's desire for the same degree of wealth that foreign companies and political elites have extracted from the Congo seems an entirely justified act of restitution given the history of Western exploitation in the Congo. Bofane demonstrates Isookanga's affinity for global trading through his obsession with the game 'Raging Trade', which he plays obsessively in his home village. Isookanga's virtual destruction of people and habitat is chillingly replicated in reality by figures of the novel such as the soldier Kiro 'who dreamed of a Congo made peaceful by napalm' (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 5). Isookanga exists in both worlds; the traditional Ituri way of life and the one of global capital and technology. Moreover, the race to the bottom and plunder of the world's

resources is a game that Isookanga cannot resist. His virtual experience of war and global trading through his online game is a harsh contrast to the realities of capitalist modernity in Kinshasa and eventually turns Isookanga from a virtual proficient at war and global trade to a condition of contented apostasy.

Like Célio Mathématik, the hero of Bofane's first novel *Mathématiques Congolaises* (2008), Isookanga is forced to navigate the often treacherous social and political terrain of contemporary Kinshasa. To Isookanga, Kinshasa represents an infinitude of possibility, however, when we see the city through the eyes of Old Lomama, Isookanga's uncle, who comes in search of his nephew, we see capitalist modernity through far more sceptical eyes. For Lomama, the global city and technological modernity, contrary to its promises of building interconnected ecosystems of technology and communication, in fact deepen conditions of alienation and adrift in late capitalism. Bofane writes:

> The old man was sceptical. As he saw it, the modernity that loomed was to be feared. It wasn't with strings coming out of one's ears and with letters touched on a mirror that people would understand each other' (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 151).

The narrative is shaped around Isookanga's belief in the promise of wealth under the aegis of global capitalism to a total rejection of that system through the journey of the narrative hero. Bofane uses the perspectives of secondary characters such as Xia and Old Lomama to provide alternative views on globalization.

Bofane's narrative dispenses with any reductionist representation of the rural world of Ituri and the modern city of Kinshasa through the use of other narrative voices in the text that run parallel to Isookanga. Indeed, globalisation and modernity represents a threat, not only to the livelihood of the Ekonda clan, but also to Xia's wife left behind in China and subject to the harassment of government officials. Whilst Isookanga's narrative appears to follow the traditional journey of the prodigal son, his return to Ituri signals a 'de-globalising' impulse in Bofane's text and the aspiration to a different politics of relationality. Indeed, the critic Russel West-Pavlov argues that Bofane's novel 'suggests a mode of participation in globality (rather than globalization) that stresses an "affirmative biopolitics" of cosmic or planetary dimensions' (West-Pavlov, 2017). Bofane thus depicts the traditional capitalist fantasy of the entrepreneur and self-made man as a dangerous political sensibility, requiring a hardened individualism and 'extra detachment' from the world:

> In the globalized universe of the virtual world, even the sky is no longer a limit. And from the height at which Isookanga contemplated the universe that suited him to perfection, his position assured him extra detachment (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 9).

Isookanga's professed desire to become a 'globalist' is inherently contradictory with his self-positioning as a detached overlord of the virtual world. In this sense, Isookanga, as an initially wholehearted subscriber to the capitalist dream of self-advancement and enrichment, ultimately functions as a critique and parody of the immaturity and ultimately self-destructive ideology inherent within the West's capitalist mentality.

As a coming of age story, the sprawling postcolonial metropolis of Kinshasa represents Isookanga's rite of passage into adulthood and the stage of his reinvention: 'I'm going to be a globalist'(Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 43) functioning as what Kinshasan-born writer Vincent Lombume Kalimasi described as a 'site of dreams'(Boeck, 2004: 260). However, the intersection of different characters who exist in various states of desperation and entrapment, raises the question posed by the Marxist geographer David Harvey of who ultimately has the 'right to the city' (Harvey, 2008). In the social and cosmopolitan landscape of Kinshasa, Isookanga no longer views the world from on high and, rather, forms networks of solidarity and support. It is through these networks that Isookanga's initial enrapture with the possibilities of global capitalism are dispelled. The city acts the microcosm of the effects of global capitalism, from exploited migrant labour to child runaways and fortune hunters like Isookanga. His refusal to join the forces of globalization and capitalism represents a narrative arc of redemption, love and reconstruction that encompasses different scales from the narrative of world of Isookanga to a more historical and, as West-Pavlov argues, 'planetary' sense.

This type of fallible, prodigal hero enables Bofane to deliver his sharp and searing critique of the global avarice and subjugation of the Congo. In a blisteringly ironic epigraph, he dedicates *Congo Inc.* to 'the young girls, the little girls and the women of Congo, to the UN, to the IMF, to the WTO' (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: v). For Bofane, international organisations such as the IMF and UN constitute the modern-day imperialists and wealth extractors who bear ultimate responsibility for the country's slide into an internecine conflict. A conflict that sees multiple interest groups vying for the highest share of profit in the spoils of war (Lemarchand, 2009).

The title of his novel, *Congo Inc. Bismarck's Testament,* draws a direct link between European colonisation and Congo's transformation into a mercenary neo-colonial state with unfettered resource extraction and capital accumulation for powerful elites: a

system that reveals the fallacy of independence and self-determination in the contemporary post-colonial period. Indeed, the political manipulation of foreign leaders and elites in exploiting the conflict for their own gain is excoriated by Bofane. He paints a picture of Commander Kiro, leader of an armed group and middle-man in the conflict, who 'dream[s] of a Congo made peaceful by napalm' (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 50). He pours scorn on the Clinton Global Initiative for giving Paul Kagame a prize 'for the effort his country accomplished in the area of export (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 83).

The world of conflict-resolution and peacekeeping in the Congo is exposed with the most sinister predator of the novel being the Lithuanian Waldemar Mirnas being a UN peacekeeper who sexually abuses the young Shasha la Jactance, an episode that recalls the investigation into widespread sexual abuse amongst peacekeeping forces. The crusader Chiara Argento represents the counter example to Mirnas's predatory abuse. However, Bofane makes clear that Argento, whilst a passionate crusader, is also a political realist and knows she possesses very limited power to fundamentally change the situation of the Congo: 'Chiara was in charge of maintaining the peace in one of the largest viper's nests history had ever created, so vast that it manages to smother the screams of its millions of victims' (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 136). Thus, in the context of what Bofane defines as 'the algorithm of Congo Inc.' the individual crusader and idealist, embodied in the figure of Chiara, is rendered courageous, yet restricted, in her ability to achieve political and social justice.

Indeed, the wider culture of aid and international humanitarianism that has evolved around the war-economy is lacerated by Bofane for its self-importance, but also its collusion and co-dependency with the political forces of Western global capital:

> to propagate holiness around zero latitude, humanitarians in their immaculate vehicles were distributing rations of sanctified cookies throughout the land and attempting to comfort poor genuflecting souls, muttering dogmas they'd memorised in the humanities departments in the northern hemisphere (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 115).

For such humanitarians, the Congo represents a site of performance of the selfless charity of the Western humanitarian, who, in turn demand the grateful 'genuflecting' African victim. Indeed, Aude Martin, a woman who feels guilt for her country's colonial past nevertheless, reverts to racial stereotyping once in the Congo. Her throwaway comment 'why always such resignation?' (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 123) perpetuates the stereotype of the African as victim and passive recipient of global aid. Bofane's cynical balances the satirical prose of the novel with a clearer and much more direct political

message. Isookanga's volte-face towards the system of dehumanisation and profit, delivers an ultimately humanity affirming and cautiously hopeful message.

Bofane's message is delivered in a moment of political urgency depicting a world moving rapidly towards an apocalyptic future unless society radically changes. Indeed, there are multiple images of current, and future, catastrophe in the novel. For example, Bofane describes the Chongqing urban landscape, 'turning yellow from the microparticles of mercury and sulfur, from the various excretions that infused the hot, moist air of the Szechuan summer (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 165). Here, he pointedly marks the elision between the pillage of the planet with Wang Lideng's violation of Gong Xiyan. As Xia is stranded in Kinshasa after a bad business deal, his wife Gong Xiyan, anxiously awaiting his return, is subject to the harassment of police office Lideng. The Chinese characters are fragmented through the realities of transnational capitalism and, it is through these characters, that Bofane constructs a chamber of mirrors in which fragmentation and dispossession represent the new condition of global capitalism.

Bofane's form of the traditional bildungsroman refuses a cohesion between hero and global capitalism. It is this reimagination of the bildungsroman to demonstrate the non-mutual relations of the individual and modernity that afford the novel a more 'planetary' sensibility. It is Bofane's rejection of the capitalist and colonial modernity which makes this text simultaneously 'de-globalising' and reconstructive global fiction. For, whilst the paratextual features of Bofane's text, such as the Chinese translations, and the cosmopolitan environment of Kinshasa, convey the conventions of the 'global' African novel, this is not a utopian Afropolitanism but, rather, a dystopian world order of human fodder rooted in colonial history, in which colonial decree has become transformed into the 'algorithm' of Congo. Inc:

> the little ones created an ironclad arrogance in an attempt to build a wall around themselves. Or else they had the look of infinite sadness because – as Kinshasans said – they were living na kati ya systeme ya lifelo (in the system of hell) (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 51).

Bofane's portrait of youth in the system of death is unflinching and provides a sobering contrast to Isookanga's reunion with his family and return to his clan. Bofane constructs a haunting image of irrepressible defiance:

> the children gestured and danced with jumbled movements, waving their arms and legs in every direction, their faces belligerent or else hilarious, mouths wide-open, to put the spotlight on the world's disparagement. In accompaniment they beat on tables and on every other surface that could

> make noise, at a muted, persistent cadence like the war drums of today (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 71).

Within the form of the bildungsroman, Bofane mourns the loss of youth to global systems of profit and neocolonial exploitation. Tellingly, their anguish is conveyed through sound, they beat on tables and everything in reach, an improvised clamour that grows stronger through Bofane's novel reaching its climax with the arresting image of the Congo as a:

> megapolis […] the place par excellence where people's concepts and madness are telescoped with extreme violence, generating energies as dense as those black holes. The new century is the consumer of these, and the Democratic Republic of Congo is there to obtain them' (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 186).

For Bofane, the colonisation of Congo, and the creation of the Congo Inc. algorithm as the death-machine of modern times, is the one continuous thread that runs through modern twentieth-century history: 'The algorithm of Congo Inc. had been created at the moment that Africa was being chopped up in Berlin between November 1884 and February 1885 (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 174). Bofane goes on to demonstrate how the algorithm of 'Congo Inc.' played a decisive role throughout the wars and militarisation of the world of the twentieth century, it is the continuous historical thread that links the greatest acts of human and environmental destruction from the First World War to the Vietnam War.

The neocolonial power of Western states is refused the gravitas of history and is, instead, reduced to a 'mechanism of the most common sort' (175).It is a mechanism, however, and is, in fact, the antithesis of a Western telos of history as one of progress and development. It is a never-ending game in which African straw men such as Kiro Bizimungu are pretexts for the predations and greed of the powerful:

> While Commander Kobra Zulu was cornered, they had continued to perfect the algorithm somewhere between Washington, London, Brussels, Kigali. Kiro Bizimungu, now stigmatized in the international community as a Monyamulenge, had become a simple coefficient, an ordinary strategic datum, a mechanism of the most common sort' (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 175).

Bofane's text arguably sets itself the challenge of undoing the work and promise of modernity. Russell West-Pavlov reads the relationship between Isookanga and Zhang Xia as 'economic co-operation in miniature', in reference to the increased Chinese influence in the Congo (West-Pavlov, 2017). Not only do Isookanga and Xia represent this relationship in 'miniature', they also both represent the dark side of their respective countries expansive visions of capitalist modernity (West-Pavlov, 2017). Through this

friendship, Bofane offers his reader an image of resistance through the global relationships of survival forged under globalisation. Isookanga and Zhang Xia represent more than simply articulations of their respective nationalities and cultural backgrounds, whereby the Sino-Congolese relationship is rendered in 'minute' form through their fictional friendship. Rather, their relationship is defined by their common interest as informal workers trapped in the system of global capitalism.

The 'shegues', a group of street kids hustling to survive in Kinshasa, whose ranks Isookanga joins and subsequently becomes known as 'big one', represent collective solidarity and resistance in the face of a rapacious global system. They exemplify Judith Butler's notion of 'precarity', a social condition of contemporary global capitalism that cuts across identity categories, creating other coherent relationalities that transcend the traditional differences of race, class, nationality, religion and gender (Butler, 2006). Bofane's vision of the 'shegues' encapsulates both the structural inequalities and exclusions of the 'developing' urban postcolonial metropole as well as a vision of other emergent forms of resistance and collective identity to the dominant ideology of globalisation and development. Their identities are, importantly, non-hierarchical and culturally heterogenous. They use the knowledge around them, such as Xia's lessons in revolutionary combat, to defeat the threats that face them. In this way, Bofane reinvents the typical image of the global cosmopolitan as the wealthy and well-travelled elite and points instead to the cosmopolitanism and globalism of Kinshasa's street culture.

In the showdown between the Governor and authorities of the city, Isookanga 'recalled one of Zhang Xia's maxims: if you want to know what mango tastes like, you must taste it, and if you want to understand the theory of revolutionary methods, you must participate in the revolution' (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 72). Zhang Xia's knowledge of the 'principles of revolutionary combat' (72) and Isookanga's understanding of how to manipulate the media and the image of the authorities creates an alternative vision of global political struggle and solidarity within the 'zone of extraction'(Gómez-Barris, 2017). The image of the shegues could not be more different from the Sino-Congolese economic partnership, which many have likened to new form of neo-colonialism (see Makungu, 2013; Lumumba-Kasongo, 2011). To read this scene as ironic is to miss the affection and admiration with which Bofane draws his rag-tag group of rebels, fabricated through the ashes of global capitalism, yet representing an equally formidable adversary to its very existence.

In the globalised world of Bofane's novel, women represent the most trapped figures of the novel, particularly Gong Xi and Shasha, with the exception perhaps of the crusading Chiara. Both Xi and Shasha are both hunted and abused by men in positions of authority and state power. Moreover, their vulnerability and powerlessness stems from the conflicts and fragmentation of globalization and neo-colonialism in the Congo. Isookanga, through his position, is allowed a distance and a logic to evaluating the costs and benefits of globalization that is not equally available to the female characters. In witnessing the violation of Shasha at the hands of Mirnas, Isookanga renounces his project of self-enrichment and profiteering:

> this was not how Isookanga envisioned globalization. One couldn't dump on people to that extent, for in the end they would inevitably take revenge. It's only logical: when the balance of payments turns out to be problematic […] It's a regular practice in a liberalized universe (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 186).

Isookanga foretells a resistance and revenge against the algorithm of Congo Inc. as a logical and prosaic fact of existence. Bofane looks to the future generations to break this algorithm of liberalisation and globalization in a final image of resilience and fortitude. Isookanga's journey of innocence to experience is expanded here in a historical-planetary sense:

> In an environment polluted by the deadly waves of uranium, cobalt, columbite-tantalite, what can on expect from any individual who has passed through the centrifuge and is developing in the context of a next-generation nuclear reactor? Permanent radiation doesn't bring innocence back; it leads to rage (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: 186).

Instead of imagining the continuities of colonialism in the form of 'imperial debris' and ruination, Bofane likens it to a process 'permanent radiation', a never-ending experiment of human annihilation practiced on generations of Congolese people. The novel ends in anticipation of something Bofane can only speculate as some equivalent expression of rage and resistance within Congo as the 'centrifuge' of modernity and the conscripts of Bismarck's testament.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the subversive use of form in three Congolese novels against the metonymic representation of the Congo as the heart of the 'dark' continent. Each of the selected texts share a preoccupation with oppressions and violent power relations of the postcolonial state and the possibilities of resistance to this reality, both within and

beyond the world of the text. The reinvention and subversion of form in this selection of texts demonstrates the heterogeneity of postcolonial Congolese fiction with the picaresque, experimental and the bildungsroman all used to explore and, more crucially, politicise the crisis of authoritarianism during the post-independence years and the later slide into internecine conflict after the collapse of Zaïre in 1997.

At the heart of their experimentation with language and form is the inevitable limits of both to adequately capture and represent the loss and violent rupture of colonisation and its continuing detriment of the human subject. Tansi wrestles with the possibility of the literary imagination to find purchase in the political reality of egregious and punitive tyranny. Mabanckou, meanwhile, uses the struggle of his picaresque hero to belong in society as a metaphor for the condition of postcolonial authoritarianism. And finally, Bofane introduces radical and distinctly non-literary notions of technocratic algorithms determining Congo's social reality and histories of globalisation and modernisation within the twentieth century, within a form traditionally used to bring the individual and modernity into some form of accord.

Chapter 3 Controlling the narrative: feminist negotiations, international sisterhood and neoimperialism in the writing of Congolese women's histories

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined how Tansi, Mabanckou and Bofane subvert and reinvent literary form in order to produce innovative works of fiction that challenged the dominant form of discourse on the Congo. Their fictions offer the reader alternative representations and literary cartographies of power, history and coloniality in the (post)colonial state. In this chapter, I explore the space of Congolese women's writing and authorship, specifically examining how narrative form and authority continue to be a site of contestation, negotiation, and conflict. I explore how the colonial logics of race and sexuality continue to code representations of Congolese women in histories of Pan-African liberation as well as in contemporary mainstream discourses around the 'failed state'.

In this exploration, I draw attention to the crucial importance of Black African women's writing in disrupting the dominant politics of patriarchy and coloniality; a disruption from which critical feminist discourses that interrogate and deconstruct the hegemonic representations of feminism, 'race', sexuality, and violence have materialised. I argue that the repetition of colonial and imperial stereotypes that produce sexualised and racialised logics rely on a process of narrative erasure and the 'unwriting' of Black African women's experiences. Moreover, the mediation of Black women's voices and political experiences has resulted in objectified, sexualised and racialised tropes that silence and relegate the African woman to a visual signifier and spectacle of victimhood.

The birth of women's literature in the Congo can be traced to the moment of anticolonial resistance. Interestingly, Bodia Macharia reads this coalescence of a new political culture of national independence and the beginnings of women's movement in the early 1960s, not as a fateful accident, but rather as an inevitability. According to her, the intoxicating language of freedom and rights of expression that the national independence movement gave birth could only fuel a feminist reappraisal of the gender hierarchies instituted by the former colonial rulers (Macharia, 2006).

Indeed, this political transition led to the formation of the first literary group Pleiade du Congo, founded by writer and poet Clementine Faik-Nzuji in Kinshasa in 1965. This literary history of Congolese women's writing, along with the diversity of genres and different modes of expression that Congolese women have used to articulate both the lived experience and the poetic imaginary, challenge the otherwise static imagery and hypervisibility of Congolese women in the contemporary discourses of development and political economy. I will return to these representations of Congolese women in discourses of political economy and development in more detail in the next chapter. I begin this chapter by looking at the history of Andrée Blouin, her erasure from the political history of Congolese independence and her problematic retrieval from the archive in Karen Bouwer's work *Gender and Decolonisation in the Congo: The Legacy of Patrice Lumumba*. From the troubling representation and historiography of Blouin and the marginalisation of radical Black African women, I then turn to two contemporary texts – Lyn Nottage's *Ruined* (Nottage, 2010) and Lisa J. Shannon's *A Thousand Sisters* (Shannon, 2010) that attempt to wrestle with the explosion of sexual violence against women during the two Congo Wars. Whilst these texts are *not* by female Congolese writers, both are texts that blur the lines of feminist literature and NGO sponsored productions oriented towards political mobilisation and building awareness around women's rights across European and North American audiences.

The presence of women in the archives of African liberation struggle and national independence is now being revisited (Bouwer, 2010). However, if we look at contemporary representations of Congolese women, they are predominantly used to encode development and positive readings of the nation, whereas it is men who have been lauded as the leaders and chroniclers of the embattled (post)colonial nation-state. The elision of women with the nation state has a long history (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989) which today is reformulating itself by coalescing women's empowerment with the demands of the global economy. What is incontrovertible is the fact that Congolese women have been the most exploited class, both within the postcolonial authoritarian state and the globalised economy of late capitalism. For example, Mobutu's notorious 'family code', which was imposed in 1987, allowed men full control of marital property, the right to take other wives and lowered the age of consent to 13 (McGreal, 1997). The collapse of the economy and the engulfing of the country in conflict in 1997 meant that women's already precarious social standing through juridical-legal means of the state was further imperilled in the post-Mobutu period.

Macharia crucially counters this dominant representation of Congolese women as caretakers of the nation and as the driving force of the economy by asserting that there has always been a complex underground corpus of women's writing. The long periods of political repression and authoritarian control that have shaped Congo's (post)colonial history leads Macharia to define Congolese women's writing as a 'littérature souterraine'(Macharia, 2006, 9). The publication, transmission, and recognition of women's writing has, in many ways, suffered the greatest impact from the economic exploitation and political exclusion that has characterised both the country's colonial and post-colonial period. The 'littérature souterraine' of Congolese women has, not surprisingly, had much less success in finding a foothold in the publishing market than those of their male counterparts.

This underrepresentation of Congolese women in literary culture is particularly noticeable following the rise and global success of established writers such as Alain Mabanckou and In Koli Jean Bofane, as well as the excitement generated by Fiston Mwanza Mujila's debut novel *Tram 83* (Mujila, 2015). The recognition of such writers as leading lights of African literature reveals not only the paucity of women referred to in the same capacity, but also the political and social exclusions that determine literary success and transnational recognition. It is for this reason that Macharia advocates for the right to free education, literacy projects and an anti-patriarchal revolution, in order to reverse the deepening oppressions facing women in the Congo. In this way, she underlines the need for a restitution of social provision, something that has been steadily eroded through globalisation and economic liberalisation.

3.2 'If it were my turn to speak': the problems of mediation and collaboration in Andrée Blouin's *Black Pasionaria*

I turn first to the representation of Pan-African revolutionary Andrée Blouin – one of the key figures in Congo's Independence movement and the wider Pan-African liberation movement. The daughter of a French businessman and African woman, she was taken from her mother and raised in a Roman Catholic mission for mixed-raced children. The death of her son from preventable illness became the political trigger for her later career as a political adviser during the years of Pan-African liberation. She advised Sekou Touré during Guinea's independence negotiations with France and joined Patrice Lumumba's party leading the women's wing and later as chief of protocol in the national government (Reid, 2020). Her childhood and remarkable political career is chronicled in *My Country Africa: Autobiography of the Black Pasionaria,* a collaboration with American writer Jean

Mackellar (Blouin, 1983). This collaboration and its controversy are later re-evaluated in Karen Bouwer's feminist historiography. Blouin's own desire over how to be remembered are altered and arrested in both texts by her, white, Western feminist interlocuters.

The appropriation of Blouin's story, to tell a particular story of colonialism, echoes Michelle Boulous Walker's argument that, 'silencing involves a sort of spatial logic' (Walker, 2005: 10). This idea of silencing incorporating a 'spatial logic' is acutely evident in the representation of Blouin as signifying both the Congolese nation and post-colonial Africa. It is precisely these forms of literary objectification and fetishization along the lines of race, gender and sexuality that lead the editors of the collection Black Women Writers at Work to emphasise in the very first line, that their text 'is not a collection of disrobing exposés revealing the personal lives of black women writers'(Claudia Tate Ed, 1983: xv). Mackellar's psychological portrait uses these imperial Western tropes of 'unveiling' and 'disrobing' colonial subjects, in order to produce subjects that serve particular political and narrative desires.

Blouin's forgotten central role in Congolese independence disrupts the otherwise androcentric histories of Congolese independence and Pan-African liberation. Blouin is a rarely cited figure in accounts of Congo's history. She does not garner a single mention in David Van Reybrouck's 639 page history of the Congo (Van Reybrouck, 2015). This obsolescence is all the more glaring when we consider the fact that she was one of Lumumba's most trusted advisors and duly appointed chief of protocol during the turbulent years of anticolonial struggle and independence. Moreover, Blouin was instrumental in mobilising women to join the anticolonial movement in the Congo.

Whilst Mackellar's text clearly aims to refocus the story of Congo's anticolonial movement through the lens of Blouin, the mediation and narrative slippages of the text make Blouin perversely, a more elusive and fickle figure within the text itself. The controversial history of the text's provenance and publication further accentuate the problems of identifying narrative voice and positionality throughout the text. Blouin's desire to write a political testimony and record of her life's work clashed with Mackellar's desire to present a psychoanalytic portrait of Blouin and the motivating factors of her personal history that led her to embrace the political world of Pan-African liberation. According to Bouwer, the final manuscript caused Blouin such dismay that she sought to block its publication and considered taking legal action against Mackellar. This disputed collaborative history raises immediate questions of the ethics of ownership of texts.

The title of the text foregrounds the point that it is an autobiography, with the collaborative role of Mackellar positioned second. Throughout the text, Mackellar uses the pronoun 'I' effectively embodying the voice of Blouin and collapsing the narrative distance between collaborator and subject. There is also another level of mediation in the fact that Blouin recounted her experiences in her native French tongue with Mackellar than transcribing this French transcription into English. Thus, there is a linguistic alienation between subject and text, despite the text's categorisation as an autobiography. It raises serious questions as to how the form of autobiography as a work of intermediated collaboration can in fact accommodate the many different versions and conflicts over the subject herself. It further raises the problem also of how the reader is supposed to delineate between the collaborator and subject within the autobiographical form.

This text follows a somewhat problematic historical tradition of Black writers and intellectuals' work being prefaced and approved by established European writers before publication and recognition, particularly when the text is addressed to a global audience. Whilst the work of male, Black revolutionaries like Fanon is situated within an intellectual genealogy of European philosophy courtesy of Sartre,[42] the historical contribution of radical Black women in the struggles for freedom in the long twentieth century are relegated to the margins of intellectual genealogies and philosophical canons. Rather, their philosophy and activism has often been documented through the genres of life writing: autobiography, political biography, memoir and essays with examples like *Left of Karl Marx: the political life of Black communist Claudia Jones* (Davies, 2008), *Assata: An Autobiography* (Shakur, 2014) and *Sylvia Wynter: On being human as praxis* (McKittrick, 2015). These texts work against the fragmentation and suppression of the radical thought and activism of Black women as supplementary to existing political genealogies of freedom and struggle.

The centering of these narratives of Black female liberation through the genre of autobiography works against this history of marginalisation and fragmentation. The importance of narrative agency is underlined by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1992) who argues that,

[42] Jean-Paul Sartre's introduction to Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (1990) confirms the importance of the text to audiences, conferring intellectual legitimacy by placing him within an established philosophical tradition and culture of letters: 'Fanon is the first since Engels to bring the processes of history into the clear light of day' (Fanon, 1990: 13).

> our capacity to confront the world creatively is dependent on how those images corresponds or not to that reality, how they distort or clarify the reality of out struggles. Language as culture is thus mediating between me and my own self (Thiong'o, 1992: 15).

As Thiong'o points out, the mediation between image and the reality of the self is a powerful and determining force in the development of the self. Indeed, it is for this reason that creative autonomy and authorial position is a key issue in documenting black women's history. Aoua Keita's 1975 autobiography *Femme d'Afrique: La Vie d'Aoua Keita racontee par elle-meme* (Kéita and Bessis, 2014) underlines the authenticity of the text, whilst Winnie Mandela reverted to a different tactic in her memoir entitled *491 Days Prisoner Number 1323/69* (Mandela et al., 2017) using the form of autobiography to erase her own identity and underline the institutional barbarity and anonymity of the South African apartheid regime. Both texts signal powerful acts of reclamation and self-affirmation that elude the feminist reconstruction and retrieval of Congolese women into the historical narrative of anticolonial liberation.

Julia Swindells remarks on how the critical turn in autobiography studies has 'rendered usefully problematic the idea that autobiography is a naked and transparent presentation of existence' (Swindells 1995: 1). Instead of being 'transparent presentation of existence', Swindells argues that 'all autobiographical statements show some process of mediation between the subject and author of the autobiography, and the ideological environment they inhabit' (1). The presence of Mackellar as the collaborator complicates this division between subject/author/ideological environment even further. Indeed, the different political standpoints of Mackellar and Blouin influence the entirety of the text and Mackellar's positioning of Blouin within a particular ideological environment. Annette K. Joseph Gabriel notes how,

> by casting Blouin as an exceptional woman, Mackellar confines African women into passive and immobile roles on a continent that very much resembles the setting of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (Joseph-Gabriel, 2015: 211).

Thus, by elevating Blouin, she excises her from precisely the ideological environment of Pan-Africanist liberation and emancipation she devoted her life to, situating her instead within a completely different political narrative. In the text's epilogue, Mackellar notably steps into first person narrative to deliver her final evaluation of Blouin's life:

> While Andrée continues to think of herself as a "revolutionary," the change she seeks today is that of making her continent economically sound and self-sufficient. Now that colonialism is almost a thing of the past, it is the

> subtleties of neocolonialism that remain to be corrected. Only when Africa's people have learned to use their great resources effectively, she says, will they have the real freedom for which they have yearned so long (Blouin, 1983: 287).

Economic neocolonialism and its 'subtleties' are here merged with African people's lack of knowledge over how to use their own resources. This typical Western narrative of economic mismanagement is frequently used to rationalise the concurrent mineral richness and widespread poverty in Africa, whilst removing complicity from neocolonial powers and their continuing exploitation of African resources, labour, and land. It is furthermore, a narrative that succeeds in removing any responsibility from former colonial powers for continuing exploitation; as Rodney famously described in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Rodney, [1972] 2018), outlining a history that is remarkably *unsubtle* in its theft, violence and exploitation.

In Mackellar's words, economic self-sufficiency is not a 'revolutionary' project, as Rodney and Blouin would see it, but rather a pedagogical and corrective exercise of African 'self-improvement'. What is implied, therefore, is that the only obstacle to true freedom is African people's 'lack' of knowledge about how to profit from their own land and resources. Responsibility for the continuing oppressions and inequalities are thus shifted onto the African as individual as opposed to a structural force of modernity shaped by slavery and colonialism. The overly paternalistic and prescriptive attitude of this discourse completely re-writes Blouin's political identity and self-perception as someone committed to Pan-African revolution and freedom, positioning her instead in the mould of the liberal imperialism, championing the economic efficiency of Africa in the new world order.

Mackellar engages in a politically liberal worlding of Blouin, in which she is an 'African entrepreneur' rather than a woman whose politics were incontrovertibly radical on the issues of economic and political liberation. Mackellar's transformation and translation of Blouin into an entrepreneur erases the rich history of women and African feminists in anticolonial liberation movements, reducing them to symbolic meanings as opposed to agents of radical change.

In response to the challenges faced by the women writers from non-white, non-Western backgrounds, the cultural critic Trinh T. Minh-Ha formulates the term 'triple bind':

> She who "happens to be a (non-white) Third World member, a woman, and a writer is bound to go through the ordeal of exposing her work to the

> abuse and praises of criticism that either ignore, dispense with, or overemphasise her racial and sexual attributes (Trinh, 1989: 31).

Mackellar's representation of Blouin enacts both of Trinh's warnings. Her mixed-race identity as the product of an interracial relationship, is viewed as a 'triumph' over colonialism by the author. Blouin's racial identity and the sexually transgressive act she represents thereby signifying the 'failure of racism' (Blouin, 1983: 13). The irony of this reading is significant given that she was in reality removed from her mother and sent to an orphanage precisely because of that 'transgression'. Hence, the structural violence of racism defines both her mother's and her own life by denying the bond of Black women and their children.

The pre-occupation with Blouin's sexual and racial attributes characterise not only the text, but also her reception from Western journalists during the heights of the Congo Crisis. Once the Lady Macbeth figure of the Congo Crisis, the press struggled to reconcile her sexuality, race, and radical politics with her high-profile, public role in the Lumumba camp (Reid, 2020). Rather than viewing her role as a progressive step forward for women, she was caricatured as a temptress and master manipulator of her male colleagues.

Her portrayal as a master-manipulator contrasts with Mackellar's attempts to represent the pre-eminence of Blouin's life as a partial redemption of colonial history:

> Andrée's life today continues to combine the legacies of each of her parents. One sees her white father's authority and commitment to hard work in the way she carries out her role. Like Pierre Gerbillat, she has a sense of adventure in business and the challenge of finding and providing for a commercial need has made an impressive entrepreneur of her. Like Josephine, she remains inextricably attached to Africa and its people, rejoicing and suffering with them as the continent's life unfolds. Everything that happens to Africa affects Andrée on a personal level. When there is good news, she celebrates as if it were a happiness within her own family. For idiocies and misbehaviours she feels personally mortified (Blouin, 1983: 291).

Leaving aside, for a moment, the glaring infantilization of Blouin, here Mackellar reproduces racialised and gendered colonial stereotypes as complementary parts in the life of Blouin. Thus, both representations of Blouin – as seductive temptress or emotionally guileless – silence Blouin as a complex actor in the political maelstrom of anticolonial liberation and decolonisation. Mackellar's switch into third person narrative further consolidates her objectifying representation of Blouin. Whilst Mackellar celebrates Blouin's symbolism as embodying the dissolution of race and colonialism,

what she does is in fact the opposite. Rather, she re-inscribes the same colonial stereotypes on the figure of Blouin, who is racially and sexually coded to represent the redemptive second act of colonialism. Her paternal inheritance has gifted her 'authority' and work ethic, whereas the legacy of her African mother is a purely emotional one in which the nation, the familial and the personal are indivisible. The inference here, is of course, that her white paternity is a necessary counterbalance to the exuberance and joy of her African self. This racial coding of Blouin, as a harmony of colonial doxa with the co-existence of logic and emotion, sits in stark contrast to Blouin identification as African:

> but the truth is speaking of my life has been my way of speaking of Africa […] I speak of my country, Africa, because I want her to be known. We cannot love what we do not know. Knowing comes first, then love follows (Blouin, 1983: 286).

For Blouin, therefore, the autobiographical form is a means to producing knowledge through love and understanding. In this sense, Blouin also places herself as a symbol of Africa and the nation so that knowledge of her life may lead to knowledge of her country.

For Blouin, autobiography is a collective tract that has humanist and reconstructive impulses as opposed to an account of individual greatness and iconicity. Her interpretation of the possibilities of autobiography are misread in two crucial ways by Mackellar. Firstly, that she overturns Blouin's desire for a collective, oral history of political liberation into a psychoanalytic portrait of childhood trauma, 'race', belonging in an 'exceptional' individual. In this way, Mackellar situates Blouin in a far more familiar Western tradition of history writing and autobiography in which the subject is unveiled and dissected to the reader. Secondly, Mackellar constantly highlights the constituent parts of Blouin, the western and the African:

> Evenings chez Andrée are a combination of the graciousness of a salon of Madam de Staël (with whom she has been compared) and the rollicking spontaneity of Josephine's village life (Blouin, 1983: 292).

Thus, we see Blouin embodying both the 'cultured' salons of the West and the far more sexualised representation of 'rollicking spontaneity' of Africa. Blouin's own body and identity is thus transformed into a landscape where coloniser and colonized peacefully co-exist. Equating the racial and sexual coding of the Black female body with the psychosocial territory of the postcolonial state. The erasure of her own voice is necessary to her symbolism as one that represented the overcoming of the rupture of colonialism and represents equal parts the colonial/capitalist knowledge of her paternal origins and

the sexuality and emotion of Africa. This erasure of her voice to fit these symbolic narratives constitutes a violent act of reappropriation of her legacy in the anticolonial movement.

Mackellar's autobiography expresses a desire to mediate radical Black women's voices in order to present a particular narrative of decolonisation and postcoloniality. The fact that this portrait of Blouin was published in a particularly fraught period of proxy wars and ideological struggle across Africa is important. In 1983, the year of the text's publication, the civil war in Angola was intensifying with the invasion of South Africa troops leading to an increase in aid to MPLA forces from the Soviet Union and Cuba. Whilst we are made aware of Mackellar's political opposition to Agostinho Neto's MPLA, Blouin's opinion on Angola is conspicuously absent. A silence no doubt integral to Mackellar's transformation of Blouin, from radical Pan-African liberationist to entrepreneur and socialite, which enlists her into a far more liberal space in which the struggle for African liberation is finished.

Double erasure: Black women's liberation and feminist history

Karen Bouwer's contemporary feminist re-examination of Congo's history refocuses the lens of Congo's Independence, and later political uprisings, through the actions and writings of women who have since been marginalised in histories and scholarship on the Congo. Her feminist history challenges the traditions of male history writing through 'retrieving silenced voices of the past' (Swindells: 9). However, this process of 'retrieval' and reconstitution of history through feminist historiographic praxis is a complex area particularly when it comes to issues of 'race', imperialism, power, class, that inevitably bear upon the production of feminist knowledge and scholarship. What emerges from Bouwer's analysis of the various female figures in Congo's independence is a problematic contrast of virtue and vanity in her comparison of Pauline Lumumba and Andrée Blouin – the two women closest to Patrice Lumumba.

Despite their different political contexts, the problem of mediation and writing feminist histories in these two texts reaffirms the need for creative autonomy and Black, female self-expression when it comes to writing the history of Black feminist liberation. Indeed, for Bouwer, the contestation of voice and narrative agency in *Black Pasionaria* is due to Blouin's naive grasp of the limits of the autobiographical form:

> perhaps had she been given the chance, Blouin would have realized that any and every form would be unable to represent lived experience in its

> immediacy, its uncertainty, and its rich diversity. No account could fully correspond to her image of herself (Bouwer, 2010: 97).

Bouwer's observation constitutes a tradition of white western scholars bemoaning the lack of intellectual sophistication on the part of Black African women writers, in particular, to fully understand the limits of writing to express personal reality. Arguably, what is at stake here could more accurately be defined as a struggle over authorship and authority. So, not only did her collaboration with Mackellar result in a deradicalized and psychosocial portrait in the place of the political testament that she wished to leave behind, Bouwer adds that if Blouin were to speak in her own narrative she would invariably find the very same limits of form and imagination of the original autobiographical text. There is strikingly little evidence for the claim that Blouin does not understand the philosophical limits of writing because there is little evidence here of any engagement with that question. Thus, whilst not only is Blouin's voice mediated by Mackellar in *Black Pasionaria*, but her speculative voice is also determined by Bouwer in an act of double erasure.

Bouwer claims that Blouin's aptitude for oral storytelling makes her unsuitable for the task of autobiography. So, in this sense, the text, as a transcription or mediation of Blouin's spoken life history, is the most authentic celebration of her identity. Her exclusion from the writing process is interpreted as a 'fitting' tribute to her political legacy:

> Commonly, African women's autobiographies have tended to mark the women's entry into the reading public's eye and to document the beginning of the writing process. This is not true for Blouin; the one published text that bears her name has been transcribed and shaped by another. Blouin was a proficient writer, but an author of speeches and radio broadcasts. Her words were always destined to be spoken, and she capitalized on her strengths as an orator (Bouwer, 2010: 97).

Bouwer thus argues that it is her history of oral storytelling and her powerful speechwriting skills that make her unsuited to the form of autobiography and life writing. Implicit in this argument is the genre of women's life history as distinctly Western and not African. Blouin's exclusion from the autobiographical form, as an inauthentic form of self-expression, legitimates the role of the mediator and transcriber to amplify and capture the 'speech' of Blouin and translate this oral testimony into an autobiographical form.

Bouwer's alignment of particular bodies to different forms of communication is a problematic argument. Indeed, when Mackellar slips into third person narrative and the reader is given the impression of direct reported speech from Blouin, she speaks about the impossibility of speech and the space from which to speak from disrupting the otherwise traditional, linear narrative of the text. Blouin's concluding incantation constitutes an abrupt stylistic shift from the preceding prose and evokes a powerful pathos. The conditional and speculative tone introduced 'If it were my turn to speak' (Blouin, 1983: 385) paradoxically generates a greater sense of agency and distinct narrative voice in which Blouin truly emerges from the text. Her incantation is addressed to the future, where women can occupy space and take their long overdue 'turn' in telling their stories. Her sense of paralysis and pathos is accentuated in the following line: 'in setting down my life here I have, in a sense, made this my celebration. I have taken my turn' (Blouin, 1983: 385).

There is a palpable sense of loss here, the loss of a pre-colonial tradition of storytelling, the conditional reality of her given 'turn to speak' and the wilful celebration of this brief speech through the authorship of Mackellar. Reading between the lines of the text, its distortions, mediations, and conceits, it is difficult to reconcile these contesting images of Blouin. The poignant reflection of Blouin's text here contrasts with Bouwer's problematic observation that 'a beautiful mixed-race woman married to a prominent white businessman, she could have chosen to be white' (Bouwer, 2010: 96). Similarly, Mackellar also fetishizes Blouin as an 'unparalleled example of courage and gifts realized' (Blouin, 1983: 292). The representation of Blouin recalls Atukwei Okai's complaint of Western writers treating Africans like 'glass-enclosed specimen […] or like an exotic weed to be sampled and made a conversation piece' (Ashcroft, 1997: 481).

This slippery issue of narrative authority would presumably inform the criticism of the text; however Bouwer ignores these integral questions. Where she critiques the text, it is with Blouin as the author and where the text is praised, it is for Mackellar's authorship. For example, she writes of Blouin 'falling into another trap, that is the exoticizing gaze' (Bouwer, 2010: 81). In Bouwer's analysis of the text, Mackellar fades entirely from view. Given that we know that Blouin wished to prevent the publication of this text, we can only read the text and speculate what she found written *in her own voice* objectionable, requiring a 'double' reading of the text. Moreover, the fetishization of Blouin's mixed race identity sits uneasily with this critique a text riven with uncertainties over who is objectifying whom.

In an interview with Ludo Martens, we hear Blouin's voice unmediated for the first time, offering a very different narrative voice and style; one that throws into doubt how much of Blouin's unmediated voice is present in the Mackellar text. Here we witness a precise and exacting prose exuding her fierce political commitment to, most of all, poor, Congolese women. This is an address that rests less on the anxieties of her role and identity and, instead, underlines her power as an orator and rallying force behind female liberation and national independence:

> The themes we developed concerned the importance of the Party and the need for unity of the country and solidarity among Congolese, the sacrifices required if true independence were to be achieved. To the extremely poor women of the backwoods I explained that they were full-fledged African citizens and that they had to become conscious of their own dignity and responsibility. They signed up for the PSA by the thousands, even Black nuns joined us (Bouwer, 2010: 92).

When Blouin's voice does come through unmediated by anybody (through snippets of interviews and media reports like the above) she is chastised by Bouwer for her singularity and the perception that she is raising herself above the everyday African woman: 'her syntax tends to separate herself from other women […] the text recounting the campaign is filled with "my job" and "I"(Bouwer, 2010: 93). Even when Blouin herself ironically addresses her perception in the French press 'as the only African woman who was making a serious contribution regarding the issues of the continent's decolonization' she is censured for not 'attempt[ing] to refute or qualify this statement'(Bouwer, 2010: 93). Blouin is not allowed to express irony without being censured for indulging in an act of egoism and singular status, a representation that she regards as a ludicrous and misguided fiction of the French media.

For Bouwer, Blouin's public persona and work with the men of the Party results in her transgressing of gender norms and a particular masculine presentation. This transgression and subversion, rather than being hailed as a feminist act makes her distant and elusive from her African sisters: 'working primarily with men, even to politicise women and to promote their rights, she appears cut off from the collectivity that for many other women was a vital source of support and strength (Bouwer, 2010: 93). According to Bouwer, Blouin embodies the gendered contradictions of Africa. Blouin is trapped between Mackellar's determination to extract Blouin from her social and political context as an extraordinary African human and Bouwer's equal determination to scold Blouin for disconnecting herself from the 'ordinary' African women. African women themselves, whether ordinary or writers, are swept into the disciplinary

boundaries of western knowledge. In practice this means that they are adroitly nudged out of a 'real' understanding of themselves or 'Africa'.

The gendered and racialised coding of Blouin's self in both texts dislocates her from any collective, ideological environment. For Bouwer, 'her fluid crossing of boundaries of race and gender' removes her from an imagined collective female African experience. Mackellar is far less subtle and contrasts Blouin as an ebullient and unlikely hero elevated from:

> [a] society where most women were consigned with a swat, to their cooking pots […] in one of the cruellest denigrations of the feminine sex in the world (Blouin, 1983: 292).

In Bouwer's text, it is the gendered and racialized ambivalences that effectively isolated her from an 'authentically' African female experience. For Bouwer, Blouin's mother Josephine Wouassimba and Pauline Lumumba are representative of this authentic, female African voice. The ambivalence and complexity accorded to Blouin is reversed in Bouwer's representation of Pauline Lumumba.

'A simple tale': Pauline Lumumba and the gestural subject

Bouwer's discussion of Patrice Lumumba's personal and political life sees Pauline Lumumba accorded virtue, whereas Lumumba figures as a careless and feckless individual. This history is given in a period in which gender norms and social customs were in a state of flux. Efforts by Belgian missionaries to create monogamous and nuclear family structures, as opposed to the traditional polygamous cultures, leads Bouwer to represent Lumumba as a man with a foot in both worlds, 'he straddles two worlds and sought acceptance in both' (Bouwer, 2010: 60).

Bouwer contrasts Lumumba's 'duality' with Pauline Lumumba's 'authenticity' as a woman more representative of the female experience in Congo under colonial rule. This is a problematic assertion, for it links complexity and duality with something inauthentic, and simplicity with 'authenticity', so that while Patrice loses his authenticity as 'Congolese' Pauline loses complexity. In line with this representation, Bouwer feels the need to break from the academic register of her voice to express more accurately Pauline's story:

> told as a simple tale, Pauline Opango Onosamba's story might sound like this. Once upon a time there was a girl called Pauline who lived with her parents in a village in the Kasai region of the Congo. When she was in her

> teens, she learned she would marry a handsome, learned man from the city (Bouwer, 2010: 67).

The assignment of a childlike wonder is difficult to conceive of in any other context in which a life history would be introduced in the manner of a fairy tale. Significantly, precision in time and space are judged entirely irrelevant to this tale. Through sentimentalising and simplifying Pauline's life story, the author entreats us to sympathise with Pauline as a neglected wife and whose humble desires in her life were sacrificed to a greater political movement. She gives a dreamlike, naivete to her story with her fairy tale like opener 'once upon a time' and homogenises this as the experience of all African women from rural backgrounds. The voyeurism of Bouwer as she enters into the figure of Pauline and her alienation from the urbane and learned figure of her 'strange' husband not only erases Pauline's voice, but also estranges Patrice as a distant and uncaring figure.

The narrative elision between Pauline and Bouwer continues through the text. She writes 'amazingly enough, given [Lumumba's] busy schedule, her husband also had time for women other than Pauline' (Bouwer, 2010: 61). Are we supposed to believe these are the outraged words of Pauline Lumumba or Bouwer's mediation of Pauline's personal feelings of betrayal? Indeed, the representation of Lumumba as a hypersexualised man follows a well-worn racist and colonial trope that depicts Black masculinity as violent and threatening. Moreover, Blouin's decision to present Lumumba's sexual history in a diagram appears a jarring and prurient exercise that has echoes of colonial attempts to examine and regulate what they perceived as deviant and non-standard sexual and cultural norms of the society (61).

The assigning of virtue, vanity and indiscretion is a problematical reading of their relationship and the complexities of gender in the period of decolonisation. Bouwer justifies this literary indulgence as arising from the fact that 'the little we know about Pauline Opongo has been cobbled together from interviews and references'(Bouwer, 2010: 69). It is therefore up to the author to embellish and attempt to reconstruct the 'simple tale' of Pauline. Pauline's narrative is one of redemption versus that of Blouin. Due to the fact that Pauline is framed in a sentimental narrative and therefore marked as more deserving of the reader's sympathy.

The contrasting textual depictions of Andrée Blouin and Pauline Lumumba elucidate the problems of producing knowledge at the intersection of feminism, 'race' and (post)coloniality. They capture what Minh-ha's definition of the 'triple bind' as a perilous

negotiation of simultaneous hyper-visibility and invisibility. Indeed, the deradicalization of Blouin and the sentimentalization of Pauline do equal disservice to the legacy of Congolese women in history of liberation. The history of African female liberation and anticolonial struggle, in all its complexity and contingency, is reduced to a sentimental landscape of authentic and inauthentic selves. Whilst Blouin and Patrice Lumumba occupy trickier liminal spaces, often resulting in more negative portraits of egoism and ambition, the idealisation of Pauline Lumumba as the everyday female heroine is equally reductive.

Although Mackellar and Bouwer's texts are problematic, both are important reminders of the work of Congolese feminists in the history of anticolonial liberation. The autobiographical genre and politics of feminist literary retrieval has been side-lined today by a different form of feminist writing and activism aiming to generate awareness of the dire situation of women owing to the two Congo Wars that have devastated large parts of the country. Both Lyn Nottage's *Ruined* and Lisa J. Shannon's *A Thousand Sisters* are works based upon survivor testimonies. Travelling from the autobiographies of radical trailblazers such as Blouin to these texts of survivor testimonies indicate the catastrophic impact of war and violence on women in the last two decades. Indeed, these different forms of feminist writing and activism represent a wider shift from the politics of liberation to the politics of survival.

3.3 Telling others' stories: silence and sisterhood in Lyn Nottage's *Ruined*

Since Margot Wallstrom, the UN's special representative on sexual violence, designated the Congo as the 'the most dangerous place on Earth to be a woman'(Autesserre, 2012), there has been renewed political focus on the issue of sexual and gender-based violence. However, this declaration has also led to a silencing of Congolese women in this discourse. Hallstrom's designation of the Congo as the worst place to be a woman, recalls Boulous Walker's argument that 'silencing involves a sort of spatial logic', whereby it the Congo which is spatialised as a site of terror and sexual violence. This logic silences the role of imperial histories of gendered violence along with today's global systems of extraction and profiteering. Indeed, the Congolese feminist activist Justine Masika Bihamba (2017) refutes this narrative questioning 'the 'rape capital of the world'? we women in the Congo don't see it that way.' Instead, she emphasises the words of Leymah Gbowee, who named the Congo 'world capital of sisterhood and solidarity'. This gap in perception between feminist Congolese activists and senior international figures in women's rights raises important questions over narrative control and agency in who is

framing and telling the story of women in the Congo and the wider political effects of these discourses.

Indeed, Bihamba highlights the importance of the political participation of Congolese women arguing that 'efforts to build peace and end sexual violence should be led from the front' and the grossly unequal resources of this campaign allotted to Congolese feminist activists expose the divisions and inequalities of the international aid sector. As Bihamba notes,

> after more than 17 years of involvement by the United Nations and three years after the UK's Global Summit on Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict, progress on the ground is minimal. The summit cost £5.2m to host while we carry out our work with nothing (Bihamba, 2017).

Contemporary discourse on conflict and gender oppression in the Congo that have led to characterisations of the place as the 'rape capital' of the world and 'the most dangerous place' to be female, reveals a historical disjuncture between the political lives and radical histories of figures such as Andrée Blouin and Leonie Abo during the years of anti-colonial liberation with the discourse of survival and victimhood that characterises contemporary discourses on women in the Congo today. Indeed, this radical feminist legacy is silent in recent productions of women's experiences in Congo since the collapse of Zaïre in 1997.

Both Nottage and Shannon embed themselves with different charity and aid organisations to gain access to survivors. This relationship allows the writers to construct their narrative through the testimonies of survivors. Nottage recounts how 'I found my play *Ruined* in their painful narratives, in the gentle cadences and the monumental space between their gasps and sighs' (Nottage, 2010: 120). Thus, it is in this encounter and within the space of the non-verbal and speechlessness that Nottage writes. This is problematic in its silencing of the Congolese storyteller/survivor and her right to the story that that silence tells. Through 'filling' the gasps, Nottage crafts a universal story from her position as a researcher that homogenises the Congolese survivor into a homogenised and silent subject.

In the play text, photographs of the survivors accompany the play in the appendix. The images of the women are caught in the moment of telling and reliving their trauma. She highlights the fact that the photos were taken 'moments after they told their powerful stories' (Nottage, 2010: 120). The fact that we are given just an image at the back of the

play text is a telling illustration of the power and politics of authorship when it comes to writing women's experiences and testimonies.

From this collection of stories, Nottage crafts a universal human narrative of beauty and suffering,

> to celebrate and examine the spectrum of human life in all its complexities: the sacred with the profane, the transcendent with the lethal, the flaws with the beauty, and selfishness with generosity (Nottage, 2010: xii).

Bihamba's argument that Congolese women must be at the front of peace process for there to be change is not the case in Nottage's text, with the images of the women and women's NGOs and organisations listed in the back pages of the text. Indeed, the text's aim, of both dramatic storytelling and raising awareness within Western audiences, places the stories of Congolese women within a universal human narrative as opposed to a critical discourse in which the sexual violence in the Congo both during colonial times and during the First and Second Congo Wars is inextricably tied to the logic of economic extraction and (neo)colonial exploitation.

Brechtian reversal in Nottage's Ruined

Ruined takes place in a brothel situated in the crosshairs of a battle between Government and Rebel forces. The site of the brothel represents both sexual exploitation and female protection through the figure of Mama Ndi. Ndi, the matriarch and madam of the bar, uses her intelligence and wiles to pacify both factions of the war and maintain her business and financial autonomy. The play is presented as a realist depiction of the realities of Congo, with the women forced to navigate the perilous realities of the war.

Nottage's idea for the play begins as an adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage* set in the Congo with the understanding that 'doing an adaptation might call attention to the crisis' (Nottage, 2010: x). This immediately raises the question of the play's intended audience. Despite the fact that the play represents itself as a universal story that is relatable to a global audience, the play is primarily addressed to Western audiences. This is evident from the schedule of performances which are exclusively limited to North American and European theatre venues. Thus, there is an unresolved tension within Nottage's play between constructing a universal narrative of survival and courage around the experiences of Congolese women and the construction of the Congo as a place of exceptional and spectacular violence. Of course, this does not mean that high levels of sexual violence should not be front and centre, but there is a problem when the

representation of such crimes takes place in an ahistorical framework in which the forces of global capital extract Congo's wealth and ensure its citizens' continuing poverty and vulnerability to conflict and sexual violence.

Charlotte Mertens (Mertens, n.d.) explores the complexities around the reporting and representation of sexual violence in the Congo through the lens of what she terms the 'visibility problem' of rape in the Congo, and its role in perpetuating imperial and colonial stereotypes:

> while the intensity of violence cannot be denied, there is something deeply disturbing about the ways in which the rapes in Congo and the Congo itself have been employed and represented within global discourses (Mertens, 2017: 664).

Indeed, multiple media accounts have drawn attention to the 'bestial' and cannibal nature of violence against women in the Congo. This mode of representation has led to the Congo's exceptional status as 'the worst place on Earth to be a woman' and an 'unthinkable reality'. Thus, the positioning of Congolese women outside 'thinkable reality' prompts Nottage to turn to a universal register of human drama and emotion. In a bid to connect Western audiences to the suffering of Congolese survivors, she consciously reverses Brechtian techniques of audience alienation. The problem here is that rape and violence both define the entirety of the Congo and simultaneously extract it as a disconnected exception comprehensible only through drama.

There is a spatial logic that runs through the conception and production of this play that dictates the terms in which the stories of Congolese women are told in the play. Kate Whoriskey, the director of *Ruined*, writes:

> since our trip, I have been haunted by the human capacity to use creativity and imagination to such deadly ends. I would like to think we are better off in the United States, but when you look at what was done in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay, we are only wealthy enough to keep it off shore. In the United States, we have the money to create weaponry that removed us from the violence that we enact. By contrast, in the Congo, the mixture of poverty and war is a lethal combination. Due to a lack of money, the human body becomes the weapon, the teenage boy the terror, and a woman's womb "the battleground (Nottage, 2010: xi).

The dissonance that Whoriskey outlines between violence enacted by the West and violence in Congo sees the former externalised and the latter internalised and embodied. Whoriskey does not develop how these differential articulations of violence connect however, and wealth-extraction and poverty are here the passive subtexts to the

militarisation and epidemic of sexual violence of the Congo. The idea that war and sexual violence is the consequence of a 'lack of money', as opposed to an agentive process of wealth-extraction and exploitation by foreign countries and corporations, is a problematic frame of analysis that casts the teenage soldier as the chief cause of 'terror', evoking, once again Conradian tropes of racialised and sexualised violence. This analysis sits in contrast to Bofane's *Congo Inc.,* which places Congolese youth in the crosshairs of the destructions and predations of global capitalism and explicitly identifying those who are profiteering and complicit in the violence in Congo.

The representation of the war in Congo as bodily and psychic trauma, 'the teenage boy the terror, and a woman's womb "the battleground", is a narrative that revives imperialist tropes of terror and violence as the exceptional reality of the Congo. A narrative, moreover, that Mertens finds troubling for,

> framings of rape as exceptional hide the complicity of international actors, institutions, researchers and the media-aid complex in perpetuating violent representations. Effectively positioning themselves outside of or in opposition to the 'horrific' sexual violence 'out there', thus occluding the fields of power pertaining to discursive regimes (Mertens, 2017: 665).

Indeed, there is a noticeable lack of agency or historicization in the text, which opts instead to present an impossible and ever-moving chaos in which the women at the epicentre must navigate to survive.

> Mr Harari: This fucking war, ay mother, no one owns it! It's everybody's and nobody's.
>
> Mama: Tst
>
> Harari: It keeps fracturing and redefining itself. Militias form overnight, and suddenly a drunken foot soldier with a tribal vendetta is a rebel leader, and in possession of half of the enriched land, but you can't reason with him, because he's only thinking as far as his next drink.
>
> Mama: Yes, and what is new? (Nottage, 2010: 89).

Mama Ndi's world-weary cynicism sits in direct contrast with Harari's exasperation at the incomprehensible twists and turns of the war. Nottage contrasts the very different roles that men and women play in times of conflict. The brevity of Mama Ndi's speech gives us little clue to what she thinks. It is unclear whether she is agreeing to Harari's inferences merely to appease or, because she does in actual fact agree with his summation.

Harari's exasperation derives from the fact that the war in Congo does not follow a logical pattern belonging at the same time to 'everybody' and 'nobody', which threatens his ability to make a profit through the diamond trade. It is a striking that here the argument is that the illogical chaos of the Congolese conflict constitutes a barrier to economic profit when in fact, the instability and violence has been instrumentalised in order to exploit Congo's wealth. Nottage exoticizes the war in Congo 'the man I shake hands with in the morning is my enemy by sundown. And why? His whims. Because?! His witch doctor says I'm the enemy' (Nottage, 2010: 89). Nottage presents an image of modern capitalism thwarted by the whims and witchcraft of African soldiers. Ndi concludes that it will always be so, affirming Harari's representation of chaos and the only certainties in which she can live by are the necessary lubrications of sex and alcohol.

> Mama: He pays me in gold, he pays me in coltan. What is worth more you tell me. What is their argument? I don't know. Who will win? Who cares? There's an old proverb, "Two hungry birds fight over a kernel, just then a third one swoops down and carries it off. Whoops! (Nottage, 2010: 89)

Here, Nottage is clearly celebrating Mama Ndi as a figure of stoicism and strength in the face of incredible adversity. Whilst she remains a morally complex figure in the play, Nottage shows how very little political capital is available to her, except for her bar. Ndi's bar secures her economic autonomy; however, it relies on perpetuating women's sexual subjugation. It is problematic that Mama Ndi is given less of a political voice than her male counterparts. Indeed, she is resigned to war and abuse as the perpetual state of the Congo and the death machine of male power: 'let all the mother-hating soldiers fight it out. Cuz, in the end do you think that will change anything here? (89). The audience thus gains very little insight into Ndi's thinking about the state of the Congo, she is rather a figure determined to survive and maintain her precarious position of autonomy through the exploitation of other women. She presents a striking contrast to anticolonial resistance fighters and politicians such as Blouin and Abo.

Mama Ndi's removal from a political narrative and agency sees her character fall back on to the language of inevitability and proverbial wisdom when it comes to the realities of war, gender, and violence. By making her a depoliticised figure appeasing all different political factions, she appeals to the politics of sympathy and moral redemption. However, as Purvi Shah points out, a 'politics of sympathy […] purports to offer subjectivity but relies upon an objectification of women by placing them into fixed categories of victimhood' (Hobson, 2016: 165). The historian B.K. Kumbi challenges this

politics of sympathy to address what systems of power and oppression are masked through this representation:

> when the media covers the tragedy in Congo, it is to demonstrate that there are Blacks who kill Blacks. There is no question raised about the people or the countries who arm those Blacks – and for what purpose (BK Kumbi, 2014).

Kumbi engages directly and politicises the dissonance and exceptional status of the Congo. The dissonance and exceptionality conferred upon the Congo constructs a narrative that prevents reflexive questions and ethics that directly implicate the audience. Instead, *Ruined* looks to address a collective humanity:

> looking inside moments of profound disruption, witnessing the chaos, absorbing the psychic damage, and then synthesising the narrative that shows we are capable of so much more (Nottage, 2010: xii).

For Nottage, the universal narrative of the indomitable human spirit has an ultimately healing effect. By highlighting the universal humanity message however, the actual power-relations and economic-military forces in the Congo disappear from view. It is a call to improve the human subject but not transform oppressive economic and political systems. It is ironic that the government and aid organisations that engaged with Nottage's play such as the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where Salima's Act 2 monologue was performed in 2001, are exactly those that Bofane sardonically dedicates his novel to 'to the young girls, the little girls and the women of Congo, to the UN, to the IMF, to the WTO' (Bofane and De Jager, 2018: v).

3.4 Representations of testimony and trauma in Shannon's *A Thousand Sisters*

Where Nottage sees her role as a writer to 'fill the silence', the American activist and writer Lisa J. Shannon takes the opposite tack and believes her role is to elicit stories and be the bearer and witness of these testimonies. Shannon's candid memoir directly interweaves the personal journey that she embarks on with the wider political narrative of the Congo as a place of extraordinary violence against women. Shannon thus acts as a bridge between women in the Congo and women in America.

By collecting the testimonies of survivors, Shannon aims to find a larger truth and narrative that can capture this body of testimony. Of course, the search for 'truth' and the mediation of story and testimony is necessarily affected by the positionality and power of researcher and subject. Moreover, different traditions and cultures of mourning and

pain often problematise Shannon's quest for more empirical evidence of atrocities committed against women. Shannon's mediation and elicitation of stories claims a universal sisterhood and humanity that can triumph above the devastating realities of war. However, the elicitation of testimony and story is conditioned by other factors, such as economic incentive, which problematise this idealised narrative of individual human triumph and global sisterhood.

Shannon's power and positionality engender a particular performative economy of testimony and trauma that are embedded in the narratives of the 'liberal, moral, order'(Hobson, 2016: 7). Whereby, women's right to control their own narratives is downgraded in order to produce a narrative that legitimates certain moral discourses. Shannon situates her own narrative within the historical genealogy of the Abolition movement. A movement which, according to Shannon, saw the actions of a privileged and self-sacrificing group of individuals leading to the formal abolition of slavery. There are semi-religious overtones to this interpretation of history, whereby historical progress is constituted from the work of individuals compelled to speak out and act on behalf of others. Of course, this narrative gives agency to that privileged few and denies Black political resistance and collective struggle in securing the abolition of the Slave Trade:

> there are activists worldwide who do what they can on behalf of others who are oppressed, though they may not share their plight. These are the people who realize that their own privilege – the privilege of not witnessing atrocities, the privilege of being heard ….that story, the story of a few individuals acting upon injustice even though they have not witnessed it first-hand has always existed, and that is the story that adds to the hope survivors share when they triumph over evil they have witnessed (Shannon, 2010: 11).

By privileging the role of white Abolitionists in dismantling the global slave trade, Shannon silences the history of Black slave rebellion, marronage and resistance.

In this reading, slaves are instead rendered as an oppressed mass of people who must wait patiently for the benevolence and attention of such individuals. It also divorces the Abolition movement from the complex political world of empire and global capitalism. Here, select individuals are the catalysts for global change:

> it was a few individuals who had never been a part of the slave trade who decided to act in the late eighteenth century in London, England, leading eventually to the global abolition movement (Shannon, 2010: 11).

The moral self-sacrificing individual is the catalyst for historical change ignoring the wider historical context of crushed slave rebellions across the Caribbean, the compensation of slave owners and the maintaining of systems of slavery and economic profit through indentured labour (Gopal, 2020). It is this long lens of history that disappears through the fantasy narrative of heroic individuals. The perpetuation of Abolitionist histories as the driving force of political change moreover works to silence histories of African resistance and slave rebellion in the New World. The silencing of this history constitutes an act of epistemic violence in which the history of the slave is supplanted by the politics of charity and morality-based politics in the colonial metropole.

In her introduction to the memoir, Zainab Salbi lauds Shannon's personal sacrifice 'she travelled halfway around the world to talk with them directly, touch them, assure them that there is still hope in the world' (Shannon, 2010: 12). Of course, through elevating Shannon, Salbi pre-figures 'them' - Congolese women - as living in state of hopeless and despair, effectively erasing their agency and resistance.

Throughout the narrative, Shannon's interactions with her Congolese hosts and interviewees are dehumanised through financial bargaining and a particular politics of representation that she seeks to convey. As a trained photographer, her tactic for breaking the ice is to use her camera, displaying her images back to her subjects. In one particular scene, after being ridiculed by a group of former child soldiers on the empty gestures of white people, Shannon requests to take their photographs concluding 'vanity. Works every time'(Shannon, 2010: 90).

The manipulative wielding of her camera to gain the trust of her interviewees is a discomforting exercise. Indeed, what is perplexing is how Shannon does not see these methods as problematic, but rather as crucial to her ultimate goal and, thereby, justified. She describes her method in a cold and functional manner, 'I capture them in still frames. I export them, save them, print them out in pixilated eight by tens and file them in a white plastic three-ring binder' (90). There is sense here of the work being somewhat mundane and tedious but enacted dutifully in the knowledge that it is necessary to improving the lives of people in the Congo.

In order to gain access to the stories of survivors, Shannon is accompanied by a number of translators, drivers and intermediaries; actors who facilitate and enable the interactions of the text. However, these people rarely inflect her narrative as fully

realised and complex individuals. Rather, they are reduced to their function in delivering her to her subject:

> Maurice and Serge will be with me every day of my journey in Congo, and along with Hortense, will be at my side to translate every story, every moment, every interaction I have in here with non-English speakers – and in this French and Swahili-speaking land, that's almost everyone. They'll work for US$10 per day. A steal (Shannon, 2010: 84).

In the pursuit of justice for Congolese rape survivors, Shannon sees no problem in exploiting Congolese workers to fulfil this goal. This paradox underlines the simultaneous imperial gesturing and benevolent self-sacrifice that runs through her text. The intertwinement of narrative telling and economic incentive creates a performative economy of traumatic reliving and testimony that sits uncomfortably and unresolved throughout her account. Multiple subjects display an unwillingness to revisit memories of violence and trauma, but Shannon typically presses them into providing an account, telling them that their stories will be heard in America and the reliving of pain has an innate 'beauty'.

In her meeting with an indigenous tribe, Shannon attempts to outmanoeuvre this relationship of financial tipping for hospitality and knowledge. She tells the Chief

> I could give you sugarcane, but then I would be taking your dignity. I believe in self-sufficiency." Uh-oh they are soooo not impressed. The chief signals an abrupt end to our meeting (Shannon, 2010: 120).

Shannon waves off this episode in a blasé fashion:

> who knew? A little travel tip, apparently lost in some early 1990s printing of Lonely Planet Zaire. When visiting pygmies, never refuse the ritual love-offering of sugarcane (120-121).

The mixture of ignorance and proselytising 'I believe in self-sufficiency' emphasise the overlapping of imperialism, puritanism, and charitable benevolence.

Two registers exist within the memoir, one a factual reportage of the situation of DRC and the other an amateur's field guide to the East of Congo. Together they are packaged as a journey of self-discovery; these two registers make clear its intended Western audience. In pointing out the problems that arise from the text is not to dismiss out of hand acts of charity and altruism, but, rather, to pay attention to the political effects of this narrative and the forms of political representation and transformation that it occludes. As Ananya Roy warns us that 'when the apparatus of empire is military but it

is also architecture, planning, and humanitarian aid [..] complicity with empire is difficult to avoid. This is the challenge of praxis in the time of empire' (Roy, 2006: 7). Indeed, the chief's abrupt termination of his meeting with Shannon is the devastating price of these complicities.

Shannon's encounter with Sifa reveals the particular forms of speech and story that she covets and those she dismisses. Indeed, her mocking representation of Sifa's account delegitimates her narrative and sets her aside from the other testimonies that Shannon applauds for their honesty and bravery. There is a unified cultural logic at work here that solicits certain testimonies and discards others:

> Sifa is one decidedly salty lady. She rages against the white-man machine with a long list of grievances, clapping her hands in time with each item, almost rhythmically. "We have no farms. Nowhere to cultivate. We still live like wildlife (Shannon, 2010: 121).

Shannon is remarkably forthcoming about the financial transaction that preface her every encounter and interview. The transactional element and the implicit knowledge of economic incentive is disturbing particularly given the fact that Shannon never once questions the emotional and psychological effects of retelling trauma in her interviewees. Instead, we hear of how difficult this arrangement is for Shannon and represents the Congolese women as hustling for money:

> I'm sinking. As we go around the room, the conversation is all about angling for more money. I realize I've failed to meet a basic expectation. The term "American sponsor" seems to imply "unlimited sources of cash". […] I know I was naïve to expect otherwise, but I did (127).

Moreover, there is the problematic articulation and reliving of sexual trauma in return for money. The charitable act, as dependent on the degree of horror experienced by the women, constructs a disturbing political economy of trauma, performance, representation, and imagination.

Shannon frames her encounter with her sponsees as one of nervous excitement, in which she describes herself as a nervous bride embarking on a new chapter in her life. It is this romanticisation and fantasy of her own role as a sponsor that makes her shocked to realise the limits of charity in aiding women in the Congo. She is crestfallen to find that her monthly stipend has not solved these women's lives and solved the wider issues of healthcare, cost of medicine and the lack of social infrastructure that keeps these women in a state of financial precarity. Moreover, it is this economic reality of free-market

capitalism and the catastrophic impact it has had on women's lives globally that is absent from her analysis. Instead, she often indulges her role as a saviour figure despite warnings from the organisation's lead organiser, Hortense, that real visits (as opposed to the letter-writing relationship) causes issues, putting pressure on relationships around the women. The seduction of sanctity trumps however these discretionary words.

The so far epistolary relationship that Shannon has with Wandolyn turns into a real meeting at her invitation. She recounts:

> I'm stunned a couple of postcards, letters, and photos have given me near mythic status in this family and transformed me into a kind of fairy god-mother (141).

She embraces this role and its self-described 'absurdity', seemingly ignorant of the financial inequalities that undoubtedly necessitate this demonstration of love and filial belonging. Shannon's wilful embrace of the sentimental at the cost of a more critical and ethical position is immediately evident:

> If I had dreamed this scene a few years ago, how absurd it would have seemed! Me, meeting my half-grown African grandchildren in their tribal compound, something straight out of a storybook but tense with the weight of war around us. […] I announce, "Grandma's here!" and embrace each of the children (142).

Shannon's visit to the family of Wendolyn is describes as the latter 'staking a claim' on the latter although it can only appear as the reverse with Shannon very much staking an authorial role and position in the family through her economic power.

Her interviews with survivors provoke both deep-seated anxiety over the ethics of her actions and an interrogative like zeal to establish certain facts. Following her conversation with Wandolyn, she is prompted to pay her money:

> It's not a suggestion. Its mandatory. I scrounge around my bag and pull out US$40, slipping it to Wandolyn with the uneasy feeling I've just paid her to relive all that (145).

However, this 'uneasiness' is soon overtaken by a desensitisation and the feeling that her benevolence is being manipulated. A feeling that leads her to doubt the authenticity of the testimonies she solicits: 'I'm doing my best to ignore what she just said; I feel like I've walked into a trap. "Right," I say. "Which one of the children is sick? The little one?" Generose reiterates. "The proprietor is chasing us." Is this posturing, some kind of act?'

(153). Sympathy and suspicion are close bedfellows in this political economy of trauma and testimony and, ultimately, it is Shannon who possesses authorial and editorial control over the women's testimonies:

> I can't tell that story. It's not productive. If I tell that story, I'm a trash peddler. A gore-monger. I smile supportively and look at them as they sit opposite me, on the edge of the narrow wooden bench, with their arms crossed. I feel cold and mechanical behind the camera. Something is off. This meeting has become an audition. An audition to become one of my talking points. I could have given them numbers and made a scorecard to help filter the information – charted their stories; rated them on a scale of one to five, for usability. Which horror-nugget wins? I'll just ignore this sinking feeling (222-3).

Shannon is implicated and complicit in this discourse but, instead of dealing with these complex realities, she declares: ' I have grown tired of the muzungu (white) role. I just want to be their friend'(240). The anxieties of her role and the ethics of this type of feminist activism remain unresolved within the narrative.

It is important to note that her objectifying representation of Congolese women is juxtaposed with peripheral representations of Congolese men as deviant and sexually threatening. From the former child soldiers to the Mai Mai, whom she tracks as if they were exotic specimens, she foregrounds a sense of menace. Whereas UN soldiers, officials and businessmen are not accorded the same threat. She recounts: 'I hold my camera sideways and try to capture a shot of Ski-mask Guy. […] He's blurry and out of focus in the background. It's too bad it would have made a great visual metaphor: I mentally title the photo I didn't get: The Hidden Face of the Congolese Army (302). Much like Whoriskey's representation of teenage soldiers as the reason for women's terror, Shannon creates a disturbing and frighting image of African men.

Shannon juxtaposes the warlords and child soldiers as inimitable parts of the Congolese landscape. A landscape in which the Western writer must make sense of the paradoxical beauty of the landscape and the intensity of violence and destruction. Her observation of the last remaining Belgian establishment as an ancient outpost of imperialism evokes her own feelings of complicity in the unending exploitation of the Congo as a place of never-ending enrichment and reinvention for foreigners:

> the mining guys, the aid workers, me… aren't we all trying to live one of these "create-your-own-adventure" books we read as children. Pick option A, B, or C: do you want to help rape victims or child soldiers, rake in the cash as a mining guy, or take down a warlord? (306).

This rendering of adventurism and empire as a juvenile sport is all the more unsettling, given the gravity and traumatic weight of her subject matter. There is a palpable sense of the continuity of imperialism enacted by Westerners from their hermetically sealed presence in the hotel and the disjuncture between the languor of the interior and the violence beyond their walls. It is the space between these different positions that is left unanswered. Indeed, it is telling that her positioning as a bridge and a messenger between Congolese women and American women fails at the end of the text. She admits that the two realities remain somehow dissonant and irreconcilable:

> every engagement will be a pre-negotiated tightrope walk between taste and truth. A more strategic mind might break it down carefully, analysing lines and limits. Instead, I retreat to my easier-to-digest, pre-Congo talking points, which are laced with only occasional illustrations from my trip and result in an unavoidably flat delivery (270).

3.5 Conclusion

Exploring the politics of representation and authorship in the field of Congolese women's writing and feminist writing about the Congo reveals a fraught and highly contested arena in which female writers vie for narrative autonomy and control in an industry predominantly weighted towards male literary expression, authorship, and publication. The translation and dislocation of Blouin from an oral history of Pan-African liberation to a Western tradition of autobiography and a liberal narrative of the gifted individual is to witness a devastating silencing and loss in the struggle for recognition. Moreover, it is not incidental that the particular translation and mediation of Congolese women in the political narrative has enabled a continuation of objectifying representations and narrative disempowerment in the contemporary moment. There is a profound gap between the use of Congolese women's stories and testimonies in the global narrative of sexual and gender-based violence and the textual and political autonomy of Congolese women within this same narrative. Indeed, through comparing the politics of form and representation across these two different time periods is to witness Congolese women continuously dislocated from their own feminist tradition of resistance and liberation and instead recruited into discourses that celebrate survival and resilience in the face of such horrendous violence, yet stop short of any critique of the continuing relations of violence shaped through neocolonial and racial capitalism that are the underlying causes for such the high levels of instability and poverty for women in the Congo.

Chapter 4 The cultural effects of NGOs in the Congo: power, discourse, and colonial repetitions

4.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I drew attention to the problems of mediating women's stories and life histories in both Western feminist scholarship and liberal humanitarian narratives. In recent years, we have seen NGOs and aid organisations adopt a similar language and idiom of 'female empowerment'. However, this adoption of an outwardly feminist message of empowerment and inclusion does so within the parameters of neoliberal capitalism as the only normative political reality for women's success. Thus, the critique of capitalism that was fundamental to 'Third World' feminist critics such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty is effectively dismantled within NGO narratives of female empowerment (Mohanty, 2003).

What is particularly striking about contemporary NGO discourse in the Congo is the hypervisibility of women and specifically women's labour to the narrative landscape of NGOs; a discourse that has been the focus for significant feminist debate and criticism (Jad, 2007; Alvarez, 2009). These discourses, in which feminist politics and international development are unified through the 'promise' of neoliberalism and free-market economics, differentiate sharply from the radical politics of anticolonial feminists like Andrée Blouin and emerging pro-democracy, youth movements in the Congo such as LUCHA RDC (Lutte pour le Changement, Struggle for Change) and FILIMBI (the Swahili term for whistle). Contemporary social movements led by young activists and past anticolonial struggles echo one another in the emphasis placed upon freedom, dignity, and self-determination.

I begin this chapter with a critical examination of the reasons for the recruitment of Congolese women to the contemporary discourse of NGOs working in the region. I explore how this discourse mobilises a particular gendered idea of development and labour that silences other discourses and the wider imagination of radical, transformative politics beyond that of neoliberal capitalism in the Congo. The cultural effects of this form of discourse constitute a cultural phenomenon that the theorist Mark Fisher has termed 'capitalist realism'(Fisher, 2010), whereby capitalism is seen as the only viable reality.

From examining the hypervisibility of women of colour in NGO discourse, I turn to four case studies, the Eastern Congo Initiative (ECI) and their campaign to revitalise the once thriving Congolese coffee industry, Renzo Martens' film *Enjoy Poverty* (2009), the arts collective Yole!Africa and the Faire-Part filmmakers collective. The first two case studies are good examples of Fisher's notion of capitalist realism, offering both positive and negative representations of financial capital as either fundamentally 'good' or exploitative. Martens' film uses satire to critique the hypocrisies of global aid and development and through this the representation the web of capitalism is presented as inescapable. It is for this reason that he advocates a total surrender to market forces. Thus, even in its most negative representation, we see the logics of capitalism and coloniality reinforced. Where Martens' dystopic satire explores how the degradations of capitalism can be monetised, other cultural practitioners such as Yole!Africa and Faire-Part Collectif explore the possibilities for participatory ethics, collaboration, and cultural production in the Congo within sites which remain determined by colonial relations of power, which I will explore in the final section of the chapter.

4.2 Contested presences: NGOs in Africa

Whilst most scholars can agree on the rise of NGOs worldwide, the overall impact of such organisations, particularly in Africa, remain in dispute. For some, NGOs are viewed as the last defenders of democracy and human rights in an increasingly partisan and intolerant world, others however, have argued that we have witnessed an 'NGOization of struggle' (Choudry and Kapoor, 2013); a phenomenon that has actively prevented radical, systemic change through the co-option of grassroots social movements. For example, Sangeeta Kamat acknowledges that 'NGOs have a vital part in articulating the dramatic transformation in state and economy brought about by neoliberalism' (Choudry and Kapoor, 2013: viii). Scholars such as William Fisher (1997), instead warn against approaching NGOs as any unified structure, pointing out the different power dynamics and political ethea evident across different organisations. Nonetheless, it is true that the process of 'NGOization' stems from a particular ideological history of liberal capitalism. It is for this reason that Falk characterises NGOs as 'outgrowths of Western liberal humanitarianism'(Falk, 1999). It is this function of NGOs in partially legitimating the politics of neoliberalism and thereby limiting forms of dissent and the political imaginary that has incurred most criticism.

Both the colonial period and the contemporary present share a symbolic interest in women as representations of the health and status of the nation. It is perhaps not

surprising therefore, that much of the critique of 'NGOization' has been spearheaded by anticolonial feminists from outside the Western hemisphere (see Jad, 2007; Alvarez, 2009). Despite the turn towards female empowerment within discourses of international development, such feminist scholars and activists see the efforts of NGOs as actively hostile to the liberatory aims of feminist politics in the Global South. For example, the writer and activist Arundhati Roy (2004) compares NGOs to 'indicator species […] the greater devastation caused by neoliberalism, the greater the outbreak of NGOs' (Roy, 2004) reformulating NGOs as symbiotic strains of neoliberal capitalism. The concern therefore is that NGOs are a corollary of global capitalism, whose utility is dependent on the crisis of the neoliberal order. Thus, the general notion of women as the greatest beneficiaries of aid and development initiatives is, in fact, because they are the greatest casualties of capitalism and economic liberalisation.

The hypervisibility of women in development discourse as the beneficiaries of the economic system is thus recast, as something altogether less benign. Moreover, the dominant articulation of women from the Global South as the prime beneficiaries of international aid programmes obfuscates other, more radical feminist discourses that actively resist the politics of globalisation and neoliberal capitalism. It is the collusions and complicities between powerful states and NGOs that led INCITE!, a radical feminist network of women of colour in the US, to create an 'antiviolence movement that was […] independent of state funding' (INCITE!, 2017: ix). The decision of INCITE! feminist to divest from all state funding reveal the problems for progressive feminist organisations and NGOs to pursue radical agendas whilst being embedded within existing institutional power structures.

The expansion of NGOs in Africa has often been compared to a new form of imperialism (Fowler 1991, Furedi 1994). Once hailed as the 'magic bullet, the panacea to failed top-down development and the means to poor people's empowerment', there is now an increasing backlash from scholars, activists, and cultural producers for its uncritical accommodation of globalisation and neoliberal capitalism, which we see with Aganze's satirical film. For example, Julie Hearn (2007: 1096) observes that NGOs have effectively remodelled themselves from being a 'third sector' […] to a rediscovery of deTocquevillian civil society theory'; a theory that is juxtaposed as the only progressive alternative to the neo-patrimonial corruptions of the African state (see Pinkner), as we shall see through the example of coffee NGO Eastern Congo Initiative. This formulation rests upon the problematic tendency of certain strands of Africanist scholarship and political sciences to pathologize the African state (Wai, 2012).

The reformulation of NGOs as bastions of democracy and civil society against the so-called plutocratic African state is, for James Petras, indicative of the 'success of the NGOs in displacing and destroying the organised Leftist movements and co-opting their intellectual strategies and organizational leaders' (Petras, 1999: 429). Thus, we see the juxtaposition of corrupt African states with NGOs constituting a proximal civil society. This discourse reproduces the modalities of Western Enlightenment philosophy, in which Africa is represented as the Hobbesian exception to the 'ideal' function of Western democracy and civil society.

NGOs in Congo DR

The role of NGOs in constructing the contemporary narrative on the Congo and shaping the political agenda of the country is equivalent to their ubiquitous presence in the region. This enlarged presence in the Congo is captured by Sammy Baloji in *Hunting and Collecting,* which lists the names of NGOs operational in the Congo alongside colonial maps (Baloji et al., 2016), producing a disquieting continuity between past and present realities. What is clear from Baloji's image is the ubiquity and presence of NGOs in multiple civic roles, industries, and services. The reframing of NGOs as the products of colonial history is quite deliberate on the part of the artist. The juxtaposition of NGOs and colonial cartographies implies a complicity through their appearance from the same historical temporality. The title of Baloji's piece echoes the language of early colonial anthropologists in Africa documenting the cultures of so-called 'primitive' societies. Baloji, however, reverses the meaning suggesting that the real 'hunters' are now in fact international NGOs. Indeed, the narratives and discourses of NGOs that typically search for political solutions within the system of neoliberal capitalism differentiate sharply from the historical moment of anticolonial struggle and national liberation. Third World anticolonial struggles and the period of independence continually emphasised economic self-determination and sovereignty from Western control.

Leading figures of the Congolese Independence Movement (MNC) looked to different political ideas and cultural influences with which to build an independent state (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002).[43] This form of internationalist and anticolonial politics that characterised Lumumba and other Pan-African leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere, sharply differs from the Eurocentric ideologies and cultural values of

[43] The Sixth Pan-African Congress saw Lumumba forge a close bond with Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of independent Ghana and the Pan-African movement influence the political philosophy of the MNC (Zeilig, 2008: 67).

mainstream NGOs working in the Congo. Thus, we see different forms of epistemic violence and militarisation materialising through humanitarian aid work. Mertens and Myrttinen (2019) argue that 'heteronormativity' and 'western-inspired norms of individual agency' are articulated through humanitarian work in the field of sexual and gender based violence. Meanwhile, in environmental work Marijnen (2017) highlights the militarisation of Congo's Virunga Park under European Commission's development aid. In different ways, these two examples demonstrate the problematic intersection of western epistemology and militarisation with discourses of aid and humanitarianism.

Whilst a distinction is often cast between the interests of civil society (as a composite of NGOs and other non-profit actors) and states, in the Congo we see both the Government of Joseph Kabila and NGOs, like the ECI, aligned with the dominant forces of neoliberalism and global capitalism through partnerships with multinationals, such as the global beverage company Starbucks. Thus, we see a hard and soft form of a prevailing political ideology and logic characterising both the state and NGOs despite their outward antagonism. Partnerships with global corporations like Starbucks are invariably touted as promising wealth and prosperity by both state and civil society actors. It is this chaotic and corrupt economic regime in which foreign owned companies, armed groups and local actors engage in a race to the bottom that causes Joe Trapido to characterise contemporary Congo DR as 'Africa's leaky giant'(Trapido, 2015). This characterisation of the Congo as a powerless witness to the exodus of its natural mineral wealth and capital flight sits determinedly at odds with discourses of female emancipation through the free-market. These drives towards economic liberalisation and globalisation as social solutions recruit women as the principal agent and beneficiary of this process.

It is this vision of female social elevation and contentment that accompanies the economic liberalisation of the Global South which evokes the erstwhile discursive techniques of colonial regimes. For example, a 1922 propaganda poster with the title 'Congo-Belge: Allez-y & faites comme eux!' (Belgium, 1922) published by the Belgian Ministry of Colonies, depicts Congolese workers engaged in agricultural labour under the tutelage of Europeans. Here, we see a young Congolese woman crouching next to a European man, barefoot, harvesting corn. The entire scene creates a sense of pastoral harmony, whereby colonial knowledge and enterprise is signified through the labour and energy of the natives. The foregrounded figure of the white man points to the path ahead. He is a figure symbolising 'progress' and modernity with the Congolese figures strategically placed crouched below him or behind him on the path of 'progress'. Next to this visual 'great chain of being' is a separate image of industry and construction

emerging from the rural landscape. Both industry and agriculture are directed under the gaze of the colonizer and their authority is conveyed not only through their clothing but their detachment from actual labour and the connoting of gentlemanly leisure. For example, we see the first figure holds a walking stick and the second has his hands in his pockets.

The long history of foreign interference, appropriation, and extrajudicial executions that characterised the Cold War period in Africa has, not surprisingly, led to a distrust of the non-profit sector and foreign aid as an extension of the same political apparatus and neo-colonial domination. The imposition of economic liberalisation and structural adjustment on African populations by Western powers led to increases of national debt and poverty across the continent. It is not coincidental therefore that the effects of the 'Washington Consensus' align with an overwhelming focus on basic economic need and survival in the discourse of NGOs. The focus on ameliorating only the most severe forms of destitution rather than public investment and social provision, such as free university education and affordable public services, demonstrates the short-term vision of many NGOs in putting out the fires of capitalism as opposed to imagining alternatives.

The period of economic liberalisation in Africa that began in the early 1980s saw many public services cut and reduced to make way for the market and private investment. The role of NGOs has been to absorb the shock of these economic changes but stop short of critiquing the economic structures and systemic inequalities. The Abahlali baseMjondolo, a shack dwellers movement in Durban, South Africa precisely captures the problems of this humanitarianism as opposed to direct action:

> always the solution is to 'educate the poor'. When we get cholera, we must be educated about washing our hands when in fact we need clean water. When we get burnt, we must be educated about fire when in fact we need electricity. This is just a way of blaming the poor for our suffering. We want land and housing in the cities, we want to go to university, we want water and electricity – we don't want to be educated to be good at surviving poverty on our own'(cited in Neocosmos, 2014).

The Congolese filmmaker, Arnold Aganze, uses the form of a mockumentary to satirise the world of NGOs in the Congo highlighting the converse cultural and political dominance of NGOs and political stagnation. Despite the efforts of NGOs to use culture as a means of communicating with people and aiding their campaigns, Aganze's film *N.G.O. Nothing Going On* (Aganze, 2016) encapsulates the underlying frustration of living under 'NGOization', a political environment that breeds cynicism as opposed to direct action. Indeed, Aganze in a similar mode to Baloji, expresses a desire to live in a time in which

political opponents were visible as opposed to the current system of the aid/NGO world which he likens to a new form of colonialism hidden within a discourse of 'freedom' and 'development' (Says, 2017). Aganze's argument that NGOisation represents a continuation of the oppression of colonial predecessors, but in non-transparent and disingenuous forms, points to the intersection of financial capital, the non-profit complex, and the culture industry. In this sense, Aganze's struggle against the disingenuous cultural modes of financial capital follows the work of post-Marxist philosophy, and particularly the work of Theodore Adorno who, in *The Culture Industry,* argues that 'the drift of capitalist development […] is not towards freedom but towards integration and domination' (Adorno, [1947] 2015: 3). Aganze, like Baloji, expresses a certain nostalgia for a time when political foes were more visible, as opposed to the current system of the non-profit industry, which he likens to a new form of colonialism masquerading as something benign. Both Baloji and Aganze argue that the workings of colonialism, whilst just as powerful, take on more obscure forms that make them harder to resist and identify. In response to this, Aganze and Baloji have chosen radically different forms to mount a critique to what they see as the new faces of colonialism. Baloji, through photomontage and Aganze, through satirical mockumentary both reveal a desire for the sincerity and relative clarity of anti-colonial struggle and national liberation.

The tacking of female liberation and enfranchisement to aid and financial capital further legitimates the existing social and economic order. The paradox between the hypervisibility of women and the invisibility of power in Aganze's view resonates with Trouillot's postulation that 'history is the fruit of power, but power itself is never so transparent that its analysis becomes superfluous. The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge the exposition of its roots' (Trouillot, 2015: xix). Indeed, the 'roots' of women and NGOisation and its particular codings of 'race', gender, and labour echo from within a site of colonial repetition, in which the political mobilisation of women serves the political and economic agenda of either colonial regime, nation-state or globalised economy.

Women and development in NGO discourse

The hypervisibility of African women in the contemporary discourse of development draws attention to the historical and cultural intersections in the politics of visibility, 'race', gender, and labour. Shirin Rai contrasts the changing construction of women within national discourses of decolonisation to contemporary development discourses

which saw women go from being seen as 'victim[s] to be rescued', to leading agents of change through their labour and economic contribution to the global market (Rai, 2002). Despite the ostensible opposition between the two discourses, however, Rai concludes that the:

> power of discourse was systematically used to frame women's role in development – whether as reproducers of the nation and markers of its cultural boundaries, or as participants in its economic life (Rai, 2002).

This overriding parallel between two different notions of 'development' – one national and the other globalised - sees the same workings of power, and discourse in situating women in particular social and economic orders. Conversely, the positive images of women reproducing the economic and social order usher another subtext of cultural imperialism, whereby the African woman was used to signify 'disorder'. It is important to read the politics of visibility and spectacle around 'race' and gender both in its 'positive' and negative forms. This discourse of female-driven development and inclusion within the dominant political and social order necessarily brings up its other history, in which women judged as deviant and threatening to the 'natural' order were punished, exhibited, and denied their rights, and how both these representations hinge upon the women as labouring subjects adhering to the dominant economic and social order.

A whole body of feminist scholarship has examined the politics of visibility and spectacle and how such representations are rooted in colonial histories. Often, these studies have traced this history back to the story of Sara Baartman, an African woman who was stolen and exhibited around Europe, and whose body was subjected to medical experiments to 'prove' the theories of scientific racism (her body was finally repatriated to South Africa at Nelson Mandela's request in 2002). Paula Giddings argues that the objectification of Baartman served a particular ideological purpose:

> it is no coincidence that Sara Baartman became a spectacle in a period when the British were debating the prohibition of slavery […] there, as in North America, race took on a new significance when questions arose about the entitlement of non-enslaved Blacks to partake in the fruits of Western liberty and citizenship (Pierson et al., 1998: 222-3).

This form of othering, through violent spectacle and gross visual caricature, chimed with late Victorian notions of the deserving and undeserving poor. Ideologies that saw gendered and racial subjects subject to various scientific experiments to see if they could be considered 'citizens' and deserving of equal rights.

It is this history of capture, spectacle and misogynoir violence that informs the logics of inclusion and exclusion of the colonial order. Furthermore, as Kalpana Wilson argues, the fact that dominant representations of women from the Global South have reformulated themselves along lines of inclusion, progress and empowerment reveal colonial repetitions within the same site of power. The accumulation of images around Sara Baartman, as deviant and abnormal, echo in the contemporary accumulation of positive images today that position women from the South as 'diligently and happily engaged in small-scale but productive labour for the market' (Wilson, 2012: 323). Thus, both discourses represent an othering either through the visual logics of exclusion or inclusion, and both discourses inhere from the same site of colonial and capitalist capture, power, and signification. These dominant representations of Congolese women are united by the fact that none offer any real challenge or critique to the dominant economic and political order and, instead, prize capital and the demands of the global economy as the only corrective to the social exclusion and poverty of the majority of Congo's female population. It is this form of representation of Congolese women - as both victim and beneficiary - that denies agency and prevents global and historical connections being drawn between conflict, economic extraction, and the exceptionally high levels of sexual exploitation of Congolese women (Meger, 2015).

The trumpeting of success stories in the world of NGOs most often centre on projects that are working towards female empowerment and enfranchisement. As Wilson has noted, this feminized image of global development discourse represents a stark cultural shift from the 1980s. During this period, images of starvation and famine were broadcast across the world, and charity supergroups such as Band Aid came together to raise awareness and funds for those affected by poverty and famine. These images, of what Okwui Enwezor has described as 'Afro-pessimism'(Enwezor, 2006), have largely been replaced by different images of healing and reconstruction, through labour and the world of the free-market and charity-aid sector. This shift in visual discourse does not correlate however with any sizeable structural change in the material conditions of the poorest in the world which, if anything, have worsened since the 1980s.

The images of African women at the forefront of development have occurred in a time in which NGOs have massively expanded their work and profile on the world stage. Whilst Rai reads this instrumentalization of gender and discourse as overwhelmingly negative for women, in both national and global contexts, others see benefit and opportunity in spreading democracy (Atkinson, 2009). A necessity, moreover, to fighting the corruption of governments and advocating on the behalf of the underprivileged and disenfranchised

(Pinkney, 2009). The fact that the instrumentalization of women in development has occurred at the same time of massive expansion of NGOs to become what the INCITE! feminist collective has termed the 'non-profit industrial complex' (INCITE!, 2017: xiii) is not merely coincidence and has, in fact, played a vital role in aligning the interests of global capitalism to progressive feminist causes.

However, this cultural shift from 'Afro-pessimism' to the 'feminization of labour' (Hawkesworth, 2009), hails the labour and resourcefulness of African women as the progressive solution to prevailing social ills, sidelining, in turn, demands for economic justice and reparations for formerly colonized and enslaved people. A reparative framework would involve meaningful structural and systemic redress of historical dispossession and subjugation, whereas the 'feminization of labour' masks a regressive neoliberal agenda with the discourse of female empowerment. We can see this contradiction more clearly when we look at the impact of the feminization of labour on the poorest women in the world. This begs the question of what particular social and economic order are women from the Global South being recruited into, and how does visibility in the cultural world of the NGO translate to actual power and agency in a globalised economy? This alternative instrumentalization of the images of African women serve the same status quo of a good, moral capitalism, eclipsing in the process the continuing historical cycles of Western capital accumulation and 'capital flight' through the continuing extraction and appropriation of the Congo's resources, from the 'Red Rubber' to the mining of coltan to power the digital economy.

According to Mary Hawkesworth, this new cultural discourse of female-powered development constitutes a fundamentally disingenuous restructuring of labour and capital. Tracing the increasing 'feminization of labour' in globalised, neoliberal capitalism alongside critical feminist discourses, she argues that we have witnessed the co-option of the latter to the demands of the former. The hypervisibility of women in the Global South as the new protectors of the global political and economic order goes hand in hand with what she identifies as the 'erasure of feminist knowledge' that is 'part of the infrastructure of forgetting, sanctioned ignorance that masks and perpetuates constitutive power relations' (Hawkesworth, 2009: 285).

The hypervisibility of women in discourses of development and the globalised economy negates entirely the critique of capitalism that was central to Third World Feminist theory. Moreover, as Hawkesworth points out, the championing of women's empowerment by organisations, such as the World Bank, enabled economic

restructuring to be seen as a progressive step forward for women in the Global South. Where, in actual fact, this process was responsible for shifting labour and responsibility away from government and, thereby, removing women from any social collective and state provision. Women thus became self-sufficient individuals tasked with taking care of both labour in the private and public realm. Of course, women in the Global South have resisted these new forms of oppression and exclusion, sold as empowerment, which has led to increasing levels of female illiteracy and personal debt accrual.[44] It is precisely this critique and resistance that Hawkesworth believes has caused such a cultural shift in representation:

> multiple forms of resistance to the onslaught of neoliberal globalisation are contributing to a reworking of racialised representations, through simultaneous processes of appropriation and invisibilisation (Hawkesworth, 2009).

Thus, the constituent forms of 'appropriation and invisibilisation' have seen the long history of resistance to capitalism from women in the Global South steadily replaced by a discourse in which they are made to appear as willing and grateful recruits of neoliberal globalisation.

Looking at these more recent trends in political discourse and the politics of representation, we can see that there has been a specific recruitment of women of colour to neoliberal discourses of development as a positive embodiment of such ideas and practices. However, this recruitment, embodiment, and visibility of women of colour reverberates through particular colonial histories and also hides new forms of political exclusion that have resulted from the rise of global neoliberal capitalism. It is this juxtaposition between the politics of 'feminization' of labour and the underlying politics of knowledge around gender, 'race' and labour, whereby women experience a simultaneous process of material exclusion and discursive incorporation. This overarching logic of feminization means that:

> women are simultaneously hailed as resourceful providers, reliable micro-entrepreneurs, cosmopolitan citizens, and positioned as 'disposable

[44] Microfinance schemes championed by the UN as a way of lifting women out of poverty have been shown to have detrimental effects on women not only in terms of economic pressure to repay with high interest rates but also in terms of their social relationships due to the fact that microfinance agreements require women to co-sign agreements with female relative and friends as guarantors. See Tamale 2001 and https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/microfinance-has-been-nightmare-global-south-sri-lanka-shows-there-alternative/(Kadirgamar and Kadirgamar, n.d.).

> domestics', the exploited global workforce, and as displaced, devalued, and disenfranchised diasporic citizen (Hawkesworth, 2009: 275).

In this sense, the most powerless social class are seen both as the leading drivers of the global market economy, whilst at the same time rendered 'disposable' and entirely subject to the labour demands of the very same system. Thus, the realities of women's social and economic exclusion, through economic reform and liberalisation are erased, with women visually instrumentalized and positively encoded in contemporary development discourse as the global economy's greatest strength.

This bind of exclusion and incorporation works through cultural discourse. For example, the homepage of the United Nations Organisation Mission in the Democratic Public of Congo (MONUC) demonstrates the problems of hypervisibility and feminization of labour. The homepage features a young woman from the Indian Force Police Unit stood in front of a United Nations plane. The policewoman's helmet visor is lifted to reveal her features and focused expression, with the bindi on her forehead highlighting both her ethnic and religious identity. Meanwhile, an article in *Frontlines*, the online publication of the United States Aid Department (USAID), declares that 'The DRC's Coffee Might Be Served at a Starbucks Near You'. Beneath the headline, is an image of two female coffee farmers engaged in agricultural labour smiling while they work.

Figure 6

In these two images, we see the feminization of different forms of labour from the agricultural sector to the military. The promotion of women engaged in these forms of labour highlights a sense of both gender progress and more traditional tropes of women as the 'natural' defenders of the earth. In these two examples, we see the instrumentalization of women, and specifically women of colour to processes of militarisation and security as well as commercial agriculture.

In Figure 6, the representation of the Indian police officer as a global ambassador for the UN is conveyed through her positioning in front of the plane with her blue helmet and

other paraphernalia ("United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC)," n.d.). The location of the airfield is unspecified though we assume that is must be somewhere in the Congo, although the global signifiers of the image lead us to believe that the location is unimportant. In this sense, the peacekeeper is represented as a globalised subject with the ability to do her work in any territory, regardless of its socio-political situation. Rather than seeing her engaged in work, she is photographed in mid-stride disembarking from the plane. The angle of her gaze, with her helmet visor flipped up, suggests to the viewer that she is already familiarising herself to new surroundings and her focused expression coveys experience, capability, and self-mastery. The upward angle of the shot emphasises the physical stature of the subject and elevates the subject against the background rendering her a 'globalised' agent of international peacekeeping and security.

The substitution of a young Indian woman into the traditionally masculine role sends multiple messages. Messages that work to give the viewer pause and subvert traditional pre-conceptions of what such a figure 'should' look like. She is undoubtedly in a position of authority, but the transformation of the figure of the international peacekeeper to a woman of colour disrupts the traditional imagination of such authority figures. However, the reimagination of the traditional male, Western role as a non-Western, woman of colour as a form of gender progress problematically aligns feminist struggle with militarism and securitisation.

The conflicted realities and representations that characterise the feminization of labour are demonstrated in figures 6 and 7. Yet, despite the overt contrast, both images aim to provide positive representations of female labour and of women personally uplifted through work. In this sense, the women are celebrated for their individual sprit and resilience, but the overall logic of feminisation of labour also places the struggle of maintaining peace and economic survival as the collective burden of women. These representations of female labour are rooted in colonial history. Wilson historicises this particular logic of representation through attending to what is being silenced and expelled from the frame. Accordingly, she argues that,

> contemporary racialized representations of 'women in the Global South' demonstrate important continuities with representations of 'productive and contented workers' in colonial enterprises, and like them operate to legitimize and reinforce existing structures and relationships and to ensure that resistance and the desire for transformation remain out of the picture (Wilson, 2012: 316).

The positive celebration of these women and the power of the individual female spirit to transform ignores, on a more global scale, the wholesale shift of labour onto women and the rollback of state benefits and welfare provision that has accompanied economic liberalisation in Africa. Moreover, these publicity images of empowerment

Figure 7

silence other stories that demonstrate the continuation of cultures of violence and exploitation within liberal institutions. The reports into 'predatory peacekeepers' in the UN underlines the distortions between reality and the co-opted feminist discourses used to promote the work of MONUC. As we shall see in the next section, the rise of Congolese coffee in NGO discourse as the crop that will bring prosperity and peace has also been undermined by recent investigations into the ability of Congolese coffee farmers to make a liveable wage through this new market. Both MONUC and *Frontlines* are keen to present images that articulate female empowerment within a particular social and political order that is rooted in systems of oppression and exploitation. The fact that these women are recruited to this single image of contented labour raises the spectre of late Victorian colonial enterprises, in which 'contentment and productivity' were key to the colonisers project. For Victorian industrialists, the mission to create good workers and obedient colonial subjects would ensure the development of capitalist modernity in colonial territories.

The second image (figure 7) from the publication *Frontlines* (Smith, 2016), features the two Congolese coffee farmers, capturing these colonial antecedents that Wilson identifies. The women sit next to each other, one is smiling with her face down and the other is gazing reflectively into the distance. The posture of the two women is relaxed, the photographer captures them in moments of reflection and laughter. In the centre of the image is the coffee plant, its focal point in the image highlights its importance to both the women's livelihood and economic survival. This is an image of romanticised,

feminized capitalism in which the land and commodity is cared for and cultivated by women; we see an abundance of space and young growth. Unlike the first image, the photographer here is crouched down in order to accentuate the connection between the farmers and the earth. Iyko Day has described this form of representation as 'romantic anti-capitalism' (Day, 2016). Their proximity and body language speaks of friendship and solidarity and highlights the equivalence of power between these two women and between the women and the earth. These visual codings of female solidarity, growth and non-intensive labour are all through the discourse of the piece, placed under the aegis of the capital and the free-market.

Thus, in these two images, we see two different forms of a global, feminized workforce through both the presentation of the farmer and the soldier. All three women are presented as guardians of both the natural world and the political realm. The first image is a new and emerging form of feminization in which the traditional male, white role is revoked and reformed as the political domain of women, and more specifically, women of colour from the Global South. Meanwhile, the second image evokes what Wilson has identified as the historical iconography of labour under colonial regimes, which repeatedly underscored the 'contentment' of workers. The difference, of course, is the specified feminization of this labour to women from the Global South. The simultaneous revocation of colonial representations of labour and new emerging forms of feminized labour in traditionally male roles work to legitimise the social and political order of neoliberalism.

The use of African women and other women from 'developing' countries as the face of NGO-funded change that we see in the above images, are notably static and homogenised and, in this way, evoke colonial iconographies of 'race', gender, and labour. Images of late imperial regimes such as those of the Congo Free State strove to present their efforts as philanthropic, producing, in the process, productive and content workers and colonial subjects (Stanard, 2011). It is this particular iconography or logic of visibility that simultaneously limits dissent in the present and recalls colonial histories, outlawing other forms of resistance and radical critique to these configurations of power.

The positioning of Congolese women as beneficiaries, as opposed to leading agents within the literature that has grown around NGOs is problematic, when we see how frequently women are used to visualise conflict and crisis. Moreover, women are not only used to call attention to crisis but are also positioned as the agents of peacebuilding, reconstruction, and development. Whereas, the formulation of Congolese women's

writing as a littérature souterrain points to the resistance against dominant modes of representation and visualisation employed by NGOs and international aid agencies. The representation of poor women from the Global South as the main recipients and beneficiaries of global aid silences other discourse and narratives seeking to challenge this political and economic order. Thus, this particular imagery and visual logic serves to silence and reproduce existing political and economic orders.

The positive representation of globalisation and capitalism for women in the poorest countries limits alternative, feminist politics that critique the coloniality and capitalism as inherently patriarchal structures. The contemporary discourse around African development is one of female empowerment and economic enfranchisement on a small-scale, local-level ignores the fact that poor women from the Global South have suffered the greatest loss under economic liberalisation and global capitalism. Between unfailingly positive representations of women and capitalist development and Achille Mbembe's argument that the Black man is the 'living crypt of capital' (Mbembé, 2017), we see a process of 'invisibilisation' (Wilson, 2012) of women and their *actual* experience of, and resistance to, global capitalism, coloniality and patriarchy.

4.3 Eastern Congo Initiative's Congo Coffee Atlas

In this section, I want to examine the ECI's Congo Coffee Atlas and its campaign to revitalise the Congolese coffee industry. Coffee, much like sugar in the colonial period, carries as heavy a metaphorical weight as it does an economic one. The word coffee instantly conjures up an array of juxtapositions between the rural coffee producer and the urban warrior fortifying her, or himself, before speeding towards the next meeting or appointment. Little wonder that the concept of 'fairness' has been a crucial narrative, in coffee marketing, harnessed to bridge the actual and imaginative distance between the Congo and the West with something other than social and economic disparity. Coffee has become recognisable as a visible material signifier of progressive relations between Congo and the West. In this sense, coffee follows a similar line of logic to that of the 1980s Band Aid anti-poverty campaigns. Huge public campaigns in which, as Mark Fisher reminds us, 'the point was not to offer an alternative to capitalism […] the aim was only to ensure that some of the proceeds of particular transactions went to good causes. The fantasy being that western consumerism, far from being intrinsically implicated in systems of global inequality, could itself solve them'(Fisher, 2010: 19).

The ECI campaign is a telling illustration of the imbrication of aid and development with the forces of financial capital whereby forms of neoliberal commodification and

globalisation are being equated with economic revitalisation and social progress in the Congo. Extraction, coloniality and commodity fetishism all play a role in different forms of cultural production around development and globalisation in a country that has been historically indispensable to the modernisation of the West and the development of global capital.

On the ECI homepage, the Congo Coffee Atlas, which is listed under 'success stories', invites the reader to explore and digitally traverse the world of Congolese coffee. An opportunity that allows the user to '[unlock] what Congolese coffee means to you'. The 'atlas', itself, is an interactive map embedded in the website that allows the user to move across the eastern borderlands of the Congo and identify the locations and contact information of different coffee producers. The Coffee Atlas is therefore addressed both to specialists in the industry, through its technical detail, but also to a wider public through its interactive map, which allows any user to inspect and gather information on coffee farming in the region.

The text that precedes the interactive atlas directly addresses the reader, promising a glimpse into an undiscovered trove of superior tasting coffee:

> from the rich volcanic soils of the Petit Nord, to the shores of Ituri's Lake Albert, through the vibrant coffee growing communities and ever-increasing offerings of top-quality Arabicas and Robustas, Congolese coffees are poised to take their place among the best in the world ("Congo Coffee Atlas," n.d.).

Throughout this text, what is emphasised is the excitement of discovery both through the sensory character of coffee, and through the unique topography of the Congo. We travel from volcanoes to lakes in search of world-leading coffee. The colonial framings of 'Lake Albert', the particular gaze of the interactive atlas and the direct address to the reader as the agent in this journey of discovery all serve to reinforce the colonial tropes further. This mythology of Congolese coffee as something that is yet to be discovered is, of course, a fabulation. The erasure of the history of coffee production in the region enables a 'discovery narrative' and particular fetishization of a commodity.

Of course, the idea that coffee, and everything that coffee has come to symbolise in global twenty first century capitalism and modern working culture, is an entirely new and untapped resource in the Congo waiting to be discovered, is an embellishment that works to entice the consumer rather than reflecting the real and interconnected history of labour and capital in the Congo, which is slightly ironic given that the atlas is, according

to ECI, 'a resource designed to demystify, inform and empower'. The history of coffee cultivation is far more entangled with histories of imperialism, plantation-based economies and forced labour. Coffee plantations were a feature of colonial rule which enabled King Leopold to export coffee and tax colonial subjects (Schneider, 2020). Of course, this history of enforced labour plantations during the colonial period sits uneasily within the discourse of free-market capitalism as a mutually beneficial global village of prosperity.

The championing of coffee, by the ECI and other non-profit groups, pushes aside this impolitic history, and, instead, heralds coffee as the miracle crop that will end the suffering inflicted on Congo's war-devastated eastern regions, thus strengthening the notion that it is the free-market that is best placed to 'empower' and enrich the lives of those affected by war and poverty. When we look more closely at the early exploitation of the Congo's resources, by the Lever Brothers for example, it reveals the relationship between the colonisation of the Congo and the rise of global capitalism. Nascent forms of individuals and companies, who now possess vast concentrations of global wealth, in macabre fashion represent themselves as philanthropists and generous donors. These discourses of liberal philanthropy and capitalist, colonial expansion can, furthermore, be traced back to earlier forms of colonisation. For example, the Lever Brothers (now Unilever) were at the time seen as progressive and moral capitalists, with their model village Port Sunlight built to house their factory workers in Merseyside, a testament to their benevolent form of entrepreneurial capitalism. In the Congo however, the Lever Brothers used systems of forced labour and colonial exploitation in the Congo Free State. The relationship between colonial governance and the scions of global capital can be seen in the case of the Lever Brothers palm oil plantations in the Congo. As the Belgian scholar Jules Marchal argues:

> the colonial government did more than just despoil the Congolese. It forced them to cut fruit to Lever's advantage. It forced huge numbers of people to leave their villages, to become cutters far away, living in wretched conditions. […] In the Congo, where labour was officially free, the government subjected the Africans, up until 1945, to a particularly harsh form of coercion, to the benefit of Lever, by imposing upon them, on the one hand labour contracts punishable by prison and *chicotte,* on the other hand an onerous head tax which they could pay only by becoming serfs (Marchal et al., 2017: 220).

Marchal's image of colonial governance and early capital growth underlines the mass forced migration of people and the overturning of existing social relations to meet the demand of capital. However, the use of such coercive and exploitative techniques

alongside the public image of philanthropy and social advancement is not so different to the discourses today on revitalising the coffee industry in Congo. The Congo Coffee Atlas project exemplifies what Graham Harrison has termed 'liberal integrative globalisation'(Harrison, 2010), whereby the global market, Starbucks, and coffee, which is regarded as crucial to both the working and leisure culture of capitalism, is seen as having the power to transform and reconstruct war-torn and impoverished regions in the Congo. It is a commodity that has been particularly seized upon by the ECI, an organisation founded by the American actor Ben Affleck in 2010, whose principal investors include the Howard G. Buffet Foundation and Google.

Their decision to partner with Starbucks, a company symbolic of globalisation for the Congo Coffee Atlas project, further emphasises the power and efficacy of neoliberal capital to 'rescue' and develop war-torn and impoverished areas. It is troubling to see the alignment of titans of global capital play with the world of advocacy and aid and underlines the importance of autonomy in social justice struggles, which the INCITE! collective have emphasised.

It is for this reason that radical intellectuals, such as Walter Rodney, have always insisted upon the importance of the economic to any analysis of freedom and human rights. Without an analysis of class and economics, discourses of empowerment, philanthropy and development all work to legitimise free-market liberalisation and capitalist 'growth' in Africa, as opposed to economic and social justice. The fact that Starbucks markets itself as a global leader in fair trade, with world music and African aesthetics filling their coffee shops, whilst at the same time is a point of conflagration with anti-globalisation protests and anti-gentrification movements, points to the many contradictions of global capitalism and cultural aesthetics. In the 1999 Seattle protests against the World Trade Organisation, protesters threw rocks through the windows of Starbucks as a prime symbol of the protesters' grievances and pointing to Starbucks problematic appropriation of the aesthetics of 'globalism' with the extractive logic of globalization.

In the statement on the partnership between Starbucks and ECI, the authors are keen to highlight the idea that sustainable coffee production can restore the devastated eastern regions of Congo. They write:

> Starbucks partnered with Eastern Congo Initiative to develop sustainable agricultural production and help restore Congo as a key source of high-quality coffee […] towards the end of 2014, Starbucks made its first purchase of coffee from farmers in Eastern Congo. After months of fine-tuning and experimentation, Starbucks is now offering an exclusive blend

> crafted only for the Starbucks Reserve® Roastery and Tasting Room in Seattle using this coffee from the Congo("Coffee from Eastern Congo Arriving in Starbucks Stores," n.d.).

What is notable about this statement is how the coffee is 'sourced' from the Congo but quickly, through the alchemy of Starbucks's master blenders, becomes an exclusive product registered and trademarked as property of Starbucks. We see the Congo is described only as the source and the site of labour and production, while the Seattle Roastery is the site of creation and consumption. There is no suggestion, however, in this statement, of growing a domestic coffee market in the Congo, providing jobs and local coffee drinking establishments, with the commercial rights of the produce owned by the producers. Rather, it reaffirms the Eurocentric ideologies, wherein the Congo is the site of extraction and labour, and the Global city, in this case Seattle, is the site of taste, craft and everything that coffee has come to symbolise in contemporary culture.

As the authors go on to say, 'every coffee tells a story' and 'Starbucks Reserve® coffees are curated to tell the story of its origin'("Coffee from Eastern Congo" n.d.). The unmissable irony here is Starbucks telling the story of Congo through its coffee, whilst registering that product as the property of its global brand; an act that demonstrates the appropriative logic and the intersection of culture, commodity, and taste with global capitalism. Starbucks demonstrates how global capitalism by definition treats the earth itself as a history-less resource.

The ECI's Global Coffee Atlas Project reproduces the same colonialist and extractive logic that has defined Congo's history since the colonial period. However, in this instance it is being sold as renewal and recovery through the convivial culture of coffee drinking. For instance, on the Starbucks website, the ideas of 'transformation' and 'hope' are foregrounded and the authors are at pains to show that this is more than just a marketing gimmick through documenting the work that Starbucks has done to regenerate the coffee industry in Congo: 'farmers' incomes have more than tripled, and families have been able to send their children to school and access healthcare'("Coffee from Eastern Congo" n.d.). Thus, Starbucks, as a giant of global capitalism, is the means through which social welfare on a small scale can be achieved; an illustration of the inevitable beneficence of trickle-down economics and global, free-market capitalism.

In this configuration however, African labour, as a somehow 'inexhaustible' source of energy through the gritty realities of war and the logic of the extractive zone, become absorbed into the means of production. As ECI board member Dave Olsen writes:

> Life has been incredibly difficult for the people of Eastern Congo, but even in the hardest circumstances, you see their grit and determination […] we're applying that energy to creating coffee("Coffee from Eastern Congo" n.d.).

This idea of labour assimilated into the process of production embodies Marx's notion of commodity fetishism. Under capitalism, the relationships of labour become subservient and distorted to that of the commodity, 'the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are material relations between persons and social relations between things'. Marx's insight into the nature of commodity and labour rings true here in the case of neoliberalism's revitalisation of the coffee industry, which highlights the benefit to the producer through the act of consumption, as opposed to social and human relationships. In the discourse of Starbucks' Congolese coffee adventure, relationships are forged through the commodity as opposed to actual social relationships.

The Starbucks reserve coffee beans, more generally, signify a globalising commodity fetishism, wherein the corporation has systematically trademarked and registered different coffees from around the world with lavish packaging designs that promise the consumer not only a 'global' experience through the buying and consumption of coffee, but also a positive role in Starbucks overarching mission, 'to inspire and nurture the human spirit' (Karuletwa, n.d.). With every newly launched product, Starbucks is keen to present it as a new chapter or story – one that is always positive and orientated towards a peaceful and economically prosperous future.

It also promotes the idea of a global village with its universal message. Take, for example, one such story, 'A bouquet of Starbucks Reserve Coffees from East Africa', which fosters a sense of communality across nations and borders, in which the rich and fertile climate, and the abundance it brings, has the ability to heal and bring people together. In the language of the global village, it is coffee that is the great social equalizer:

> from its humble beginnings, coffee has infinite ways of transitioning from a lush cherry on a tree stem to a drinkable infusion. With each bean, there is humanity surrounding coffee in all its forms. There is incredible beauty and disheartening desolation; abundance encroached upon by profound scarcity. These stories are synonymous with Starbucks mission: to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighbourhood at a time (Karuletwa, n.d.).

The cause behind desolation and scarcity goes unremarked with the suggestion that 'beauty' and 'abundance' inevitably beget their opposite. Into this strange picture of dystopia and utopia, Starbucks inserts its own mission, as one of steadfast commitment and 'nurture', with nobody left behind.

This message in fact runs counter to its fetishization of Congo coffee as an exclusive product available only in the Seattle Reserve Roastery. For example, an industry magazine feverishly reports that 'Starbucks' unbelievable new drink has beef jerky and Congo coffee in it' (Lamb, 2017). The press release for the product notes how it is the notes and flavours of the beans themselves that determine the process of creating the product. Thus, we can see this resurfacing cultural logic, whereby it is Starbucks' creation of products though the sensory profile of the coffee, which speaks to the place itself. Creating a vision of romanticised anti-capitalism in the form of the global village, as opposed to the colonialist logics of extraction and commodity fetishism. Here we see two forces at play – the idealised self-representation and the historical and present reality of extraction and exploitation. Moreover, the presentation of Starbucks, as a mission of moral and economic improvement, echoes Theodore Adorno's observation that, 'the drift of capitalist development…is not towards freedom but towards integration and domination' (Adorno, 2015: 3).

The Starbucks mantra of 'one cup, one neighbourhood at a time' deepens this idea of freedom sold under the guise of 'integration and domination'. Moreover, underneath the 'global village' rhetoric of Starbucks literature, there is a clear division between the wealthy, gentrified landscapes of cosmopolitan cities that Starbucks has come to represent and the idea of the African productive site as rural idyll that can be sourced and consumed through the global market. Of course, this division between African pastoral and North American consumer culture ignores the fact that most people living in Africa today are more likely to reside in an urban setting than a rural one (Opondo, 2008).

4.4 A Cup of Alienation

The cultivation of coffee along with cocoa, dates back to King Leopold's colonial regime in which every person in the Congo Free State were indentured, allowing Leopold to export the commodity and tax the farmer. Similarly, during the Mobutu period, coffee plantations from the colonial period were nationalised and centrally governed, which allowed Mobutu to amass an enormous personal fortune under his unhindered, kleptomaniac regime. A regime that effectively impoverished the country for decades.

Indeed, at one point the revenue from the coffee trade was the only thing effectively propping up Mobutu's failing regime (MacDougall, 2017).

The colonial history of coffee cultivation in the Congo makes the ECI's Congo Coffee Atlas legitimise and reinscribe existing colonial and extractive structures and, in the process, severely limiting any kind of articulation of economic autonomy and sovereignty around the control of Congo's resources and rich minerals and the elaboration of radical and transformative economic change. The history of agricultural labour and resource grabbing in the Congo are evident in the 'solutions' proposed by entities such as the ECI, whereby the opening up of places to neoliberal markets is equated with development and growth. However, a recent report in the Global Press spoke to farmers unable to make a living through the trade. Innocent Lunyere, a farmer interviewed in the report commented that "They get rich off our backs", a sentiment shared by many farmers working in the sectors who accuse the cooperatives of not trading fairly and keeping their earnings (Aboubakar Esperance, 2018). More recently, in a report by the food and agricultural platform, Selina Wamucii found that prices paid to African farmers are the lowest in the world and not enough to cover production costs. All this is happening at a time in which the 'stock exchanges in Europe and America are swimming in fat coffee profits' (Selina Wamucii, 2020).

What is clear from this article is a far more conflicted reality beneath the 'success stories' of non-profit and NGOs championing the Congolese coffee industry as the miracle remedy. Indeed, it constitutes a far more jarring reminder of the power relations that hide beneath fair trade logos and the language of ethics and sustainability touted by multinational conglomerates, such as Starbucks. Indeed, we see the ideology of romanticised anti-capitalist utopia in the ECI-Starbucks partnership in the Congo with the continuing colonialist and destructive logic of the extractive zone in global capitalism (Gómez-Barris, 2017). Indeed, these two countervailing ideologies often intersect throughout Congo's history, which Bofane in his literary work imagines as the centrifuge or engine of modernity. Whilst Bofane sees this history as dystopic and anti-human, the reverse is apparent here, in which the market promises regrowth and renewal, a general wealth that will see conflict between communities and nations subside and the erosion of hostility through the convivial global culture of coffee.

4.5 Renzo Martens' *Enjoy Poverty*

If the Starbucks regeneration of the Congo's once flourishing coffee industry highlights an interest in heralding a new African renaissance and economic rejuvenation, the Dutch

artist Renzo Martens' work in the Congo expresses a similar logic. Although, one that has an altogether different target and aim and proceeds in a highly adversarial manner. It is a critical intervention designed not only to call out the hypocrisies in the art world's relationship with global capital, but to also announce the arrival of a new enfant terrible in the world of artistic satire and political commentary.

In 2012, Martens announced his intention to 'gentrify the jungle', urging downtrodden plantation workers to adhere to the neoliberal world order and profit from the system that exploits them. Martens' takes a cynical swipe at the resource curse narrative. A narrative which has been used to rationalise the multiple invasions of Congo and its military occupation and exploitation by legions of different armed groups financed by corrupt governments and multinational corporations.

In marked contrast to the romanticised anti-capitalism vision encapsulated by the Congo Coffee Atlas Project, Martens' film advocates a surrender to the forces of global capitalism. In his film *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty,* Martens travels to the Congo with the message that, for the Congolese, poverty is in fact their greatest resource (Martens, 2009). Martens' ominous proposition that 'poverty is your greatest resource' is a brutal counter-discourse to the early Pan-African-liberation movements that fought for dignity and economic sovereignty as an unconditional necessity of political independence. The undoing of the African Socialist project and the triumph of free-market capitalism through the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s opens the door to Martens' and his advocacy of applying the principles of the market to the 'selling' of suffering. He writes 'amidst ethnic war and relentless economic exploitation, I initiated an emancipation programme that aims to teach the poor how to benefit from their biggest resource: poverty' (Martens, 2012: 3). In this sense, Martens' film is a cynical second act of the Band-Aid Afro-pessimist cultural moment, in which the international free market is once again seen as the saviour of the poor through the 'selling' of poverty.

Martens introduces his film with the failure of aid and development to alleviate African poverty due to the fact that the poverty-fighting industry is thoroughly enmeshed in the system of free-market neoliberalism. A system that directly profits from low wages, poor working conditions and the buying of resource rich lands in the Congo. He responds to this failure of development with a performance piece in the tradition of the theatre of the absurd which, rather than engage in any real, sustained critique of global capitalism, stages the drama of human suffering alongside with the bourgeois pretensions and benevolent charity of a liberal elite. We are invited into the liberal-bourgeois space of the

art gallery and Martens films attendees responses to images of suffering and violence. The aim of Martens is clear; human suffering has become the cultural pastime of a wine sipping and hors d'oeuvres consuming public.

He lacerates the sentiment of goodwill behind images of development and progress, suggesting instead that what audiences desire from Africa are images of suffering so that the offering of aid and charity is essentially a selfish act. Martens' interviews local workers who attest to the dire and worsening conditions of their rivers and forests which are their only means of income. Martens' illustration of the ineffectual nature of aid and charity programme, when the house is burning down in the beginning of the film, constitutes the justification for his performative satire and appeal to the people of Congo to sell their suffering.

Whilst Martens exposes the hypocrisy and delusion of international aid, he does so only insofar as it allows him to engage in the spectacle of Western image production and construct a satire of human objectification posing as a 'socially-engaged' piece of art("In and out of Brussels," 2012: 5). Martens cites Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (1729), in which Swift proposes that starving Irish children be fed to the British aristocracy to solve the problem of poverty in Ireland, as an important influence on his work. However, Swift's grotesque satire of the cannibalising greed of the English upper classes, in the form of literary prose, is a far cry from Martens' instrumentalization of global poverty that exploits Congolese people and their poverty in order to stage his own Swiftian satire.

If Martens gesture proves anything, it is the limits of rhetoric in critiquing configurations of power and global order in the Congo. As David Spurr astutely observes

> mapping the discourse (of colonial writing) […] an informal genealogy in which the repetitions and variations of these tropes are seen to operate across a range of nineteenth and twentieth century contexts. These basic procedures are accompanied throughout by a reflection on the nature of writing itself, not only as epistemic violence and a colonizing order but also, to cite Michel Foucault, as that which opens up "a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions", including the subversion of its own order (Spurr, 1993: 3).

Thus, Martens gesture reifies colonial discourses through their subversion and the elimination of any alternative or any critical counter discourse. What is never questioned in the film is the inevitability of the rule of global capitalism and free rein of the market in Congo. Trapped in this state, therefore, it is the human body and its suffering in

particular that can be monetised. The overtones of slavery here, and the monetisation of human suffering as a sellable commodity, are consistent throughout the film.

Critics who have defended Martens' work, such as T.J. Demos, highlight the postmodern ploys of the film that are designed to give the Western viewer pause over the hypocrisies of the West's relationship to the Congo (T.J. Demos "In and out of Brussels," 2012: 8). However, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza argues that the status of postmodernism in Africa is highly fraught and problematic: 'for scholars committed to the project of African emancipation, postmodernism is troubling for its apparent cynicism against all truth claims, against revolutionary politics, against collective politics' (Zeleza, 2006: 100). For Demos, the political offense and ethical unease that the film initially prompts, subsides into a deeper profundity where, he argues, the Western viewer is moved to meditate on the postmodern ambiguities of the film. However, this critical meditation and reflexivity exclusively concerns the Western viewer, as opposed to the African subjects of the film, who are coerced into participating to the extent that they serve the symbolic narrative of the film. The film raises the European viewer to the status of 'interlocutor', whereas the Congolese subject is limited to a signifying function. When the villagers ask where the film will be shown, Martens tersely responds that it will only be screened in Europe. This imbalance of critical agency in the film between the Western spectator and coerced Congolese worker is a running anxiety in the film's critical reception. Toma Muteba Luntumbe co-opts a postcolonial discourse, particularly Franz Fanon's writing on race and subjectivity, in order to restore a balance of critical agency to the film, in which the anonymous crowd are wishfully elevated to the status of 'co-directors' and 'co-creators' (Toma Muteba Luntumbe, "In and out of Brussels," 2012: 15). However, this exaggeration of the power-dynamic clearly romanticises and obviates the problematic power relations that are explicit in the film.

The central quest of Martens' *Enjoy Poverty* is his token proposition to impoverished Congolese plantation workers that they should profit from their poverty. Throughout the film, two Congolese men follow Martens carrying a neon 'Enjoy Poverty' sign, which they later assemble in a small village. It is the central image of Martens' 'emancipation programme'(Martens, 2009). As he surveys Congolese fisherman from the riverbank, pursuing an ever more endangered livelihood, he approaches them with the suggestion that they fish for something 'other than fish'(Martens, 2009). The staging of the scene articulates the difficulty for the Congolese to make a living from their own land and natural resources against the land seizures of multinational agribusiness used to develop aggressive mono-cultural plantation farming ("GRAIN | Agro-colonialism in the Congo:

European and US development finance bankrolls a new round of agro-colonialism in the DRC," n.d.). The scene brings into acute focus the growing ecological devastation and exploitative labour practices of neoliberalism. However, rather than resist the ecological catastrophe and the endangerment of global food supply, Martens' proposal presupposes that the Congolese have no choice but to adhere to a neoliberal 'rationality' and profit from it by whatever means they can. Thus, the imagination of alternative futures that resist the exploitation of their natural resources is pushed beyond the realm of possibility. Instead, according to Martens, poverty can be a profit-making enterprise. The political implications of his proposition are devastating for the Congolese and are indicative of the limits of the imagination beyond neoliberal capitalism in contemporary Western culture.

In his film, Martens looks at how images of poverty and destitution in the Congo are formulated and marketed by the West. In one early scene, he films grinning Finnish aid workers taking photographs of impoverished Congolese women collecting food supplies. The film starts with the failure of development and international aid to alleviate poverty in the DRC, whereupon we see the death of a malnourished child and the departure of the Pakistani UN peacekeeping force to the conflict in Eastern Congo. Following this narrative of failed development, Martens stages his intervention. In his instruction to the Congolese, Martens positions himself as a colonial missionary 'teaching them how to deal with life' (Martens, 2009). He ostensibly distinguishes himself from his missionizing predecessors by preaching a language of what he sees as political and economic 'common sense'. Thus, his advice is for the Congolese to make use of the one product – poverty – that the global free market bestows upon them. The 'civilising' mission is thereby reconfigured from religious conversion to economic conversion. Crucially, Martens represents the Sisyphean exploitation of the Congolese plantation workers in order to give weight to his proposition that they work and profit from the very same forces of global exploitation.

It is this cyclical state of exploitation and disenfranchisement, engendered by neoliberal economics, to which Martens aligns himself, and further, uses to produce spectacles of surrender and failure to human progress. In this sense, he presents himself as an 'anti-Missionary' figure, in which aid and development have failed and his project is similarly doomed to fail, as we see in the final scene, where his neon 'Enjoy Poverty' sign is cast adrift down the river, referencing the final scene of surrender in Herzog's *Aguirre, Wrath of God* (1972). In *Aguirre,* the surrender was to nature, but, in Martens' film, the surrender is to neoliberal capitalism.

To this end, Martens enlists a group of local wedding and party photographers with the promise of more money if they produce images of malnourished children and raped women. However, his enterprise is ultimately a failure due to the gatekeeping practices of aid organisations, which only allow accredited passes to European-affiliated photographers. Although his mission is a contrived failure, Martens nonetheless forces the photographers to take images of suffering, misleading them into believing that Martens can get them the passes as a means to a higher living wage. There is a protracted scene in which Martens, in full pedagogical mode, instructs the photographers how to best exploit the image of African misery for the European audience. The Congolese photographers are puppets in this set-up and their participation is secured purely through Martens' reckless promise of money and security, knowing in reality that he cannot deliver on his incentive. The viewer is left wondering why Martens manipulates these photographers so that his ultimate motives are disclosed only to the Western viewer. I would argue that he does so in order to enact a performance of exploitation in which he films them photographing their fellow Congolese in states of misery and abjection; forced to sell their own suffering. The narrative he constructs through the film objectifies the Congolese and enlists them insofar as to construct a theatre of the absurd, where poverty can yield profit and Congolese villagers, who mostly speak French and Lingala, dance around the neon sign that reads in English 'Enjoy Poverty'. Thus, they become the unwitting participants to his narrative of futility and art's 'inconsequentiality'("In and out of Brussels," 2012: 17). Once their work has been rejected by the Western aid organisation, Martens admits to the photographers that he believes their venture will fail due to the inadequacies of their work failing to meet Western standards. He expresses no regret at his misleading of the photographers in his grand narrative of failed intervention and resumes his indulgent posture of dispassionate ennui.

4.6 Faire-Part Collectif and Yole!Africa

The satirical productions of Renzo Martens are reversed by the participatory ethics politics of Faire-Part Collectif and Yole!Africa. Both organisations attempt to break down the dominant mode of aesthetic and political engagement between Congo and the West and reframe the dominant image of the Congo within cultural and political discourse. Where Martens announces his absurd interpretation of a new civilising mission through his proposal to gentrify the jungle and 'enjoy poverty', Faire-Part Collectif and Yole!Africa highlight political solidarity and creative self-determination as central to their praxis.

Yole!Africa is a cultural centre and youth engagement programme, founded in 2000 by the filmmaker and activist Petna Ndaliko Katondolo. Since 2005, they have also hosted the Congo International Film Festival in Goma alongside Alkebu Film Productions. The objective of Yole!Africa is to support young people in eastern Congo and provide a platform in which they can develop creative skills. The emphasis of the organisation's founders is upon the critical agency of young people to 'shape their own realities'("Yole!Africa: The Art of Empowering Youth!," n.d.).

The work of Yole!Africa is a critical response to the problematic interventions of NGOs into areas of cultural and artistic production. As Cherie Rivers Ndaliko demonstrates, NGOs will commission local artists and then market them as the 'voice of the people' whilst retaining overall creative and commissioning control over artistic and cultural production (Ndaliko, 2016: 5). The presence of NGOs in the cultural and artistic realm is problematic because NGOs have a vested interest in framing the conflict in Congo as a 'humanitarian problem', 'ethnic conflict' and 'development of a postcolonial state' as opposed to what Ndaliko states is a war over history in which 'history is not a matter of the past but a matter of the present' (Ndaliko, 2016: 83). Moreover, NGOs operating in the Congo cannot afford to alienate Western donors and thus, it is not surprising that whilst the Congolese government is labelled as corrupt, the same is not said for Western nations who 'support rebel groups and oppose regional governments on the basis of their own financial interests in the nation's resources' (Ndaliko, 2016: 55). The narratives of the Congo within the mainstream media and the discourse of the non-profit sector produce a problematic and skewered image of the Congo Wars and the political reality of contemporary Congo.

Yole!Africa's objective, to provide a space for the young to 'shape their own realities', subverts traditional narratives through participatory ethics and pedagogy based on political solidarity. Whilst Yole!Africa situates itself as a cultural launchpad for emerging Congolese filmmakers and artists, the Faire-Part Collectif formed following the film *Faire-Part* (2019) which represents the first Belgian-Congolese collaborative feature length film by directors Anne Reijniers, Nizar Saleh, Paul Shemisi and Rob Jacobs. The fact that this film represents the first Belgian-Congolese collaboration highlights the long, undisturbed tradition of exploitation of Congo cinematic value for Euroamerican filmmakers from Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (Coppola, 1979) to Michael Crichton's *Congo* (Marshall, 1995). The film itself is an exploration of collaboration, participation, and the ethics of filmmaking in Congo within the context of continuing colonial power structures. It is perhaps for this reason that the film was chosen to open

the 2019 'Same same but different: international arts festival on decolonisation and identity' by organisers over more institutionally established and recognised cultural producers. That a decolonial arts festival would select four debut filmmakers points to the ways in which the film's self-styled 'amateurism' allows both the artist and audience to escape the epistemic violence of colonial modernity.

One of the central concerns of the filmmakers is the relationship between financial capital and culture and how to create a cinema and film industry that is independent of these networks. This ambition was underscored by the differences and inequalities that were amplified by the space of the festival itself, which saw multiple African artists and attendees' visas denied. At the end of the screening of *Faire-Part*, the film's two Belgian directors (Reijniers and Jacobs) were invited on stage to speak about the process of cinematic collaboration. Meanwhile, the film's two Congolese directors, whose visas were denied by immigration authorities, communicated to the audience via video link. In a further twist, the festival discussant read aloud her questions to Paul Shemisi and played his pre-recorded answers simulating a 'live' discussion which, conversely, only highlighted his absence and exclusion from the space of the auditorium. The physical presence/absence between the African/European directors was a sobering coda to the film's laudable vision of international collaboration and radical filmmaking that crosses traditional lines.

'Kinshasa is never ending theatre'

Saleh describes Kinshasa as an intensely visual place, yet one which is extremely difficult to photograph/film, due to the common fear that their images are being exploited for financial gain by Europeans (an incontrovertible fact given this film represents the first serious collaboration of Congolese and European directors with equal creative control over the project). Given this dramatic richness, coupled with the suspicion of the camera's gaze on the part of Kinshasa's residents, the question of how to make a film is indeed a perplexing one for the young quartet.

Eschewing conventional narrative forms therefore, the filmmakers expose the inner workings of making a film about Kinshasa and the difficulties this presents to the politically and ethically engaged filmmaker. Long, patiently shot scenes of street performers are interspliced with dialogues of the filmmakers debating on how the footage can, or 'should' be used by the four filmmakers. There is little embarrassment over their collective youth and inexperience in inviting the audience into their *atelier* and the dialogues, that are inspired through the filmmaking process, represent an

unashamed and enthusiastic rupture with past traditions. Moreover, the self-contained vignettes of everyday life and theatre in Kinshasa grace the screen without intervention from the filmmakers. This division challenges the typical object-subject relationship of the camera's gaze.

The film itself takes place just before the elections in Congo DR are due to happen. However, intriguingly, there is little sense in the film that these long-delayed elections will change anything for the people. Instead, the film showcases a long durée perspective through the street theatre performers of Kinshasa who are presented as the real public intellectuals, or perhaps 'vanguards', of Congolese politics and history. In the first scene, we see a masked man engaged in a cleansing ritual; washing a bundle of fabrics in a bucket, he pulls the flags of Belgium, China, and the US to the loud jeering and boos of his audience. Next, the flag of Congo DR is pulled from the bucket to jubilant applause and he runs through the muddied streets flying the flag in a powerful image of contemporary geopolitics and historical national liberation.

The scene then cuts to the filmmakers interviewing the artist on the meaning behind the performance. He goes on to explain that the colonial nations need 'cleansing' from the oppression, exploitation and greed that has defined their colonial project in the Congo. Throughout the film, the filmmakers find parables of the nation's story post-independence performed on the streets highlighting one interviewee's observation, 'Kinshasa is never ending theatre'. Seeing the footage of the street theatre and hearing this characterisation of the city recalls Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot,* and how drama unfolds in the 'waiting for something' to transform the otherwise static structures that govern everyday life.

The film thus registers an unusual 'structure of feeling', to borrow Raymond Williams term (Williams and Orrom, 1954), that moves elliptically between the self-contained 'mini-films' of Kinshasa's street theatre to the ethics and praxis of the filmmakers' decision-making in constructing their own narrative from the footage captured. The film is thus constituted of these two central themes that eventually intertwine (literally and figuratively) in the public reading of poem 'Les Dents de Lumumba' before his commemorative statue in central Kinshasa. The circling back to Lumumba as the key historical event to understanding contemporary reality in Kinshasa echoes Georg Luckács insight that great historical novels 'bring the past to life as the precondition of the present.' (cited in Torgovnick 2005: 96).

At first, the critical commentary on how to make a film addressing the issues faced by Belgians and Congolese 60 years after independence is striking in its lack of conceit. However, this insight into the creation and production of film that the filmmakers constantly return to offers something more complex than perhaps initially suggested. The filmmakers use the idea of the amateur as a comment on the existing colonial relations of film in Europe and Africa, dispensing with old canons and forging together into the 'great unknown'. The financial capital that governs the culture industry is a major concern of this film and the challenge to create cinema film that is untethered from the financial control and creative supervision of European cultural institution is of paramount importance.

In *Faire-Part,* it is the dialogue between the filmmakers that functions as the critical space as opposed to a conventional narrative of 'discovery' and 'redemption' something emphasised further by the two white directors for creating respectful collaborations between African and European artists in contexts of huge economic disparity and inequality.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has examined different forms of discourse and rhetoric of NGOs working in the Congo. I have examined these discourse moreover, in the wider critical discussion on the NGOization of Congolese society as a response to the 'failed state'. Within these discourses, I have focused on the hypervisibility of Congolese women in NGO discourses as a 'future' and the drivers of the national economy and global development. I have traced such representations of women, labour and development to histories of labour exploitation during colonial times and the imperial roots of visions of the global development in the Congo. From examining the hypervisibility of women in NGO discourses, I turned to a broader examination of specific NGOs operating in the Congo today. In doing so, I wished to highlight the fact that NGOs do not constitute a monolithic entity in the Congo. Indeed, each of these case studies that I have selected for this chapter negotiate the complex networks and bonds of capital and cultural production in notably different ways. As such, I end this chapter by contrasting the satirical polemics of Martens' *Enjoy Poverty* to the participatory ethics of organisations such as Yole!Africa and Faire-Part Collectif which both seek to ground their work in the cultural production and expression of the Congo.

Chapter 5 Anticolonial assemblages under the shadow of modernity: Lumumba, anticolonial afterlives, and prophetic futures

5.1 Introduction

Patrice Lumumba's Independence speech is an iconic moment in anticolonial history that outlined a vision of an independent Congolese nation and African continent that refuted, by extension, the Belgian King's narrative of colonial nostalgia and historical revisionism (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002). Significantly, Lumumba's public interjection and political vision took place from within the ceremonial western court of a formal handover of power from the Belgian King to the Congolese. The theatre of the court is not however, the only reason for the iconicity of the speech. Lumumba's central challenge to modernity, Enlightenment philosophy and civility as the sole purview of Europe with its imperial agents, as its natural descendants, constituted a fundamental threat to the dominant colonial/epistemic order.[45]

Lumumba's reversal of these ideological and cultural grammars evoked a deep contempt and outrage that simultaneously revealed the intertwinement of racist and racializing discourses within Enlightenment philosophy (Eze, 2013). The imagery of Lumumba as an African statesman and nationalist leader was deliberately revoked by the widely circulated images of his arrest, a mere six months later, in which soldiers violently beat him and his supporters. This image was deliberately circulated to the international press in an attempt to reassert the dominant colonial order, through reproducing the western image of the African man as primitive and enslaved, by displaying prominently his bruised and beaten body being forcibly fed bananas (De Witte, 2002: 147). This form of image production was used as a technique of racialised degradation and humiliation and to dispel the former image of Lumumba as the rightful heir of Enlightenment philosophy and modernity.

The story of Lumumba demonstrates that the articulation of freedom and civil liberties, as a Black colonised subject, lays bare the undertow of racism within such discourses that enables the exclusion of the colonised from those same discourses. Within the space of six months, Lumumba descended from the coloniser's court to the coloniser's prison.

[45] Indeed, Lumumba's speech can be read as part of what Sylvia Wynter as a time in which a broad-based intellectual challenge was being mounted against the interlocking discourses of race/modernity/coloniality (Wynter, 2003).

The triumphant sabotage of his leadership provided a brutal spectacle; an event signalling the impossibility of a sovereign Black state. Lumumba's expulsion was the expulsion of Africa from laying claim to the supposedly universal human desire for freedom, dignity, liberty.

Through examining both the discourse of the Independence speech and the destabilisation and threat that it contained to the existing order, as well as the subsequent unleashing of primitive, psychoanalytic and pathologizing narratives upon the figure of Lumumba, I want to analyse Lumumba's speech as a subversive assemblage of anticolonial discourse. Arturo Escobar's notion of 'assemblage'[46] (Escobar, 2009: 26) captures the way in which Lumumba's speech crossed the borders of nation to take on transnational dimensions of Black liberation struggle and other anticolonial movements across the Third World. The assassination of Lumumba saw a global outcry and assemblage of anticolonial feeling in protests worldwide. The story of Lumumba's execution was mapped onto other histories of racist oppression and violence. In New York, protesters laid siege to the offices of the UN in actions that the press would characterise as a riot (Dworkin, 2017: 228). Meanwhile, the Pan-Africanist historian John Henrik Clarke referenced the murder as a 'lynching', retelling the story of Lumumba's death in a way that would resound with African-American political experiences (cited in Williams, 2012).

Lumumba's discourse, moreover, remains powerful and subversive in the face of contemporary representations of the Congo as a 'failed state'. Narratives used to discredit and suppress the political vision of Lumumba uncover, in turn, the undertow of racism and racial science within western Enlightenment discourse (Eze, 2013). The narratives around Congolese independence invariably start with the figure of Lumumba going determinedly 'off-script' and refusing a more gradual secession of power from the Belgians (Fraiture, 2008). Of course, this delaying tactic on the part of Belgian officials aimed to cement their economic interests in the country through finding ways of legally seceding the mineral rich Katanga region (Kent, 2017).

It is this image of an African colony, exploited and held captive by one of the most egregious colonial regimes, without the political institutions and mechanisms to govern, refusing to wait for freedom and independence that constitutes the dominant narrative

[46] Escobar uses the term 'assemblage' as an English translation of the Spanish word 'redes' in *Territories of Difference: Place, Movements, Life, Redes* in his study of social movements in the Pacific to '[convey] more powerfully the idea that life and movements are ineluctable produced in and through relations in a dynamic fashion' (Escobar, 2009: 26).

of Congolese decolonisation. Lumumba's disavowal of a telos of European-approved and managed transition to an independent nation state is the reason why the moment of decolonisation, and particularly Lumumba's speech, becomes a fascinating piece of political theatre. I will briefly overview Lumumba's speech, its reception at the time, and its historical signification and memory within contemporary culture before examining contemporary 'afterlives' of Lumumba's speech and vision of a truly independent Congo in contemporary works such as Pitcho Womba Konga's play *Kuzikiliza* and the vibrant constructions of Congolese artist Bodys Isek Kingelez.

5.2 Lumumba's Independence speech

Lumumba's speech sent shockwaves through not only the Belgian official delegation but also amongst audiences who listened to the speech on the radio. Sylvia Wynter rightly identifies this period as an intellectual challenge to the interlocking discourses of race/modernity/coloniality (Wynter, 2003). Lumumba's speech masterfully dismantles these epistemic linkages. Moreover, the ad-hoc and off-script nature of his address constitutes both an intellectual challenge and an epistemic rupture of the colonial mentality.

As Renton and Zeilig point out, Lumumba had not in fact been scheduled to speak; during King Baudouin's speech, Lumumba was seen 'desperately scribbling out a new speech' (Renton et al., 2007: 220). The expectation had been for Lumumba to graciously thank the Belgians and accept independent status with an attitude of conciliation and goodwill. The ad-hoc nature of the speech makes the act more one of catharsis and political reconstitution; a refusal to satisfy as opposed to satisfying the prescribed demands that Lumumba reaffirm the ideology of the coloniser at the turn of independence. If its effects for the Congolese were a form of catharsis and reconstitution of the national body politic, then the effect on the Belgians was the direct opposite.

The Independence Day ceremony was a highly scripted event for both the King and his official delegates as well as for the delegates and representatives from the MNC (Mouvement National Congolais). Photographs from the ceremony reveal the distinctive clothing of the attendees present. King Baudouin is dressed in full regalia with medals and other adornments highlighting not only his status, but also the pomp and ceremony of the Belgian Congo regime, and the staging of their uncontroversial departure as benevolent colonial patriarchs. Meanwhile, Lumumba and the other members of the MNC are dressed in bowties and suits, visibly bereft of the adornments of state power. Their clothing and appearance constitutes a formal and subdued contrast to those of the

King; to some denoting their lesser status and making it clear to audiences that they are guests in the court of the King. The striking sartorial contrast also emphasises Lumumba's identity as a democratic citizen versus the regalia of the colonial monarch, subverting the codes of political modernity. The managed transference of power within the space of western court and the scripting of the event by the Belgian delegation, however, makes clear who the central actors within the scene are, and who the outliers.

As Renton, Seddon and Zeilig note, Lumumba had not been expected to speak at the event with Joseph Kasa-Vubu, the president of the political party Alliance des Bakongo, following Baudoin's greatly condescending speech, crediting the 'wisdom' of the Belgians (Renton et al., 2007: 77). When it came to his turn to speak, Lumumba, instead of thanking the Belgian delegation, celebrated the victory of the national independence movement. From there Lumumba proposed how the victory of independence would be remembered and carried forth by what he refers to as the victorious generation. Adroitly, through writing the future, Lumumba effectively re-narrates the past. For this generation, the day of independence constitutes:

> an illustrious date that will be ever engraved in your hearts, a date whose meaning you will proudly explain to your children, so that they in turn might relate to their grandchildren and great-grandchildren the glorious history of our struggle for freedom (Lumumba, n.d.).

Lumumba goes on to explain how it is crucial that the victory be remembered as one of struggle, and how the wounds inflicted on Congo, by its colonial rulers, are a reason for 'deep pride' as opposed to silence and shame. Lumumba speaks all the time of a collective struggle arising from bondage, making his own body and 'wounds' interchangeable with that of the body politic. Here, Lumumba claims historical ownership of the event: converting the spectacle of benevolent colonial withdrawal into one of glorious, national birth.

Before securing independence, and an agreed timetable for Belgian withdrawal, Lumumba was imprisoned in the notorious Jadotville jail. He went into negotiations with the Belgians after suffering several beatings (Bulabemba, n.d.). The personal and political can thus be read within his declaration that 'our wounds are too fresh and much too painful to be forgotten'. Lumumba collapses himself, the Congolese, and the Congo itself into a wound. By speaking to the event and experience of colonial domination and its scars and traces, Lumumba thereby refutes the narrative of Belgian colonial innovation and benevolence.

By addressing a future Congolese nation in such existential terms, Lumumba's speech is the event that attempts to re-write Congolese history. The speech is imbued throughout with the language of constitutionalism, of legal precedents, and human rights as necessary tools with which to remake the Congo, whilst characterising the system of colonial rule as the unmistakable perversion of exactly those principles:

> 'we have seen our land seized in the name of ostensibly just laws which gave recognition only to the right of might. We have not forgotten that the law was never the same for the white and the black, that it was lenient to the ones, and cruel and inhuman to the others. We have experienced the atrocious sufferings, being persecuted for political convictions and religious beliefs, and exiled from our native land: our lot was worse than death itself' (Lumumba, n.d.).

Lumumba's depiction of colonial rule as a legally-sanctioned rule of death and violent oppression is twinned with the promise of what a Black, African government can do with precisely those same powers of governance and legal constitution: 'we shall show the world what the Black man can do when working in liberty, and we shall make the Congo the pride of Africa' (Lumumba, n.d.). Lumumba's speech is an indictment of historical colonialism, a prophecy of Congo's future, and a declaration of Black liberty and sovereignty that together forms an Afrotopian vision of a future state (Sarr, 2019). A vision moreover that refuted the predeterminations and paternalism of King Baudouin's speech that summarised Belgian colonial rule in the Congo as the successful execution of the 'white man's burden' (Baudouin qtd in Renton et al., 2007). However, the cautioning within the speech to colonial powers to respect independence and for the Congolese to respect the rights of Belgian settlers, so long as they remain amenable to the conditions of independence, speaks to the underlying uneasiness towards transition to a new independent state.

Lumumba's unapologetic retooling of liberty and the law, along with his indictment of colonialism, are not only powerful political theatre, but also profoundly threatening to the colonial powers. We see this threat, for example, in the severe, statesman-like bearing of Lumumba in Tshibumba *Le 30 Juin 1960 Zaïre Indépendant,* a work I will return to later in the chapter. In this sense, Lumumba's speech represents a constituent moment of anticolonial struggle that became emblematic and inspirational beyond the borders of state and nationality, in much the same way as the Haitian revolution and the 1804 constitution, which significantly guaranteed liberty to all people regardless of their status (Trouillot, 2015).

This imaginable Congo, as seen by the former colonisers, had to be destroyed, much like a free Haiti, preventing the possibility of a different modernity both as an idea and as a possible material reality. The manner of Lumumba's assassination and his public humiliation were key to undermining this project. His position in the world and his determination for Congo to lead the freedom movements across the world promised a new kind of Black, African modernity.

The swift and violent removal of Lumumba from power and his demonisation by the colonial powers speak to the subversive power of his word, and to the need of the colonisers to reassert their authority. An authority wielded through the visual spectacle of the colonial primitive and the degradation of the national movement. Indeed, editors of *Libre Belge*[47] referred to Lumumba as the 'barbarian' and a sexual threat to white, European women (De Witte, 2002: 11). Kevin C. Dunn convincingly argues that these representations of Lumumba as threatening and deviant to the established order are due to the fact that he disrupted 'the familial analogy of Paternalism, the "children" were not allowed to talk back to the "parents"'(Dunn, 2003: 74), which had been the prevailing ideological discourse of the Belgian colonial state. That this stereotypical discourse of the Black man as sexually threatening (Awkward, 1995), intensified during independence and subsequent Congo Crisis, demonstrates the will of colonial powers to undermine the constituent vision of a free and independent Black Africa and their resolve that the black man 'know his place'.

What is notable about Lumumba's speech, in light of its violent response, is its own lack of bellicose rhetoric to the present Belgian settlers and members of parliament. Indeed, Lumumba extends a hand of friendship to them; one, however, conditional upon their respect for the integrity and dignity of the Congo. After assuring his audience that a future Congolese state will be fortified through its own immense mineral resources as well as the aid of other states, Lumumba states that 'Even Belgium, which has finally learned the lesson of history and need no longer try to oppose our independence, is prepared to give us its aid and friendship'(Lumumba, n.d.). What then invoked such deadly ire and feelings of threat in the former colonisers? It is Lumumba's refusal to make any positive overtures or acknowledgement of a colonial legacy or debt to which a future independent Congo should be built upon that left the Belgian congregation stricken and discombobulated. Instead, Lumumba describes the world of the Belgian-

[47] Edouard Bustin writes that Belgian newspapers such as *Libre Belge* 'had a record of virulent hostility to Lumumba combined with an unqualified devotion to the Belgian royal family' (Bustin, 2002: 547).

Congo as a land of death from which no lesson should be imparted declaring that 'we, who have suffered in body and soul from the colonial oppression, we tell you that henceforth all that is finished with' (Lumumba, n.d.). The consignment of the Belgian-Congo to the ashes of history, and the creation of a new sovereign and democratic African state threatened therefore the central identity of the colonial metropole as spreading civilisation and progress across a world remade in their own image (Rosoux, 2014: 20).

In much of the scholarship, Lumumba's speech is often reduced to a brief moment of hope and pride quickly quashed by external political pressures and realities (Wrong, 2001; Van Reybrouck, 2015). For this reason, its significance is often overlooked as symbolising nothing more than a moment of reckless self-destruction (Bustin, 2002: 545). For many, the brevity of Lumumba's time in office between independence and his assassination is remarkable only for ushering forth an uninterrupted period of failure. For example, the Marxist historian Basil Davidson compares the killing of Lumumba as a 'turning point', after which 'the political sociology of much of Africa, after the 1960s […] began to acquire a mournful guise of repetitive failure' (Davidson, 1992: 230-1). In Davidson's analysis, the slain Lumumba is an ominous portent of what is to follow on the rest of the continent. For Davidson, the central reason for this is the incompatibility of 'parliamentary models' with the '*nature* of [African] society' (Davidson, 1992: 230). Thus, for Davidson, it is the lack of an African bourgeois class able to assert their interests 'swamped by multitudes of the poor' and unable to defend the parliamentary structures of new nation-states, which left the new state vulnerable to opportunism and sabotage.

The elimination of Lumumba and the stunted formation of a bourgeois class inculcates a kind of fantastic landscape, antithetical to liberal democracy in every way. Davidson refers to it as a 'fantasy of a nation state governed by 'pirate warlords' (Davidson: 230). There is a fantastical dystopia at work in Davidson's prose; one that fails to take note of the threat which Lumumba's politics embodied in the context of the Cold War and to the continuation of neocolonial power and control in Africa.

Davidson's explanation suggests that the promise of an independent Congo was killed from the inside, as opposed to foreign interference, asserting that the inherent *nature* of African society birthed this fantastical dystopia. The figure of Lumumba is thus associated not only with the past, but the past's forsaken future. Here, the overthrow of Lumumba and the promise of democratic right and parliamentary politics give way to the nature (read pathology) of Africa society. Not only is Lumumba thereby divorced from his African context, but also his silencing comes to exemplify the pathological

character of African society and the failure of nation-states. This emphasis ignores the pathology of the colonizer and their need to reassert control by silencing Lumumba. In this rendering, Lumumba and the particular nationalist, democratic politics he represents are too precocious and advanced for the existing class structure of African society; working class Congolese are thus positioned in a different telos of Marxist theory by Davidson to that of Lumumba and the nationalists.

This pathologizing of the African working class is apparent both in Marxist and liberal conservative scholarship (Wrong, 2001: 64; Davidson, 1992: 230). The argument that the hope of an independent Congo is snuffed out and squandered by its own people overlooks the huge popular base of support that Lumumba had amongst working class Congolese and the determined efforts of colonial forces to maintain economic control of the region through the secession of Katanga (Kent, 2017). This overly deterministic account of Lumumba raises, however, the question of how the event of anticolonialism and the struggle for independence before the failure of Congolese nationalist movement should be historicised?

Fred Moten draws the figures of Toussaint Louverture and Lumumba into a shared critical space to show the 'serrated lyricism' of the Black radical tradition that connects 'the irruption […] of a radical energy, an exterior lyricism, whose implied victory has not been achieved or met' (Moten, 2003: 131). In Moten's account, the Lumumbist project is not some preternaturally doomed endeavour and instead represents a struggle for freedom that should be thought of in the longue durée of global capitalism, systems of slavery and imperialism. In this sense, Lumumba and Louverture represent figures expelled from the Enlightenment's racial codes who dared to demand instead freedom and equality. Both figures therefore represent the unfinished project of Black liberation and subvert normative readings of history that isolate political and historical actors and configure them into finite histories and temporalities. It has been noted how similar Lumumba's political character, his personal trajectory and symbolic memory are to the eighteenth century Black revolutionary Toussaint Louverture. In his classic work of history *The Black Jacobins,* the Trinidadian historian C.L.R. James concluded that Louverture's ultimate failing was not one 'of darkness but of Enlightenment' (James and Walvin, 2001).

Louverture's belief that the universal ideals and revolutionary spirit of the French Revolution would indeed extend to all men regardless of their 'race' and social status was ultimately unsuccessful. This critical thread is taken up again by Moten, who argued that

it is the failure of Enlightenment that sealed Louverture's fate. Arguably, Lumumba's appeal to the values and spirit of Enlightenment philosophy evokes this same historical flaw.

In Lumumba's last letter before his execution, he speaks not only of the betrayal of Independence, but also of the fact that the occupiers and elites had in fact, no intention of giving the Congolese their freedom and merely pulled them along in a game of political manipulation and doublespeak (Lumumba, 2009). This duality of romance and tragedy that Lumumba encompasses makes him map onto the figure of Toussaint Louverture in uncanny ways. Lumumba's reversal of the formulation of Enlightenment principles and his inversion of the colonial state as a space of death and destruction with the African statehood as the beacon of those principles, evokes Louverture's exact same guiding belief and ultimate miscalculation of his political opponents.

It is their shared alterity to the central principles and racial logic of the Enlightenment that makes their mark upon history jarringly similar and interchangeable. Of course, to map the trajectories of these two figures as sharing identically doomed paths in the quest of freedom and dignity is to plot the histories of nineteenth century anti-slave rebellion and twentieth century anti-colonial rebellion in a cycle of repetition, suppression and ultimately failure.

David Scott (Scott, 2004) notes the vacillation in James' text between tragedy and romance as different narrative modes for the history of liberation struggle in Saint Dominique and for imagining other possible futures. James' conclusion that Louverture's downfall was a 'failure of Enlightenment' and his overriding but ultimately, misplaced belief that the universal freedoms they promised would eventually triumph. Lumumba mirrors the same course although, it is arguable, Lumumba was conscious throughout of the danger of claiming such freedoms both during Independence and before his final execution, while, his independence speech is undoubtedly a form of anticolonial romance with its overarching images of renewal and restoration of an African political spirit and economic sovereignty. A state that appeals precisely to the political imagination of Louverture and the Haitian Revolution.

By contrast, his final letter to his wife Pauline Lumumba, sent from Thysville prison clearly finds him resigned to his own death and the power of western political institutions in denying Congolese independence from the very inception of negotiations. The hope and determination of Lumumba's independence speech sits is marked contrast to the tone of his final letter.

The certainty and strength of the speech is here replaced with the personal fragility of one man. The ephemerality of the letter's opening, his uncertainty of whether the words will be read is a far cry from the ebullient force of the speech. He states unequivocally his lack of regret for the 'sacred cause' of independence but admits also that it 'was never the desire of the Belgian colonialists and their Western allies' to relinquish power and control in the Congo. Here, Lumumba evokes Audre Lorde's argument that 'the master's tools will not dismantle the master's house' (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 2015: 94). The institutions, upon which the freedom of the Congo depended, deserted, such as the United Nations failing Lumumba and the MNC.

Lumumba's tragic realisation echoes Lorde's postulation that something other than the power in its existing form must be prevailed upon in order to achieve radical transformation. Despite this sobering admission, Lumumba continues, 'the day will come when history will speak. But it will not be the history which will be taught in Brussels, Paris, Washington or the United Nations' (Lumumba, n.d.) and gestures to history from a position of radical alterity to that of the dominant order.

In light of the failure of national liberation through appeal to the Enlightenment principles of Europe, Lumumba looks to a history outside of western power as the source of liberation and hope for the future anticipating not only his death, but also the subjection of his own political voice to the misapprehensions and misreadings of western discourse. Moreover, for Lumumba, prophecy and the imagination of the future are inseparable from the telling of history.

Here is the tragedy of Enlightenment, its seductive power in making people aspire and believe its universal claims were truly universal and not a merely a performance that concealed the deliberate sabotage of the nationalist movement and protected its own economic interests. Indeed, the notion of his speech as utopian detracts from the fact that in order to effect political change, Lumumba had to speak in an idealised register about a future Congolese state. However, the underlying racial codes of the Enlightenment, in determining who possessed reason and who did not in the arena of political governance, determined the space of political freedom for Lumumba and his political vision. The task of imagining independence thus fell on revolutionary thinkers because self-determination and political self-rule for colonised peoples was supposed to be an impossibility.

5.3 Theatre and imagery of Congolese Independence

The visual framing of the ceremony sees a collision of pre-modern and modern cultural signification. The staging of the event, at first glance, appears that of a royal court with the regalia and figure of the monarch at the centre of proceedings. Noticeably though, the image of the King, and the overarching symbolism of the ceremony, are also entangled with the modern. The ceremony was broadcast and transmitted through radio technology. This resulted in the production of a spectacle in which two forms of cultural signification and symbolism, monarchy, and modern technology, were utilised to narrativize the formal end of colonial rule. The speech from the ceremony were transmitted across the Congo, and throughout Belgium, by the state broadcaster RTBF (Radio Television Belge de la Communauté Française), making the ceremony one of the first global, mass-mediated events of decolonisation (Giefer et al., 2010).

The ceremonial transfer of power occurred under the auspices of the European sovereign and clearly aimed to consolidate the image of the Belgian King and the colonial order. This desire to maintain the colonial order is evident through the Belgian officials' attempts to present their political acquiescence to the nationalists demands as an act of voluntary paternal beneficence. The King thus addresses the Congolese delegates as if it were a gathering of handpicked graduates of Belgian colonial institutions therefore, making them 'suitable' and vetted candidates for the challenges of government and civil service. In his speech, King Baudouin warned the Congolese delegates 'do not compromise the future with hasty reforms and do not replace the structures that Belgium has left you until you are certain you can do better' (Baudouin cited in De Witte, n.d.). The Belgian's sentimental framing of the ceremony, as a mournful departure of the patriarch and graduation ceremony of African students in European civility and governance, precisely consolidated those master-pupil colonial relations. A power relation that Lumumba directly refuted through his use of the language of equality and brotherhood which he uses both to acknowledge the painful history of colonisation, 'who will ever forget the shootings which killed so many of our brothers', as well as his hopes for the future Congolese state: 'brothers let us commence together a new struggle'(Lumumba, n.d.).

Arguments against Congolese Independence made much of the fact that the country had only six university graduates. With so few graduations, opponents to Independence argued that the Congo was, therefore, ill-prepared for the challenges of governance and political self-determination (Newbury, 2012). Of course, the notion that African civil

servants and government officials had to be trained within the very European institutions under which their own freedom was denied, as a test of 'readiness' for freedom, points to the underlying racism at work in western developmentalist narratives. Moreover, this oft-cited figure of six graduates, in one of the largest countries in the world, suggests a rudimentary African education system in need of continued European assistance and development, as opposed to what was, in fact, a deliberate colonial policy of creating an elite, educated class of évolués[48]; a system that forced the rest of the population into political systems of economic coercion and labour extraction.

Lumumba interrupts this narrative framing with a sobering rejoinder:

> morning, noon and night we were subjected to jeers, insults and blows because we were "Negroes". Who will ever forget that the Black was addressed as "tu", not because he was a friend, but because the polite "vous" was reserved for the white man? (Lumumba, n.d.).

Lumumba's interjection into the proceedings sees the Belgian set-up quickly unravel from the royal court into the modern drama of the courtroom, in which the object is not the transference of power, but the critique of that power, and a disavowal of its pre-existing form in the moment of its transference. Thus, the stilted mechanisms of the ceremonial court which were designed to consolidate a Belgian narrative of benevolent imperialism are here disrupted through Lumumba's retrieval of power, not within the space of the court, but rather by communicating directly with a national and international audience. Hence, Lumumba subverts the collusion of both pre-modern and modern technologies of power. Finally, the drama of the courtroom becomes a contest of history and narrative on the global stage, due to the fact that all of the speeches were transmitted on the radio. The subversive image of Lumumba in the court of the King, refusing the 'gift' of independence, and, instead, celebrating the struggle of the nationalist movement, initiates what Moten regards as an '*irruption*' of anticolonial power as a constitutive assembly and collective power within the managed space of the Belgian court (Moten, 2003: 131).

Given the drama and gravity of the response to Lumumba's speech, by both the Belgian officials and their accomplices as well as the Congolese audience, one would expect the language of the speech to be marked with passion and fury. However, a curiously overlooked, but crucial dimension of the speech, is precisely its lack of rancour and

[48] The French term 'évolué' was used to describe African and Asian colonial subjects deemed 'evolved' through their assimilation into the values and systems of European culture.

emotion. Indeed, this absence of personal emotion is punctuated only briefly by Lumumba's declaration, 'nous ne sommes plus vos singes' (we are no longer your monkeys), creating a piece of oratory that otherwise displays notable restraint in its cataloguing of colonial crimes and its dreams for a different future. In order to do this Lumumba makes extensive use of the language and idioms of the coloniser and the discourse of nineteenth century liberalism and Enlightenment philosophy in which to inculcate both a free Black political subject and a Black sovereign state as the new translators and architects of Enlightenment and modernity. For example, Lumumba writes that an independent Congo 'shall show the world what the Black man can do when working in liberty' and furthermore, states his intention to 'revise all the old laws and make them into new ones that will be just and noble'(Lumumba, n.d.). It is this reversal and reorientation that structures the rhetoric of the speech which makes it a particularly powerful piece of orature. The power of his speech lies in its successful articulation of Enlightenment political and philosophical discourse and liberation rhetoric.

The speech could only result in either the recognition of colonial shame and wrongdoing, or the total rejection of the Lumumbist project. A project whose political foundation was the pride and sacrifice of the anticolonial struggle that would not bow to the colonialist's demand for gratitude and validation. For Lumumba, the liberated subject is formed precisely through the struggle of anticolonialism and not the 'civilising' mission of the colonisers and the paternal sanctioning of freedom. In Lumumba's vision, the civilising mission is marked by unrestrained cruelty and violence, rendering a no man's land unto which the anticolonial liberation movement intervenes with its unshakable demands for freedom and self-determination.

For Lumumba, this is the moment of true modernity and political subjectivity. Terra nullius under the chicotte of the coloniser becomes a land of death and destruction for its people. Undoubtedly, Lumumba's image of a land and destruction subverted the traditional imperial imagination of the Congo as the last outpost of European civility. As previously argued, the iconic line 'Dr Livingstone I presume', uttered by Henry Morton Stanley, after his death-defying expedition, is a celebration of the supremacy of European civility and gentility, with the Congo constituting the all- important stage for such performances of masculinity and cultural supremacy. The colonial system is thereby unwritten by the colonial subject and Black independent nationhood is born through this mode of recognition and refusal of the dominant colonial hegemony.

Rancière's theory of performance in *The Emancipated Spectator* is a productive critical lens through which to read the Independence Day speech and its political fallout. The collapse of colonial spectacle into anticolonial assemblage through Lumumba's response recalls Rancière's argument that:

> the theatrical stage and performance […] become a vanishing mediation between the evil of spectacle and the virtue of true theatre. They intend to teach their spectators ways of ceasing to be spectators and becoming agents of collective practice (Rancière and Elliott, 2011: 7-8).

The irruption of Lumumba's speech renders the spectacle null and void, in what Rancière describes as a 'vanishing mediation' (8). Lumumba's address is an appeal to the unity and pride of the Congolese national movement and locates the future state as the product of struggle. The spectacle of the colonial regime, as the architects and nurturers of African Independence and statehood, is dismissed through this appeal to collective struggle and visionary African politics. Indeed, what is interesting in the speech is how little Lumumba uses the first-person, choosing rather to criss-cross between past, present and future whilst all the time using a plural form of address. Rancière argues that these moments of theatrical practice and types of engagement carry a frisson, because they represent an act of 'mediation striving for its own abolition'(8).

If we follow Rancière's argument that true theatre, as opposed to spectacle, is an act that challenges the very structuring difference of stage/audience, sovereign and spectator by seeking its own abolition; this gesture simultaneously renders the spectacle hollow. This shift in the ceremony and the power of Lumumba political theatre makes the spectacle of the sovereign appear not only hollow but also absurd. We see this humour and absurdity in Matulu's painting in which the eyes of the King are downcast and his posture is subservient to that of Lumumba's. Expressions of glee, pride and laughter are written onto the faces of the spectators. It is notable that Lumumba switches the staging of the event to a popular crowd as opposed to a real venue and official delegates who comprised Lumumba's audience. Matulu's painting thus iconises this moment as a recentering of Africa and Lumumba on the world stage. The atlas in Lumumba's hands shows Africa at the centre. Lumumba's points to the globe giving him a monarchical and statesman-like appearance.

The composition of the painting, and the different attitudes of the figures, transposes the drama of the speech onto the streets of Kinshasa, as opposed to the actual indoor venue of the Palais de la Nation in which the speeches were delivered. He is telling a story through the painting, whereby we cannot hear the words. But, we interpret the words

through the attitudes of the different characters, and, in this way, the power of the speech and oratory is conveyed through the body and physicality of the painting. It is remarkable that Lumumba's is the only face without a trace of humour, his gaze is forward and sincere. Lumumba's visage contrasts strikingly with that of the King's grimace and the uplifted smiles of the witnesses.

Moten notes the transmediality of Lumumba's political visions in its historical afterlives in the paintings of Matulu, something he terms the 'material spirit of the postcolonial future'. Looking at the paintings through the dialogue of Tshibumba and the anthropologist Johannes Fabian, Moten observes how:

> the sound and content of Tshibumba and Lumumba is recorded in the paintings, reconstituting them not only against (what Derrida might call the law of) genre but as phonographic history as well (140).

In scholarship, the frequency in which Lumumba the man and Lumumba the speech blend into a putative whole speaks to the interwovenness of materiality, spirit, genre, and the subject in the transference of political power. Moten's analysis of the afterlives of Lumumba underlines the instability of the subject through its translocality – the fact that Lumumba was equally mourned on the streets of Harlem as Kinshasa and its transmediality, by way of poetry, painting and reportage all paying homage to the speech.

5.4 'Intolerable images'

Perhaps, it is this ribald quality that Tshibumba Kanda-Matulu captures in his painting, an unconcealed enjoyment at the discomfort of the sovereign that so infuriated the Belgian witnesses that day and the larger white settler population in the Congo. Indeed, it provoked a fury and indignation as many first-hand accounts testify (Marouf Hasian and Wood, 2009). In this sense, Lumumba's interjection into the proceedings, and his passionate indictment of colonialism, constituted for the Belgians not merely seditious speech, but rather, an 'intolerable image'. Rancière defines the intolerable image as that which 'makes us unable to view an image without experiencing pain or indignation' (Rancière and Elliott, 2011: 83). Lumumba's speech immediately drew the ire of the Belgian delegation and was clearly intolerable to King Baudouin who marched out of the room upon hearing its contents.

The image of Lumumba refusing the role of grateful recipient of the 'genius' of colonialism but standing rather as an autodidact of the nationalist movement and Pan-

African liberation struggle with an unswerving demand for rights as equal citizens, was a seemingly excessive and deeply unpalatable position for the Belgian delegation. Why was this intolerable image and not the latter image of his execution actively facilitated by colonialist powers? The image of his violent arrest and public humiliation was not only tolerated, but its orchestration and dissemination in the media speaks to an overwhelming desire on the part of the Belgian elite to erase the image of Lumumba as a statesman and political leader.

The image of Lumumba, arrested and abused, is a deliberate inversion of the image of Lumumba as the hope of Black Africa. Its execution and public dissemination were designed to imperil precisely the promise of the former image and the vision of a global Black freedom movement. Moreover, it is an image of targeted degradation that recirculates the European mythology of race and primitivism ruthlessly muting the image of Lumumba as a self-determining agent of an Afrocentric future. We can read his assassination, and the deliberate visual grammars in which it was fixed, as an attempt to discredit the political vision of Lumumba, through a reproduction of the primitive at a time in which Black political pride and sovereignty were ascendant political ideals. Thus, in these two images, we see two vying visual grammars and epistemes. Lumumba's political opposition to reproducing the racist knowledge forms of primitivism reveal the threat to the dominant order that Lumumba embodied.

This issue is part of a broader history of visual representation of Africa by Europeans fuelled by the desire for images of abjection. Binyavanga Wainaina famously satirised this in his essay *How to Write About Africa,* in which he offers a guide to any aspiring western writer eager to make their career through sketches of African exotica. In faux-earnestness, Wainaina advises the aspiring writer:

> among your characters you must always include the Starving African […] She must look utterly helpless. She can have no past, no history; such diversions ruin the dramatic moment (Wainaina, 2019).

The caustic brilliance of this essay is to expose an uncomfortable appetite and desire for these images of suffering and dysfunction amongst European writers and audiences that is reduced to a formula – a transactional exercise that guarantees the prestige and renumeration of the western writer and the essentialised and exotic representation of Africa. Whilst Wainaina's essay was responding to a more contemporary moment of celebrity activism, white saviourism and Afropessimism, the historical moment of decolonisation also witnessed a struggle over the visual imagery and narratives of Africa.

Indeed, the history of the Congo has more often than not been represented through the visual medium. Indeed, one could argue in discourse as well, texts such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* employ a visual register in which to describe the later imperialism in the Congo as testing the very limits of language.

In juxtaposing these two images – Lumumba the hope and Lumumba the captured – I want to pose the question of why the former image sparked greater concern among the colonisers than the latter. For within the visual grammar of coloniality, the image of Black, Congolese freedom is intolerable, to the extent that nothing less than its very reversal and the body of Lumumba humiliated and helpless was the only tolerable outcome. The US President, Dwight Eisenhower, at the time of Lumumba's assassination admitted his regret at the situation yet nevertheless affirmed the fact that Lumumba needed to go (Nwaubani, 2001: 620). Thus, for Eisenhower, the very facticity of Lumumba had become intolerable. I think this issue reaches deeper into how the Congo and its political struggle has been mediated and constitutive of the underlying politics of violence and representation that have determined the Congolese struggle for independence.

The image of the slain Lumumba that produced an international outcry follows a history of colonial and neo-colonial violence in the Congo captured through photography. Indeed, the Congo was the very first genocide to be photographed. Images of amputation victims were taken by campaigners and exhibited around Europe and North America in so-called 'lantern shows' in an effort to bring an end to Leopold's rule in the Congo Free State (Grant, 2001). However, in a Conradesque fashion, leading figures of this movement, including Roger Casement and E.D. Morel, who both championed the cause of ending the crimes of Leopold in the Congo Free State, remained faithful to other forms of imperialisms. For example, Morel wrote highly racist and inflaming invectives against the presence of demobilised Black soldiers in Europe arguing that they constituted a sexual threat to white, European women (Jahoda, 1998: 208). In his article, Morel referred to 'black savages', 'primitive African barbarians' with 'their barely restrainable bestiality' (Morel cited in Jahoda, 1998: 208).

The question thus becomes: why did these images of colonial brutality not question and displace European racism in a more profound and structural sense? This suggests a toleration, or need, for Black Africans as victims in need of a white saviour and champion, whilst the notion of Black sovereignty and power encapsulated by Lumumba, or military

strength, in the case of the decommissioned Black soldiers, becomes an image of enmity and terror for Europeans.

In this sense, Morel and Casement's passionate campaign for the expulsion of the Belgian colonisers from the Congo can be read as being as much to do with restoring legitimacy to responsible colonialism than it had to any connection with the hopes of the anti-colonial Congolese. Certainly, neither Morel nor Casement were in any hurry to discard their idea of Africans as primarily helpless children in desperate need of white assistance and protection.[49] The Congo Reform Association and its leading thinkers effectively straddled the colonial and anti-colonial and did not fundamentally dislodge the inequalities of European racial science and cultural imperialism (Reinders, 1968). Lumumba and the anticolonial movement constituted a fundamental shift in discourse. In this sense, the Independence ceremony merged seemingly opposing narratives, so too Morel and Casement revealed their alignments with western civilising narratives as they campaigned for a Free Congo (Lewis, 2005).

What is interesting about Lumumba's speech was the transgression and subversion located within it, despite its ostensible concordance with the liberal philosophies and values of Western Enlightenment. Indeed, the images of Congolese independence undoubtedly divided spectators. The haste with which western commentators sought to vilify and demonise Lumumba occurred within the same epistemic categories of racism – the psychoanalytic, the primitive and the pathological. The fact that Lumumba's demand for recognition, as an equal citizen, unleashed this form of racism and violent suppression, demonstrates the intertwinement of liberal discourse of freedom and enlightenment with enslavement, racial science, and colonialism; a relationship that made Lumumba's transgression not only a political threat, but an existential one. In order to explore this question further, I now turn to the reception of the speech, both at the time, and, in later scholarly evaluations.

[49] Casement was no exception in presenting racialised characterisations of non-Europeans in his work as a social campaigner. For example, in his presentation of the Putmayo Report (1904) which documented colonial abuses in Peru, he wrote : 'The Indian who may correctly be termed 'a grown up child,' was at first delighted to have a white man with attractive articles to give away settling into his neighbourhood…Moreover the Amazonian Indian is by nature docile and obedient no match for the dominating ability of those with European blood in their veins' (Casement cited in Taussig, 2010: 65).

5.5 Reception and colonial retaliation

The immediate reception to Lumumba's speech was a chorus of celebration amongst Lumumbists, Pan-Africanists and other Black radical movements and censure and disapproval amongst the political establishment in Belgium and elsewhere in Europe. In many ways, this division is still identifiable today when surveying post-facto responses and evaluations to Lumumba's speech. Indeed, later reappraisals draw a connection between the condemnatory attitude of the speech and the subsequent failure of the national movement, constituting a failure of Realpolitik, with the central flaw of the story being Lumumba's irrepressible and polemical personality. However, both these charges are contradicted by the actual content of the speech.

In terms of realpolitik, Lumumba offers a hand of fraternity and friendship to the Belgian settlers on the single condition that they respect the political and economic sovereignty of the Congo. Moreover, despite the lack of references to revolutionary, left-discourse, his speech was nonetheless taken as evidence of a new emerging threat of a Red African continent (Natufe, 1984: 361). Furthermore, there is a marked fondness on the part of some western commentators, in particular, to perform psychoanalytic investigations into the 'fragile' ego of Lumumba. In this reading, Lumumba is noticeably deprived of intellectual maturity and sense, and is depicted as either emasculated through colonialism, and therefore needing to restate his masculinity, or as a mischief-maker and rabble-rouser incapable of not performing when his moment came to speak. For example, gender historian Karen Bouwer (Bouwer, 2010) reads the tone of the speech as a result of Lumumba's increasing frustrations and emasculation in the face of Belgian intransigence, and David Reybrouck (Van Reybrouck, 2015) has linked the incendiary character of the speech to the extended political crisis that followed independence.[50]

In these prominent assessments of Lumumba's speech, and of his motivations, it is surprising how the speech has become historicised in such emphatically individualist terms and character-driven readings, particularly given the dominant tropes of internationalism in the speech and its unsurprising global resonance. For Reybrouck, the seductions of the stage outweighed the pragmatic need for tight-lipped western

[50] Bouwer's argument that Lumumba's fiery rhetoric on the day was due to his feeling of emasculation should be read alongside the media reports that made Lumumba into a hypersexual object, a particular racist stereotype used against Black men. Lumumba thus becomes both emasculated and hypersexualised within these psychoanalytic and sexual decodings of his self and political will.

diplomacy. In her psychoanalytic reading, Bouwer equally attributes the perceived 'excesses' of the speech to an emotive reclaiming of masculinity from the colonizer.

This turn towards individual psychoanalysis in examinations of the speech is strangely at odds with the actual discourse of Lumumba. The speech centres around several central motifs: dignity, personhood, and unity through anticolonial struggle. It is, in equal parts, passionate and measured in documenting the costs of anticolonial struggle. It is curious therefore that the accusations of emotion, vanity and self-aggrandisement over realpolitik and political pragmatism are projected upon a speech in which the sense of Lumumba as a leader and individual is entirely absent. What precisely is it that Lumumba embodies, eludes, and elicits as both prophet and saboteur of African independence? Here, the figure of Lumumba in historical scholarship becomes a site of not only contestation but contradiction within different scholarly evaluations.

These latter historical evaluations of Lumumba situate him, and his politically intemperate nature, as the foolhardy instigator of the Congo crisis, side-lining entirely the deliberate sabotage of Congolese independence. The fact that the words of Lumumba's speech unleashed a political crisis so severe, which remains, to this day, subject to a multitude of historiographical interpretation, is reason to pause on the speech and its contested histories and radical afterlives.

5.6 Nostalgia and documentation

The independence ceremony was a stage of both loss and creation. If the diametrically opposed reactions of the Belgian officials and the Congolese and wider African audience signified a clear division, then its effects on the Independence ceremony as a consciously historical event were far less certain. The ceremony, as a consciously staged historical event, significant chiefly for its intended *future* reception, reflected the decidedly less convenient unstable, ambiguous and at times contradictory relations between discourses of Western Enlightenment and African liberation. In this sense, it is not enough to posit that the independence ceremony symbolised simply the loss of Belgian Congo and the creation of an independent Congolese republic, but formed, rather, a stage in which different narratives vied for truth, acknowledgement, and acceptance. This point goes to the heart of my wider argument that posits the colonial archive and failed state as co-created entities.

The decolonial moment represents an opening in the dominant order. For the Belgian side, it was incumbent to construct a nostalgia for the Belgian Congo as not only a benign

regime but one that spiritually, economically, and culturally uplifted the Congolese people. This narrative construction was furthermore crucial to justifying the maintaining of economic control and ownership over Congo's resources. Meanwhile, for Lumumba and the MNC, nothing less than total freedom and sovereignty could do justice to the sacrifice and struggle of the anticolonial movement. Both narratives represented attempts to heal and suture particular social and political worlds and thereby create a sense of agency and subjectivity. Baudouin wanted to create a sense of nostalgia and pride in the project of Belgitude, whose first and final act was accomplished in the interest of their Congolese subjects. Lumumba, for his part, wanted to articulate a political subjectivity constructed through the forcible conscription into coloniality and the struggle to free themselves from it.

Reading the Belgian responses, Hasian Jr and Wood argue that,

> 'some of the traumatic realism […] associated with these territorial memories has to be placed in the context of colonial nostalgia and symbolic loss, where transitional power displays threatened the recollections of those who sincerely believed in Belgitude […] what we shall call "sublime decolonization" involved the hope that Lumumba and the Congolese populations would remember a colonial world filled with schools, tropical hospitals, railways, active mines, and bright African futures' (Marouf Hasian and Wood, 2009: 19-20).

In this view, therefore, the symbolic loss of Belgian Congo constituted a 'traumatic loss' for both its native and settler population and harnessed notions of the 'colonial sublime' and nostalgia as possible ways to deal with that symbolic loss. In this sense, trauma, and its contested interpretations, became the foundation upon which claims and histories were made.

Whilst trauma is highly loaded, what is at issue here is the seeming incompatibility between 'territorial memory' and the Lumumbist project, if we see both articulations formed through different feelings of memory, loss, and trauma. It is important not to underestimate the deep attachment and sense of self that colonialists wrought through their colonial territories. Thus, the key thing in the handover ceremony was the construction of a nostalgia based on the colonial state, ensuring the fidelity of any future African state to these territorial memories. The future Congolese state is a stage and intermediary space whereby the trauma and wounds of colonialism are subject to different claims of truth and modes of recognition.

Indeed, the construction of colonialist nostalgia eliminates the very reality of resistance. By comparison, the resistance to nostalgia attends to the realities of colonialisation and evidence of resistance. Between these two narratives, the state is imagined. Of course, the crucial difference is that Lumumba is visualising a state yet to be realised, whereas Baudouin is summoning a particular desirous rendition of the state of coloniality in which the future Congolese state would be mirrored on the lessons of Belgian colonisation.

Wenzel makes an important contribution to contemporary thinking on nostalgia when she argues that:

> 'if imperialist nostalgia is regret for change of which one has been an agent, anti-imperialist nostalgia holds in mind *hope for changes that have yet to be realized, changes that were always yet to be realized.* Anti-imperialist nostalgia acknowledges the past's vision of the future, while recognising the distance and the difference between that vision and the realities of the present (Wenzel, 2006: 7, emphasis added).

This conception of anti-imperialist nostalgia rebuts traditional colonialist nostalgia, through giving credence to the 'past's vision of the future', as having material and tangible effects on contemporary society and culture. For example, the tradition of popular history painting that is exemplified by Matulu's painting of Lumumba's Independence Day speech, presents the history of Congolese resistance and struggle through a popular lens. Moreover, we can see this form of street-level historical commentary in the film *Les Fantômes de Lovanium* (Michel and Monaville, 2013) which re-stages the 1969 student rebellion at the University of Kinshasa through the use of street art and film. The filmmaker Cecil Michele records Congolese painter Sapin Makengele setting up his canvass and proceeding to reconstruct the historical event. The process brings forth curious passers-by who respond in different ways to the artist. Some ask for more information and the meaning of the painting, some offer personal testimony and others debate the historical with the contemporary crises of democracy and nationhood. Here the artistic staging of history and the resurrection of 'les fantômes' is shown to have a material effect on the present.

Neither nostalgia nor trauma are unifying narratives in the historical juncture of decolonisation. Lumumba's emphasis on the pride of the anticolonial struggle and the autonomous spirit of the nationalist movement serves as a collective bulwark against the degradation and trauma of colonialism. The reconstitutive political sentiment of the speech for the Congolese, with its emphasis on dignity, pride and celebration of the

nationalist struggle, was reversed, however, for the Belgian spectators and listeners, who experienced a kind of dissembling and 'traumatic' loss and indeed would rather that 'Lumumba and the Congolese populations […] remember a colonial world filled with schools, tropical hospitals, railways, active mines, and bright African futures'(Marouf Hasian and Wood, 2009: 20).

There is a problematic tendency within Hasian and Wood's piece that draws an equivalence between the Belgian experience of 'witnessing decolonisation'(20) to the colonial experience of the Congolese. Indeed, to locate the 'trauma' of the colonizer in the moment of decolonisation within the same critical discussion around the trauma of colonization, as differing expressions of the same universal emotion, is a jarring discourse that lends itself both to the opacity of oppression and to the delegitimization of resistance. We know that acts of imperial withdrawal are highly emotive and culturally symbolic events. The iconic film of the Britain's last governor of Hong Kong weeping during the 1997 handover attests to the emotive power of such historical events (Flowerdew, 1998).

Thus, it is arguably not a problem of trauma, but rather the silencing of violence and its relationship to trauma and the psychic dimension of imperialism that is the larger question. Indeed, the question of Belgian colonisation in the Congo remains a live issue for the nation, with prominent members of Belgium's political establishment continuing to defend the country's colonial record ("Grand Débat," n.d.). Works of historiography that seek to rehabilitate the moral standing of the Belgian Congo continue this silencing and disavowal of violence within this larger critical framework of trauma. For example, in *Recalling the Belgian Congo* (2000), Marie Bénédicte Dembour probes the memories and archives of Belgian officials in order to present a consciously different history from traditional ways of telling Belgian colonial history. In the book, the colonialists' experience and memory of such times dispels with what Dembour sees as the received prejudices of popular opinion. Her own 'introspection' into this work of archival documentation thus 'invites the reader to re-call the Congo i.e. to apprehend it in other terms than the bad name by which it is generally known' (Dembour, 2000). What is notable here is the slipperiness of terms, wherein 'received wisdom' and popular opinion lay outside the archive, and are assigned an inferior historical value in determining the truth of the Belgian Congo. Her archival exploits are called upon to negate this nebula of bad press and received wisdom about the Belgian Congo in order to provide an 'authentic' account.

Looking beyond the colonial archive to the afterlives of Lumumba's speech, what is immediately striking is how the speech resonated with a diversity of international audiences. Wenzel's theory of anti-imperialist nostalgia is a useful critical lens in which to look at the radical historical afterlives of Lumumba and the mapping of this history to other histories of racial oppression and anticolonial and anti-imperialist struggle. This value differentiation of the official archive and that of popular reportage and reception to Lumumba's speech is problematic however. In the US, the speech was a rallying cry for African Americans, with Malcolm X celebrating the speech and Lumumba as 'the greatest Black man who ever walked the African continent' ("Malcolm X on Lumumba," n.d.).

What is fascinating about the reception of the speech outside of the Congo is how it was effectively mobilised and woven into different histories of racial oppression, not only in Africa and in the so-called 'Third World', but also amongst Black people in the Americas serving as a transatlantic homily under the shadow of modernity. As Ira Dworkin notes

> outside of the world of the novel […] Patrice Lumumba, became ubiquitous over the course of the 1960s. Elegiac verse like Langston Hughes's "Lumumba's Grave" became as commonplace within the new exciting print culture of journals like Black Dialogue, Black World, Freedomways (Dworkin, 2017: 203).

The historical afterlives of Lumumba's speech resist the narrative of colonialist nostalgia and historical rehabilitation with a signification that transgressed borders of time and space. Indeed, it would be a partial analysis to read Congo's independence as simply a stage of political loss and creation. Whilst decolonization has been predominantly read as a period of mourning, nostalgia and melancholia for the Belgians, the historian Jean-Claude Willame points out that this political event:

> takes place within a larger context of an imperialism that, as far as Congo is concerned, has been shaped by mercantilism into industrial capitalism, by Cold War tensions and conflicts, and by the dominance of Western democratic ideologies in world politics (Willame, 1972: 7).

This ascendant imperialism of America is a crucial political backdrop to Congolese Independence and indeed accounts for its translatability beyond the national context.

The history of the Congo is frequently conceptualised in a worldly sense through the notion that modernity as we know it would not be possible if it were not for the raw materials taken from the Congo (Du Bois, 1915). These included materials that were used by imperial powers to craft some of the deadliest weapons ever invented, such as the

atomic bomb. What is less spoken of is the idea of the Congo as an alternative modernity through its anticolonial struggle and rebellion against those very same forces. That it served only as a crucible and supplier of capitalist and colonialist systems of domination is an entirely dehumanising historical narrative. For this narrative of the Congo, as modernity's laboratory and testing ground, silences entirely histories of popular revolt and struggle against these systems of powers and the vision of Lumumba that Congo's riches would be only used for the welfare and uplifting of 'her children' (Lumumba, n.d.).

Lumumba's trajectory, from the romantic aspiration of his independence speech, to the tragedy of his assassination and last writings demonstrates the impossibility of securing the minimal terms of political independence in the control over economic resources. Perhaps the tragedy is that Lumumba's speech has become an inspiration even though Congolese independence was so quickly muzzled. Lumumba's proposal of an alternative modernity in this context of ascendant US imperialism that threatened not only tricontinental nations, but Black American populations also. Lumumba's project was also significantly unacceptable to the Enlightenment's racial codes. What Willame (1972) describes as a rapidly reshaping imperialism in the context of the Cold War imperilled the demands of African decolonisation. These different factors along with the vilification of Lumumba through the old categories of racial primitivism and psychoanalysis and his eventual murder saw the romance of Independence give way to the tragedy of it.

5.7 Hauntologies in Pitcho Womba Konga's Kuzikiliza and Bodys Isek Kingelez's Ville Fantôme

I want to now turn to two artists and their works, Pitcho Womba Konga's play *Kuzikiliza* (2017) and Bodys Isek Kingelez's *Ville Fantôme* (1996) as responses to the failure of independence and the silencing of Lumumba's postcolonial vision and his prophecy that the 'future of Congo is beautiful'. In this sense, both artists' works can be read as expressing what Jacques Derrida termed 'hauntology'. This is a term which he used to describe the spectre of the past and the past's futures in the present, generating a sense of what Hamlet referred to as 'time out of joint' (Derrida, 1994: 20). Derrida's idea of hauntology has been reinterpreted in interesting ways to capture the shift from anticolonial romance to postcolonial tragedy, which we see within both these works. Both artists' works play with the idea of the past haunting the present and both awaken discordant histories and temporalities through their explorations. I am drawn by the muted and imaginary aspects that are at work in both of these artists forms and the manner of their performance and consumption in contemporary culture.

Konga's play *Kuzikiliza* can be viewed as a series of vignettes that is held together by the speech, the muted figure of Lumumba and the day of Congolese Independence as the universal and structuring motifs of the text. Born in Kinshasa in 1975, Konga escaped Mobutu's authoritarian regime, relocating to Belgium when he was seven years old. It is for this reason that his multidisciplinary body of work explores matters of identity through the experiences of colonial history and the immigrant experience. In *Kuzikiliza*, which Konga wrote, directed and performed, he uses the speech of Lumumba as the anchor of his play, allowing him to construct a non-linear and multifaceted piece that makes sudden transitions in place, time, and character. Expending a realist and linear historical narrative, allows Konga the space to explore the condition of postcoloniality alongside the attendant spirits of anticolonial struggle. *Kuzikiliz*a is introduced with the byline: 'three men, one speech. And the spirit of Lumumba'. It explores the condition of postcoloniality, both personally and politically, alongside the silenced spirit of Lumumba, who is played by an actor who is entirely mute for the performance - making use of movement, gesture and mime to convey meaning.

The play frequently returns to the issue of speech and the difficulty of articulating the cost of colonial oppression for the Congolese. Retelling the killing of Lumumba and the genocides in the Congo, Konga poignantly utters quietly to the audience: 'I am tired', signalling the emotional labour of dramatizing this history within the space of a Belgian theatre, in which the colonial past remains a contentious topic. Konga's play makes a number of different demands on the audience; from recognising the complicity of Westerners in buying and selling of 'exotic' Africa (in one scene, we hear the actors give an amusing rendition of Madonna's hit pop song 'Holiday' as a grotesque analogy for European imperialism), to imploring the spectators to remember Lumumba's call to tell their children the day of Congolese independence and the significance of the Congolese independence struggle.

The socially-engaged nature of the play underscores the universal relevance of Lumumba's vision and its unfulfilled promise. When asked in an interview why he chose to reprise the speech now, Konga replied: 'Ce jeu entre dominé et dominant rappelle d'autres mécanismes du monde dans lequel on vit […] Tout cela pose la question de l'independence' (this game between the dominated and the dominant brings to mind other mechanisms of domination in the world we live in. All this raises the question of independence'("Pitcho Womba Konga," 2017). Konga thus uses what he sees as the universality of the speech and his emotional response to seeing Haitian director Raoul

Peck's dramatization of the event in his film *Lumumba* (2000) to interrogate its broader meaning for humanity trapped within systems of oppression.

Lumumba's independence speech binds the fragmented structure of the play, enabling a free-flowing meditation on freedom, identity, racism in the postcolonial world that at times appears like a stream of consciousness from the actor and director. This fragmented and non-linear narrative is held together by a firm political resolve on the part of the playwright, who moves between different dramaturgical modes, from carnivalesque interaction with the audience to Brechtian alienation to the tradition of socially engaged theatre as political praxis. These shifting modes are reinforced by the changing roles of the three actors and the transplanting of these three figures to contemporary and historical contexts. One of the most striking parts of this production is how Lumumba in spirit form is juxtaposed with the exhaustion of the living postcolonial subject.

In one scene, we witness the Belgian creation of the évolué. Two Black characters paint their faces white and start to mimic the actions and poses of the white man. At the performance I attended in Ghent in 2019, this mimicry at first provoked laughter from the audience, but laughter turned to a palpable discomfort as Konga transitions from the comedy of mimicry to its existential tragedy. We see Konga go from an upright position to a figure helplessly writhing on stage with a look of despair on his face. As a counterfigure to this Fanonian tragedy, the second figure, who we assume to be Lumumba, steps forward in a still and collected manner, he loosens the straitjacket of his western dress and stares confrontationally at the audience. Konga thus juxtaposes the figure of Fanonian tragedy with the romantic figure of the anticolonial revolutionary. In the play's final scene, the scratchy recording of Lumumba's speech is played accompanied by an eerie static sound that highlights both its fragility and timeless quality. It is at this point that Konga directly implores his audience to 'gravez dans votre Coeur'(engrave into your heart) the words of Lumumba. This is socially engaged theatre designed to inspire political action and reflection. Moreover, his decision to restage the speech following the disaster of independence in the Congo sees the prophetic elements of the speech as a deferred act of political emancipation, with the spirit of Lumumba present throughout the play and a renewal of his call to arms.

Bodys Isek Kingelez (1948-2015) by contrast, uses genres of fantasy and utopia to imagine African statehood. A self-taught artist and sculptor, Kingelez was born in Kimbembele Ihunga in 1948, but settled in Kinshasa where he witnessed the massive

changes to urban metropolitan life throughout the 1970s and 80s. In 1977, he started to experiment with models of the city fashioned from everyday materials that 'offered a redemptive model of the city'("Bodys Isek Kingelez - Pigozzi Collection 2021," n.d.). His sculpture *Ville Fantôme* (1996, figure 9) reconstructs the postcolonial city in utopian fashion but underlines its fantastic and spectral aspect, evoking an 'unease' (Enwezor cited in Wiesenberger, n.d: 84) within the spectator at our sense of alienation from this scene of urban utopia as a perfectly balanced and harmonious urban ecosystem. The city beguiles the viewer with the everyday materiality of its constituent parts and construction and the overall unworldly and utopic affect it achieves.

Figure 8 Kuzikliza (2019)

The fragmentary structure of Konga's text stands in direct contrast to the overtly formalising aesthetics of Kingelez's *Ville Fantôme*. Here, in the reconstruction of the state and in its idealised totality, we find a certain romance; a nostalgia for the future and a utopian vision in the post-utopia of decolonisation. These visionary 'extreme maquettes' are crafted using everyday materials like plastic and cardboard that tether the imaginary to the straightforwardly banal. Their unified aesthetic and its disposable materiality suggest the fragility and unattainability of the utopian state. Despite their overt aesthetic and formal differences, both works in many ways resemble one another in their

restorative sensibility and reconstructive aesthetic emanating from the unrealized promises of Congo's independence.

Figure 9 Ville Fantôme (1996)

Where Lumumba is a haunting spirit in *Kuzikiliza*, Kingelez's *Ville Fantôme* is entirely evacuated of people. This ghostly aspect of the work creates a sense of palpable uneasiness, producing the eerie sense of apocalypse or a controlled living experiment. The underlying uneasiness evoked by the artwork is counterbalanced, however, by the colourful exuberance of the pieces. Kingelez himself subscribes to the rehabilitative power of architecture and the importance of having a model in realising a different future: 'without a model, you are nowhere. A nation that can't make models is a nation that doesn't understand things, a nation that doesn't live'("Bodys Isek Kingelez," n.d.).

The formalising impulse at work bears a resemblance to the approach taken by colonial architects and the idea of the Belgian Colony as an experimental colonial landscape and model colony. How then to read Kingelez's work? We can start from the guiding principle of the efficacy and indispensability of models to the imagination of the future. His romantic representation of statehood points to the void between the maquettes' imaginary and cosmic renderings and the material realities of the state. Indeed, *Ville Fantôme* represents his most grand-scale work and is a city that requires no doctors or police for the health and safety of its citizens. Robert Wiesenberger describes his works as 'embodying propositions' that 'monumentalise nations and the idea of nationhood'

(Wiesenberger, n.d: 83-4). If the artistic intention behind these pieces is unclear, the fact that they constantly draw attention to the lack and void of the nation in the present constitutes an inescapable hauntology at the centre. The fantastic and utopian elements of the work underline the loss of the national liberation project as one of radical transformation.

For all the ostensible romance and utopia at work in Kingelez's vision, and despite Konga's wrenching exploration of Fanonian trauma, works such as *Ville Fantôme* produce a greater feeling of unease and alienation. Konga's decision to interrogate the function of power and colonial violence is combined with a desire to create anticolonial assemblages through theatre. In this form of political theatre, political engagement overcomes the alienation and the sense of suspended temporality that we perceive in the *Ville Fantôme,* and that suspended temporality is transformed here into contemporary political engagement. *Kuzikiliza* is thus an example of the speech and its radical afterlives fulfilling in part Lumumba's final letter - change will come when a different history is taught from outside the walls of western institutions (Lumumba, 2009).

Both artists work from a point of loss and rupture and offer comments and visions of the historical afterlives of Lumumba and the Congo and alternative realities of history amidst the broken promises of independence. The demands that Konga places upon his audience are not however in attendance in the work of Kingelez. In his retrospective exhibition at the MOMA gallery in New York, visitors were given virtual reality headsets allowing them to experience walking within the walls of his models. This image of an imaginary African utopic state being virtually enjoyed in an American cultural institution is a striking vision of imperial redux. Indeed, as already mentioned, the ascendancy of American imperialism heavily relied upon the control of Congolese mineral riches and the torpedoing of Lumumba and the nationalist movement.

The fact that the imagination of a free Congolese state is being experienced as a dreamlike virtual fantasy by westerners has the unmistakable whiff of schadenfreude. Representing, moreover, a continuation of the cultural consumption of Africa, first as primitive wilderness and now as virtual futurology. Both of these formulations seek to provide an imaginative escape from western modernity. As Wiesenberger noted upon leaving the exhibition, 'I step out into mostly monochrome midtown Manhattan. The city has never looked so dull'(85).

The fantastic and otherworldly occlude histories of imperialism that are deeply relevant to the catastrophe of African independence and statehood in the contemporary. The

cultural consumption of alien and futuristic African states as an experience of virtual transcendence expunges from the record the struggle for history, independence, and nationalism of the Congolese anticolonial struggle. Moreover, the fact that these speculative visions of Congolese futurity and alternate modernities are owned by the western art collector Jean Pigozzi and reside in his vast private collection of African art demonstrates the western capture of Congolese productions and their relegation to the status of 'fantasy'.

Whilst Kingelez's maquettes are critically provocative, no demand is made on European and North American audience to interrogate their own positionality, history and power relations that make the story of Congolese independence and post-war American imperialism entangled through history. Konga chooses to do the exact opposite and brings together the seemingly innocuous enjoyment and desire for exotic Africa with its bloodiest crimes, forcing an ethical standpoint from its audience that echoes against the otherwise resounding silence on Congolese betrayed independence.

Conclusions

In this thesis I have attempted to critique the representation of the Congo as a 'failed state' and through analysing a range of different texts demonstrated how this conceptualisation of the Congo has led to a resurgence in neoimperialist language in mainstream cultural and political discourse. Western artists and writers have been drawn anew to the embattled and crisis-struck landscapes of the Congo, retracing the steps of figures such as Conrad and Casement to launch their own artistic and literary innovations. Thus, Mosse argues that the literary innovations of Conrad must once more be seized upon, erasing in turn African modernist writers and intellectual voices that have called out the racism and epistemic violence of the text and the problematic ways in which it has been used as a metonymic signifier for the 'darkness' of the African continent (Kabamba, 2010).

In highlighting the reinscription of imperialist discourse on the contemporary conflicts and crises of the Congo, I have attempted to chart the forms of epistemic violence and erasure that have enabled the continued domination of such discourses; for example, the critical erasures of Andrée Blouin from the history of the Congo, Naipaul's reframing of Mulele as Black Kurtz and finally the silencing of Lumumba's utopic vision of Congolese nationalism as fundamentally antithetical to the matrixes of colonial modernity and global capitalism. This epistemic erasure has led to the rise of NGO discourses in the Congo that remain largely committed to Western liberalism and the ability of the free-market and global capitalism to 'save' the Congo in equally sincere (Eastern Congo Initiative) and satirical modes (Martens). In critiquing the discourses of the 'failed state', I have also examined Congolese literary texts that subvert the form of the novel to examine the workings of power within both the postcolonial nation-state (Mabanckou and Tansi) and within systems of global extraction in the period of late capitalism (Bofane).

This reinscription of Conradian discourse to the 'failed state', as a fateful foretelling of *Heart of Darkness,* erases the history of anticolonial resistance and struggle that has characterised Congo's history from early millenarian movements against imperialist incursions to the challenge of Lumumba and the MNC, and to the colonial order during the independence struggle. Moreover, the reinscription of Conradian discourses legitimises the epistemic violence and racism of *Heart of Darkness* whereby the African

characters are presented as 'barbarous' and 'uncivilised'. We see the repetition of Conrad's racism and epistemic violence against Africans in the accounts of Michaela Wrong and V.S. Naipaul where the tragedy of the Congo is linked, either to an inherently acquiescent political character in the case of Wrong, or, in Naipaul's text, to the doomed encounter of the African with Western civilisation. I have explored how the representation of the Congo as a 'failed state' has led to a resurgence in neoimperialist discourse but also how it follows in an established tradition of Western writing on the Congo that consistently imagines the Congolese state and people as on the borderline of 'civilisation'. Thus, I have shown that the conception of the Congo as a 'failed state' encompasses both acts of epistemic violence in reproducing Enlightenment thought of African 'primitivism' and 'atavism' and acts of epistemic erasure in silencing the challenge of the Congolese anticolonial struggle in challenging precisely the idea that Europe is the birthplace of freedom and civilisation.

In critiquing the representation of the Congo as a 'failed state', one of the challenges of the methodology of my thesis was how to critique the politics of discourse that has emerged through this narrative, whilst at the same time not diminishing the huge social problems that have besieged the Congolese population since the collapse of Zaïre in 1997. It is for this reason that I have attempted to show the construction and political utility of Mobutu's client state and now the 'failed state' in legitimating existing Eurocentric discourses of modernity and liberal hegemony.

Besides examining the neoimperialist forms of discourse that have arisen from the idea of the Congo as a 'failed state', I have also demonstrated how the concept of the 'failed state' is itself rooted within existing colonial, epistemic frameworks that give the impression of science and objectivity, whilst silencing the histories of calculated under-development and exploitation that Walter Rodney famously illuminated in his classic work *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa.* Following Rodney, my thesis has attempted to make the colonial and epistemic structures of the seemingly neutral, apolitical concept of the 'failed state' visible through a methodology of critical discourse analysis and a multi-media corpus that has encompassed literary texts, drama, visual culture and political orature. I chose a multi-disciplinary corpus in order to reflect the ways in which the Congo has occupied multiple disciplines and art forms, from literature to cinema and photography, from early imperial culture to contemporary representations of the war and political collapse under the auspices of the 'failed state'. Following other multi-media texts such as Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* examination of imperial culture, I have attempted to show how the imperial literary imagination, particularly that of Conrad, has

had a resounding influence on contemporary cultural production from travel literature to cinema and documentary photography.

It is for this reason that I began my thesis by tracing new forms of epistemic violence in the discourse of the Congo as a 'failed state', exploring the dominant representation of the Congo in contemporary culture as a place at the limits of the normative civil-juridical order to look at narratives that subvert this politics of representation, starting with Congolese novelists and ending with the figure of Lumumba and his iconic independence day speech. Looking at the work of Congolese novelists, I have explored the ways in which the form of the novel has been used to critique and subvert the epistemic violence of Western modernity and the workings of power in the postcolonial nation-state.

Where Mabanckou, Tansi and Bofane are able to subvert and manipulate the form of the novel, narrative control and agency has typically been a far more fraught arena for Congolese women. It is for this reason that I have examined the problematic relationship between Western feminism and African women involved in anticolonial liberation through the textual afterlives of anticolonial heroine Andrée Blouin. Through looking at the erasure of Blouin's radical politics through the narrative mediation of Western feminist historiography, I show how this erasure of radical female voices of anticolonial liberation and the sabotage of Congolese independence has resulted in dominant representations of Congolese women as survivors and the powerhouse of the globalised economy. Both these dominant representations silence how neocolonial exploitation and the global free market bear a decisive responsibility for creating the conditions of conflict, poverty and political instability in which women have suffered the most brutally.

It is for this reason that I chose to critically examine the discourses of NGOs, which problematically uphold the neoliberalism and the global free-market as the answer to the Congo's problems. The presence of NGOs in all sectors of Congolese society is seen as further indication of the weaknesses of the state. However, as I have argued, their imbrication and reliance on funding from governmental and international institutions that advocate political liberalism and global capitalism prevent a radical critique of systems of profit and exploitation; exploitative systems that have condemned the Congolese to an unending cycle of conflict and economic exploitation. My discussion of NGOs aimed to show how the imbrication of such organisations with the existing power structure of international and governmental organisations prevents any radical critique of Congo's entrapment within the structures of neocolonialism, extraction and global capitalism.

Bofane's novel *Congo Inc.,* captures precisely this historical entrapment of the Congo in the nexuses of imperialism, neocolonialism and global capitalism. For Bofane, the exploitation of the Congo is constituted from the functional banality of global capitalism as opposed to an imperial system of domination of violence and colonisation, which could be apprehended and resisted. He underlines this centrality of the Congo to the 'progress' of global capitalism from the rubber boom of WWI to the minerals for digital technology throughout twentieth and twenty-first histories.

It is this centrality of the Congo to the history of global capitalism that makes Lumumba's intervention so threatening to the existing colonial order and remains a powerful symbol today of what Wenzel has described in her conceptualisation of 'anti-imperialist nostalgia' as 'the past's vision of the future'(Wenzel, 2006). Indeed, his speech during the independence ceremony made clear his intention that Congo would be entirely liberated from all vestiges of colonial control, particularly on the question of economic sovereignty. The shift from anticolonial discourse of liberation and economic sovereignty to the liberal discourses of NGOs and the 'failed state' is stark. By examining the prophetic elements of Lumumba's speech, I wanted to examine how such discourses remain powerful and able to subvert the dominant narrative of the Congo as a 'failed state' and how the anticolonial exigencies of history reverberate in the present today through the work of artists such as Pitcho Womba Konga and the Faire-Part Collectif. Artists who subvert prevailing narratives that seek to suppress and homogenise the Congo into familiar codes of Enlightenment thought and neoimperial ideologies.

My thesis has attempted to draw out the epistemic violence of the 'failed state' discourse in representations of the Congo. Presently, 'failed states' in Africa and the Middle East are being represented as threats to the stability and security of European nation-states. Indeed, the broader discourse of states and security studies that has arisen since the invasion of Iraq and the global 'war on terror' follows in the same mode as the professionalisation and systematisation of knowledge and social sciences in the Western academy in the post-WWII period. Further research on the rise of this security discourse around 'failed states' and its links to the rise of racism, the far right and toughened immigration policies across mainland Europe could open up further avenues of critical analysis. Indeed, the types of militarised photography that Richard Mosse uses in the Eastern Congo has been expanded in recent years to examine the refugee crisis in Europe.

Moreover, the recent conceptualisation of the US and other Western states as failures adds a curious addendum to this thesis which has examined the epistemic erasure of the Congo as a 'failed state' within dominant mainstream political discourse. Since the global financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic, we are seeing the inability of political liberalism to solve the crises to global capitalism. Much in the same way that the enforcement of structural adjustment policies upon the African continent had a ruinous effect on African economies, we are seeing the unravelling of Anglo-American doctrines of political liberalism and global capitalism, which as I have argued in my fourth chapter, has led to either a tenacious belief in the free-market's ability to 'save Africa' or, in the case of Renzo Martens's *Enjoy Poverty,* a macabre performance of capital in Congolese sites of economic exploitation and extraction. Martens uses the idea of the 'failed state' as a performative site for his own critical provocations advocating a surrender to the forces of global capitalism and colonial violence as entirely inescapable. Martens provocation that the Congolese must 'sell' their poverty through photography of suffering and misery mirrors in its bombast Herbst and Mills' contention that the Congo no longer exists. Through these declarative and provocative modes, Martens and Herbst and Mills erase the struggle against colonial and neocolonial exploitation in the Congo.

Through this thesis, I have attempted to draw together the contemporary 'failed state' and Lumumba's utopian vision of a free and independent Congo into the same critical space, detailing how the sabotage of the Congolese nationalist struggle is critical to the active construction of the 'failed state'. I would contend that the brevity of Lumumba's time in office underlines the power of his challenge to the dominant colonial order. Indeed, in the discourse of Lumumba, I have demonstrated how, like other leading anti-colonial thinkers and writers, he fundamentally interrogated the dominant epistemology of Europe as the birthplace of civilisation and liberal freedom. In this way, his political vision forms a part of what Fred Moten beautifully captures as the 'serrated lyricism of Black revolutionary politics'(Moten, 2003: 131), placing the Congolese national struggle within a cosmology of anticolonial imaginaries of alternative modernities. In this sense, Lumumba's speech constitutes a powerful counter-discourse to the epistemic violence of neoimperial discourse that returns the Congo to a position of primeval barbarity and violence in the contemporary iteration of the Congo as a 'failed state'.

Where I have argued that Lumumba's speech constitutes re-narrativization of the Congolese struggle against colonialism, it also a presented a broader epistemic challenge to what Wynter had described as the interlocking discourses of race/modernity/coloniality (Wynter, 2003). It is this fundamental intellectual challenge

within his speech that resounded with Black freedom struggles internationally and placed Congolese national struggle within a broader constellation of international anti-colonial resistance and black liberation. Indeed, it is this 'translocality' (Dworkin, 2017: 288) of the Congolese struggle within these broader political geographies that makes the critical proposals of an obsolete Congolese state inherently problematic.

The silencing of Lumumba and the sabotage of anticolonial nationalism by Western powers is absent in discourses of the failed state. Indeed, I have further argued that knowledge production around failed states with classification systems, such as the fragile states index, constitute an erasal of the continuing structures of colonial power that determine the political and economic realities of the 'failed state'. Indeed, I have attempted to demonstrate the intertwinement of the colonial archive as an active site of power with the 'failed state' through exploring the visual bricolages of Sammy Baloji. His work represents an uncompromising interrogation of these relationships, cross examining the colonial archive against the denuded and impoverished landscapes of contemporary Congo.

Where Baloji seeks to visualise and illuminate these entanglements of colonial power in the present through the colonial archive, Bofane sees the calamity of the Congo as emanating from the banal and impersonal function of power in the algorithms of the global free-market. Bofane traces a lineage between the original carve-up of Africa during the Berlin Conference to the expropriation and crisis of late capitalism in the Congo today. In both cases, these artists subvert the dominant narrative of the Congolese failed state as a neoconradian place of darkness and violence, but their discourses are also restorative. At the close of Bofane's novel, Isookanga's makes his return journey home up the Congo River from Kinshasa turning his back on his early ambition to join the race to pillage Congo's resources. Baloji similarly reappropriates colonial artefacts and archives and returns them to their original context and history. Thus, these critical counter-discourses to the 'failed state' represent a kind of restorative subversion of the contemporary iteration of the Congo as a 'failed state'.

Where I have positioned the discourse of the 'failed state' in a genealogy of Enlightenment modes of thought that have traditionally represented Africa as 'backwards' and the antithesis of European modernity, I present Lumumba's speech as critical discourse to this counter-narrative that follows a parallel genealogy of resistance of anti-slave and anti-colonial rebellion that sought to challenge racial and economic

systems of oppression by rewriting and reimagining the Enlightenment from the view of liberation and the Black radical struggle.

Images

Figure 1, Richard Mosse, 'Vintage Violence' North Kivu, eastern Congo, 2011.

Figure 2, Richard Mosse, 'Poison Glen' South Kivu, eastern Congo, 2012, Digital C print, 50 x 80 inches.

Figure 3, 'Rebel Rebel' North Kivu, 2011.

Figure 4, Sammy Baloji, *Mémoire* (2006) C-print, 10 x 30 cm, Katanga, Congo (DRC).

Figure 5, Sammy Baloji, *Untitled #25,* Mémoire (2006), 60 x 134.5 cm.

Figure 6, MONUC photo, Marie Frechon (18 May 2009) Caption reads: 'A Member of the Indian Force Police Unit of the MONUC is deployed on a security detail at the airport for the visiting Security Council Delegation'.

Figure 7, Frontlines photo, Patrick Smith USAID, Caption reads: 'Jeannine Balagizi, and fellow farmer Cibalonza M'Nyabahara grow beans among their coffee trees' (Smith, 2016)

Figure 8, Pitcho Womba Kongo, *Kuzikiliza*, photo, Stef Depover ("Kuzikiliza — Skinfama, ARSENAAL/LAZARUS & KVS | KVS," n.d.)

Figure 9, *Ville Fantôme*, 1996, 44 x 224 x 94 inch, Paper, cardboard, plastic and other found materials (The Jean Pigozzi Collection).

Works Cited

Aboubakar Esperance, M., 2018. Their Coffee is World-Class, but DRC Farmers Say Growing It Doesn't Pay [WWW Document]. Glob. Press J. URL https://globalpressjournal.com/africa/democratic-republic-of-congo/coffee-world-class-drc-farmers-say-growing-doesnt-pay/ (accessed 8.1.20).

Adler-Nissen, R., Gad, U.P., 2013. European Integration and Postcolonial Sovereignty Games: The EU Overseas Countries and Territories. Routledge.

Adorno, T.W., 2015. Culture industry: selected essays on mass culture. Routledge, Place of publication not identified.

Aganze, A., 2016. N.G.O. Nothing Going On.

Allen, T., Seaton, J. (Eds.), 1999. The media of conflict: war reporting and representations of ethnic violence. Zed Books, London.

Alvarez, S.E., 2009. Beyond NGO-ization?: Reflections from Latin America. Development 52, 175–184.

Amis, M., 2008. 'The Second Plane.' N. Y. Times.

Anthias, F., Yuval-Davis, N., 1989. Woman-nation-state. Springer.

Appadurai, A., 2010. Modernity at large: cultural dimensions of globalization.

Asad, T., 1990. Ethnography, Literature, and Politics: Some Readings and Uses of Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses. Cult. Anthropol. 5, 239–269.

Ashcroft, B., 1997. The post-colonial studies reader. Routledge, London [u.a.

Atkinson, J., 2009. Globalizing social justice : the role of non-government organizations in bringing about social change /, International political economy series. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke :

Autesserre, S., 2012. Dangerous tales: Dominant narratives on the Congo and their unintended consequences. Afr. Aff. 111, 202–222. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adr080

Awkward, M., 1995. Negotiating difference: race, gender, and the politics of positionality. University of Chicago Press, Chicago; London.

Baloji, S., Arndt, L., Taiaksev, A., Colard, S., Pee, Y. van, Schuylenbergh, P. van, Baloji, S., Kunstmuseum aan Zee, 2016. Hunting & collecting.

Barber, S., 2013. Artaud: Blows and Bombs; The Biography of Antonin Artaud.

Barringer, T., Flynn, T., 2006. Colonialism and the object: empire, material culture and the museum. Taylor & Francis, London.

Bauman, Z., 2007. Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty, 1 edition. ed. Polity, Cambridge.

Beaumont, P., n.d. Tony Blair is wrong. Africa won't be the answer to Britain's post-Brexit problems | Global development | The Guardian [WWW Document]. URL https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jan/21/tony-blair-is-wrong-africa-wont-be-the-answer-to-britains-post-brexit-problems (accessed 1.13.21).

Belgium, M. of C., 1922. Propaganda leaflet of the Belgian Ministry of Colonies, early 1920s.

Bhambra, G.K., 2018. A Postcolonial Rethinking of the State and Nation.

Bihamba, J.M., 2017. The "rape capital of the world"? We women in Congo don't see it that way | Justine Masika Bihamba. The Guardian.

Bilgin, P., Morton, A.D., 2002. Historicising representations of “failed states”: Beyond the cold-war annexation of the social sciences? Third World Q. 23, 55–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590220108172
Bisanswa, J.K., 2000. Life Is Not a Book. Creuse: Literature and Representation in Sony Labou Tansi’s Work. Res. Afr. Lit. 31, 129–146.
BK Kumbi, 2014. Why Ferguson is the Congo. San Franc. Bay View. URL https://sfbayview.com/2014/08/why-ferguson-is-the-congo/ (accessed 10.15.19).
Blouin, A., 1983. My country, Africa: autobiography of the black pasionaria. Praeger, New York.
Bodys Isek Kingelez - Pigozzi Collection 2021 [WWW Document], n.d. . CAACART - Pigozzi Collect. URL http://www.caacart.com/pigozzi-artist.php?m=50 (accessed 1.25.21).
Bodys Isek Kingelez: City Dreams | MoMA [WWW Document], n.d. . Mus. Mod. Art. URL https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3889 (accessed 1.25.21).
Boeck, F. de, 2004. Kinshasa : tales of the invisible city ; [as a sequel to the exhibition “Kinshasa, the imaginary city”; this project was commissioned by the Ministry of the Flemish Community for the Venice Architecture Biennial held from 9 September throught 7 November 2004] /. Ludion ; Royal Museum for Central Africa, Ghent : Tervuren :
Bofane, I.K.J., De Jager, M., 2018. Congo Inc: Bismarck’s testament, Global African voices. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana.
Bouwer, K., 2010. Gender and Decolonization in the Congo: The Legacy of Patrice Lumumba. Palgrave Macmillan US. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230110403
Brancaleone, D., 2013. Richard Mosse’s Infra: Conflict, Art and the Regime of the Documentary Image | Enclave Review. Enclave Rev. URL http://enclavereview.org/richard-mosses-infra-conflict-art-and-the-regime-of-the-documentary-image/ (accessed 8.15.20).
Bulabemba, J., n.d. A LIFE GIVEN UP FOR THE PEOPLE by Jean BULABEMBA [WWW Document]. URL https://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/lumumba/reminiscences/bulabemba/life.htm (accessed 3.20.20).
Bustin, E., 2002. Remembrance of Sins past: Unraveling the Murder of Patrice Lumumba. Rev. Afr. Polit. Econ. 29, 537–560.
Butcher, T., 2019. Blood river: a journey to Africa’s broken heart.
Butler, J., 2006. Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence. Verso.
Butler, J., Spivak, G.C., 2011. Who sings the nation-state?: language, politics, belonging. Seagull, London.
Call, C.T., 2008. The fallacy of the ‘Failed State.’ Third World Q. 29, 1491–1507.
Césaire, A., 2020. A season in the Congo.
Césaire, A., 2018. Discourse on Colonialism. AAKAR Books, Place of publication not identified.
Channel, L., 2015a. Sammy Baloji: The Past in Front of Us.
Channel, L., 2015b. Sammy Baloji: The Past in Front of Us.
Chatelet, L., 1988. The humanitarian Action of Leopold II in Congo Free State. The Antislavery-Conference of Brussels (1889-1890). Afr. Focus 4. https://doi.org/10.21825/af.v4i1-2.6489
Chave, A.C., 1994. New Encounters with Les Demoiselles d’Avignon: Gender, Race, and the Origins of Cubism. Art Bull. 76, 596–611. https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.1994.10786606
Chiwengo, N., 2004. 'Making Visible and Eradicating Congo’s History of Violence: Maiming the Female/National Body’, in: Violence in/and the Great Lakes: The Thought of V-Y Mudimbe and Beyond Eds. by Grant Farred, Kasereka

Kavwahirehi and Leonhard Praeg. University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Dietermaritzburg, pp. 87–108.
Choudry, A.A., Kapoor, D., 2013. NGOization complicity, contradictions and prospects. Zed Books, London; New York.
Chrisman, L., 2004. Nationalism and postcolonial studies, in: Lazarus, N. (Ed.), The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies, Cambridge Companions to Literature. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 183–198. https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521826942.010
Clark, S.H., 1999. Travel writing and empire: postcolonial theory in transit. Zed Books : Distributed exclusively in the USA by St. Martin's Press, London; New York.
Claudia Tate Ed, 1983. Black women writers at work. Continuum, N.Y.
Coetzee, J.M., 1987. Out of Africa! Am. Film 12, 19–22.
Coffee from Eastern Congo Arriving in Starbucks Stores [WWW Document], n.d. URL https://stories.starbucks.com/emea/stories/2016/starbucks-eastern-congo-lake-kivu/ (accessed 1.15.20).
Comaroff, J., Comaroff, J.L., 2015. Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa. Routledge.
Congo Coffee Atlas [WWW Document], n.d. URL http://www.easterncongo.org/success-stories/congo-coffee-atlas (accessed 1.13.20).
Conrad, J., 2015. Heart of darkness ; and, the complete Congo diary. Alma Classics, Richmond.
Conrad, J., 1991. Heart of darkness. Penguin Books, London u.a.
Conrad, J., 1926. Geography and Some Explorers, in: Last Essays. London.
Conrad, J., Karl, F.R., Davies, L., 1988. The collected letters of Joseph Conrad Vol. 3 Vol. 3. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
Coppola, F.F., 1979. Apocalypse Now. American Zoetrope, Zoetrope Studios.
Country Dashboard | Fragile States Index [WWW Document], n.d. URL https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/ (accessed 2.16.21).
Davidson, 1992. The black man's burden: Africa and the curse of nation-state. James Currey, Oxford.
Davies, C.B., 2008. Left of Karl Marx: the political life of black communist Claudia Jones.
Day, I., 2016. Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism. Duke University Press.
De Witte, L., 2016. Patrice Lumumba's Speech: Ludo de Witte revisits the birth of the Republic of Congo, 30th June 1960 [WWW Document]. Versobooks.com. URL https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2437-patrice-lumumba-s-speech-ludo-de-witte-revisits-the-birth-of-the-republic-of-congo-30th-june-1960 (accessed 1.24.21).
De Witte, L., 2002. The assassination of Lumumba. Verso, London; New York.
Dembour, M.-B., 2000. Recalling the Belgian Congo: Conversations and Introspection, 1 edition. ed. Berghahn Books.
Depelchin, J., 2005. Silences in African history : between the syndromes of discovery and abolition /. Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, Dar Es Salaam :
Depelchin, J., 1992. From the Congo Free State to Zaire : how Belgium privatized the economy : a history of Belgian stock companies in Congo-Zaire from 1885 to 1974. CODESIRA, London :
Derrida, J., 1994. Spectres of Marx. New Left Rev. 205, 31–58.
Diawara, M., 1990. Reading Africa Through Foucault: V. Y. Mudimbe's Reaffirmation of the Subject. October 55, 79–92. https://doi.org/10.2307/778939
Drewal, H.J., 2006. Signs of Time, Shapes of Thought: the contributions of art history and visual culture to historical methods in Africa, in: Writing African History. University of Rochester Press, Rochester, N.Y., pp. 329–347.

Du Bois, W.E.B., 1915. The African roots of war. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, New York.
Dugard, M., 2003. Into Africa: the epic adventures of Stanley and Livingston. Doubleday, New York.
Dunn, K.C., 2003. Imagining the Congo : the international relations of identity /, 1st ed. ed. Palgrave Macmillan, New York :
Dworkin, I., 2017. Congo love song : African American culture and the crisis of the colonial state /, John Hope Franklin series in African American history and culture. The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill :
Enwezor, O., 2006. Snap judgments: new positions in contemporary African photography. Steidl, Göttingen.
Escobar, A., 2009. Territories of difference: place, movements, life, redes. Duke University Press ; Combined Academic [distributor, Durham, N.C.; Chesham.
Escobar, A., 1995. Encountering development : the making and unmaking of the Third World. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J :
Eze, E.C., 2013. Achieving Our Humanity: the Idea of the Postracial Future. Taylor and Francis, Hoboken.
Falk, R., 1999. Predatory globalization: a critique. Polity Press, Cambridge.
Fanon, F., 1990a. The wretched of the earth. Penguin Books, London.
Fanon, F., 1990b. The Wretched of the Earth. Grove Press.
Ferguson, J., 2006. Global shadows Africa in the neoliberal world order / [WWW Document].
Fisher, I., 2000. Congo's War Overshadows Tribal Fight (Published 2000). N. Y. Times.
Fisher, M., 2010. Capitalist realism: Is there no alternative ? Zero Books, Winchester, UK.
Fisher, W.F., 1997. Doing Good? The Politics and Antipolitics of NGO Practices. Annu. Rev. Anthropol. 26, 439–464.
Flanagin, J., 2013. An African Writer Who Doesn't Mind Being Called an "African Writer" [WWW Document]. The Atlantic. URL https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/09/an-african-writer-who-doesnt-mind-being-called-an-african-writer/279719/ (accessed 8.17.20).
Flowerdew, J., 1998. The Final Years of British Hong Kong: The Discourse of Colonial Withdrawal. Springer.
Foucault, M., Senellart, M., 2011. The birth of biopolitics lectures at the college de France, 1978-1979. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
Fragile States Index | The Fund for Peace [WWW Document], n.d. URL https://fragilestatesindex.org/ (accessed 2.13.21).
Fraiture, P.-P., 2008. Belgium and its Colonies:: Introduction, in: Fraiture, P.-P., Poddar, P., Patke, R.S., Jensen, L., Beverley, J., Forsdick, C., Ben-Ghiat, R., Dh'aen, T., Kundrus, B., Monasterios, E., Rothwell, P. (Eds.), A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures - Continental Europe and Its Empires. Edinburgh University Press, pp. 7–12.
Frizzell, D., 2015. Richard Mosse's EnclaveDream of the Celt. Cult. Polit. 11, 163–183. https://doi.org/10.1215/17432197-2895735
Gálvez, W., 1999. Che in Africa: Che Guevara's Congo diary. Ocean Press ; Ocean Press distributor, United States, LPC/In Book, Melbourne; New York; Chicago IL, USA.
Garnier, X., 2013. Sony Labou Tansi est-il un écrivain hors-champ ? J. Afr. 194–211.
Gary, N., 2019. Libérer les auteurs classiques africains du joug colonialiste [WWW Document]. URL https://www.actualitte.com/article/monde-edition/liberer-les-auteurs-classiques-africains-du-joug-colonialiste/97757 (accessed 8.17.20).
Gathara, P., 2020. Laugh? We nearly all died – why my US failed state Twitter thread went viral | Patrick Gathara [WWW Document]. the Guardian. URL

http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/nov/15/patrick-gathara-donald-trump-us-election-joe-biden-twitter-thread (accessed 1.3.21).
Giefer, T., Quartier Latin Media, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, 2010. Political assassination. colonial style: the execution of Patrice Lumumba.
Gómez-Barris, M., 2017. The extractive zone: Social ecologies and decolonial perspectives. Duke University Press.
Gomis, A., 2017. Félicité.
Goodwine, K., 2017. Richard Mosse and the Ethics of Photographing Crisis. Prindle Post. URL https://www.prindlepost.org/2017/03/richard-mosse-ethics-photographing-crisis/ (accessed 8.14.20).
Gopal, P., 2020. Insurgent empire anticolonial resistance and british dissent.
Gordimer, N., 1983. Living in the Interregnum.
Graham, A., 2014. One hundred years of suffering? "Humanitarian crisis photography" and self-representation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Soc. Dyn. 40, 140–163. https://doi.org/10.1080/02533952.2014.895545
GRAIN | Agro-colonialism in the Congo: European and US development finance bankrolls a new round of agro-colonialism in the DRC [WWW Document], n.d. URL https://www.grain.org/article/entries/5220-agro-colonialism-in-the-congo-european-and-us-development-finance-bankrolls-a-new-round-of-agro-colonialism-in-the-drc (accessed 1.12.21).
Gramsci, A., Hoare, Q., Smith, G.N., 1971. Selections from the prison notebooks. Lawrence and Wishart, London.
Grand Débat: faut-il effacer les traces du passé colonial belge ? [WWW Document], n.d. . LN24. URL https://www.ln24.be/2020-06-09/grand-debat-faut-il-effacer-les-traces-du-passe-colonial-belge (accessed 1.24.21).
Grandin, G., 2018. Joseph Conrad and the Dawn of Globalization.
Grant, K., 2001. Christian critics of empire: Missionaries, lantern lectures, and the Congo reform campaign in Britain. J. Imp. Commonw. Hist. 29, 27–58.
Gregory, D., 2010. The colonial present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq. Blackwell, Malden, Mass.
Hall, S., 1989. Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation. Framew. J. Cine. Media 68–81.
Harrison, G., 2010. Neoliberal Africa : the impact of global social engineering /. Zed Books, London ; New York :
Harvey, D., 2008. The Right to the City. New Left Rev., II 23–40.
Hawkesworth, M., 2009. Policy discourse as sanctioned ignorance: theorizing the erasure of feminist knowledge. Crit. Policy Stud. 3, 268.
Hawkins, H., 1982. The Issue of Racism in Heart of Darkness. Conradiana 14, 163–171.
Herzog, W., 1992. Lektionen in Finsternis.
Hobson, J. (Ed.), 2016. Are all the women still white? rethinking race, expanding feminisms, SUNY series in feminist criticism and theory. State University of New York Press, Albany.
Hochschild, A., 2012. King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa, Main Market edition. ed. Pan, London.
In and out of Brussels : figuring postcolonial Africa and Europe in the films of Herman Asselberghs, Sven Augustijnen, Renzo Martens, and Els Opsomer / [WWW Document], 2012.
INCITE!, 2017. The revolution will not be funded: beyond the non-profit industrial complex.
Jad, I., 2007. NGOs: Between buzzwords and social movements. Dev. Pract. 17, 622–629.
Jahoda, G., 1998. Images of savages. Routledge, London.
James, C.L.R., Walvin, J., 2001. The black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo revolution. Penguin Books, London.

Joseph-Gabriel, A.K., 2015. Subverting empire: gendered narratives of anti-colonial resistance in Francophone literature and politics, 1939-1960.
Kabamba, P., 2010. 'Heart of Darkness: Current Images of the DRC and their theoretical underpinning.' Anthropol. Theory 10, 265–301.
Kadirgamar, A., Kadirgamar, N., n.d. Microfinance has been a nightmare for the global south. Sri Lanka shows that there is an alternative [WWW Document]. openDemocracy. URL https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/microfinance-has-been-nightmare-global-south-sri-lanka-shows-there-alternative/ (accessed 8.20.20).
Karuletwa, A., n.d. A Bouquet of Starbucks Reserve Coffees from East Africa [WWW Document]. URL https://stories.starbucks.com/stories/2016/starbucks-reserve-coffees-from-east-africa/ (accessed 8.1.20).
Kéita, A., Bessis, S., 2014. Femme d'Afrique: la vie d'Aoua Kéita racontée par elle-même.
Kennedy, V., 2012. Conrad, Efficiency, and the Varieties of Imperialism. Conradiana 44, 163–189. https://doi.org/10.1353/cnd.2014.0007
Kent, J., 2017. The Neo-colonialism of Decolonisation: Katangan Secession and the Bringing of the Cold War to the Congo. J. Imp. Commonw. Hist. 45, 93–130.
Kuenen, E., 2018. Creation through Inversion:: The Carnivalesque Postcolonial State in the Novels of Alain Mabanckou and In Koli Jean Bofane, in: Baker, C., Grayson, H. (Eds.), Fictions of African Dictatorship, Postcolonial Power Across Genres. Peter Lang AG, pp. 79–98. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv7xbscn.7
Kuzikiliza — Skinfama, ARSENAAL/LAZARUS & KVS | KVS [WWW Document], n.d. URL https://www.kvs.be/en/agenda/40/Skinfama_ARSENAAL_LAZARUS_KVS/Kuzikiliza/ (accessed 1.25.21).
Labou Tansi, S., 2009. Les sept solitudes de Lorsa Lopez: roman. Editions du seuil, Paris.
Lamb, M., 2017. Starbucks Unveils New Beef Jerky Drink, Because Nothing is Sacred [WWW Document]. Seattle Mag. URL https://www.seattlemag.com/eat-and-drink/starbucks-rolls-out-new-coffee-drink-beef-jerky-seattle (accessed 8.1.20).
Landau, P.S., Kaspin, D., 2003. Images and empires: visuality in colonial and postcolonial Africa. University of California Press, Berkeley, Calif.; London.
Lemarchand, R., 2013. Reflections on the recent historiography of eastern Congo. J. Afr. Hist. 54, 417–437.
Lemarchand, R., 2009. The dynamics of violence in Central Africa. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.
Lewis, B., 2005. The Queer Life and Afterlife of Roger Casement. J. Hist. Sex. 14, 363–382.
Lloyd, D., Lowe, L., 1997. The politics of culture in the shadow of capital. Duke University Press, Durham; London.
Lukács, G., 1965. The historical novel. Humanities Press, New York.
Lumumba, P., 2009. (1960) Patrice Lumumba's Last Letter to Pauline Lumumba. URL https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/primary-documents-global-african-history/patrice-lumumbas-letter-pauline-lumumba-1960/ (accessed 8.31.20).
Lumumba, P., n.d. SPEECH AT THE CEREMONY OF THE PROCLAMATION OF THE CONGO'S INDEPENDENCE by Patrice Lumumba June 30, 1960 [WWW Document]. URL https://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/lumumba/1960/06/independence.htm (accessed 3.9.20).
Lumumba-Kasongo, T., 2011. China-Africa Relations: A Neo-Imperialism or a Neo-Colonialism? A Reflection*. Afr. Asian Stud. 10, 234–266. https://doi.org/10.1163/156921011X587040
Mabanckou, A., 2018a. Francophonie, langue française : lettre ouverte à Emmanuel Macron [WWW Document]. Bibliobs. URL

https://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/actualites/20180115.OBS0631/francophonie-langue-francaise-lettre-ouverte-a-emmanuel-macron.html (accessed 7.31.19).
Mabanckou, A., 2018b. The Tears of the Black Man. Indiana University Press.
Mabanckou, A., 2017. Black Moses. Serpent's Tail, London :
Mabanckou, A., 2012. Black Bazaar. Profile Books.
Macharia, B., 2006. État présent de la condition des intellectuelles congolaises : comment briser le cercle vicieux ? Voix Plurielles 3.
Macron: "I am of a generation that doesn't tell Africans what to do" [WWW Document], 2017. . Fr. 24. URL https://www.france24.com/en/20171128-france-macron-burkina-faso-tour-africa (accessed 1.13.21).
Madsen, K.V., 2019. Sammy Baloji – interview: 'I'm not interested in colonialism as a thing of the past, but in the continuation of that system' [WWW Document]. URL https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/sammy-baloji-im-not-interested-in-colonialism-as-a-thing-of-the-past-but-in-continuation-of-that-system (accessed 1.7.21).
Makungu, N.M., 2013. Is the Democratic Republic of Congo being Globalized by China? The Case of Small Commerce at Kinshasa Central Market - ProQuest [WWW Document]. URL https://search.proquest.com/openview/a4028ca847d355acbb9f41c1f4b826a1/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=2029644 (accessed 8.18.20).
Malcolm X on Lumumba [WWW Document], n.d. URL http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/459.html (accessed 3.20.20).
Maldonado-Torres, N., 2007. On the Coloniality of Being. Cult. Stud. 21, 240–270. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162548
Mallaby, S., 2002. The Reluctant Imperialist: Terrorism, Failed States, and the Case for American Empire. Foreign Aff. 81, 2–7. https://doi.org/10.2307/20033079
Manaugh, G., 2009. Leviathan: An interview with Richard Mosse. BLDG BLOG. URL http://www.richardmosse.com/textpress (accessed 1.2.21).
Mandela, W., Dlamini, S., Venter, S., 2017. 491 Days: Prisoner Number 1323/69.
Marchal, J., 2008. Lord Leverhulme's ghosts : colonial exploitation in the Congo /. Verso, London ; New York :
Marchal, J., Thom, M., Hochschild, A., 2017. Lord Leverhulme's ghosts: colonial exploitation in the Congo.
Marijnen, E., 2017. The 'green militarisation'of development aid: the European Commission and the Virunga National Park, DR Congo. Third World Q. 38, 1566–1582.
Marouf Hasian, J., Wood, R., 2009. Traumatic realism and sublime decolonization: remembering the mass-mediated representations of King Baudouin's and Patrice Lumumba's speeches on Congolese Independence Day, June 30, 1960. Controversia 6, 15–46.
Marshall, F., 1995. Congo. Paramount Pictures, The Kennedy/Marshall Company.
Martens, R., 2012. Introduction: Episode III (Enjoy Poverty), in: In and Out of Brussels: Figuring Postcolonial Africa and Europe in the Films of Herman Asselberghs, Sven Augustijnen, Renzo Martens, and Els Opsomer. Leuven UP, Leuven, pp. 3–35.
Martens, R., 2009. Episode III: Enjoy Poverty. Inti Films.
Martin-Granel, N., 2014. Sony Labou Tansi, afflux des écrits et flux de l'écriture. Cont. Manuscr. Génétique Textes Litt. – Afr. Caraïbe Diaspora. https://doi.org/10.4000/coma.260
Marzagora, S., 2016. The humanism of reconstruction: African intellectuals, decolonial critical theory and the opposition to the 'posts' (postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism). J. Afr. Cult. Stud. 28, 161–178. https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2016.1152462

Mazrui, A.A., 1995. The Blood of Experience: The Failed State and Political Collapse in Africa. World Policy J. 12, 28–34.
Mbembe, A., 2015. On the postcolony. Wits University Press, Johannesburg.
Mbembe, A., 2002. 'The Power of the Archive and its Limits,' in: Refiguring the Archive, Ed. by Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris and Graeme Reid. David Philip, Cape Town, pp. 19–26.
Mbembé, J.-A., 2017. Critique of Black reason. Duke University Press, Durham; London.
McGreal, C., 1997. Women seek abolition of "family code" as most hated legacy of regime [WWW Document]. URL https://www.irishtimes.com/news/women-seek-abolition-of-family-code-as-most-hated-legacy-of-regime-1.62342 (accessed 1.14.21).
McKittrick, K. (Ed.), 2015. Sylvia Wynter: on being human as praxis. Duke University Press, Durham.
Meger, S., 2015. Toward a feminist political economy of wartime sexual violence: The case of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Int. Fem. J. Polit. 17, 416–434.
Mertens, C., 2017. Frames of empire: sexual violence and the Congo.
Mertens, C., n.d. Undoing Research on Sexual Violence in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo | ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies [WWW Document]. URL https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/1594/ (accessed 10.15.19).
Mertens, C., Myrttinen, H., 2019. 'A Real Woman Waits'–Heteronormative Respectability, Neo-Liberal Betterment and Echoes of Coloniality in SGBV Programming in Eastern DR Congo. J. Interv. Statebuilding 13, 418–439.
Meyers, J., 1973. Conrad and Roger Casement. Conradiana 5, 64–69.
Michel, C., Monaville, P., 2013. Les fantômes de Lovanium ; La tristesse d'Antigone. AJC, Bruxelles.
Mignolo, W.D., 2010. Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom: Theory Cult. Soc. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409349275
Mills, J.H., Greg, 2013. The Invisible State. Foreign Policy. URL https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/06/24/the-invisible-state/ (accessed 12.21.18).
Mills, J.H., Greg, 2009. There Is No Congo. Foreign Policy. URL https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/03/18/there-is-no-congo/ (accessed 8.31.20).
Mirzoeff, N., 1998. Photography at the heart of darkness: Herbert Lang's Congo photographs 1909-1915, in: Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum Eds. Tim Barringer &Tom Flynn. Routledge, London, pp. 167–188.
Mitchell, D., 2014. The politics of dissent: a biography of E.D. Morel. Silverwood, Bristol.
Mitter, S., 2013. Terror Across the River: Letter from a Congo Literary Festival.
Mobley, C.F., 2015. The Kongolese Atlantic: Central African Slavery & Culture from Mayombe to Haiti.
Mohanty, C.T., 2003. "Under western eyes" revisited: Feminist solidarity through anticapitalist struggles. Signs J. Women Cult. Soc. 28, 499–535.
Mongaba, B.S., n.d. Le Congo n'est pas un pays Francophone [WWW Document]. URL https://www.facebook.com/372887086202109/videos/736211626536318 (accessed 5.31.20).
Moraga, C., Anzaldúa, G. (Eds.), 2015. This bridge called my back: writings by radical women of color, Fourth edition. ed. State University of New York (SUNY) Press, Albany.
Mosse, R., Hochschild, A., 2012. Infra: photographs. Aperture Foundation : Available in North America through, D.A.P., New York, N.Y.
Mosse, R., Stearns, J.K., O'Sullivan, A., Tweeten, T., Frost, B., Biennale di Venezia, 2013. Richard Mosse: the enclave.

Moten, F., 2003. Not in Between Lyric Painting, Visual History, and the Postcolonial Future. TDR Drama Rev. TDR Drama Rev. 47, 127–148.
Moudileno, L., 2016. "Who Me, Postcolonial? Alain Mabanckou's Transatlantic Exchange with James Baldwin," by Lydie Moudileno [WWW Document]. World Lit. Today. URL https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/september/who-me-postcolonial-alain-mabanckous-transatlantic-exchange-james-baldwin-lydie (accessed 11.14.19).
Mudimbe, V.Y., 1994. The idea of Africa, African systems of thought. Indiana U.P.; James Currey, Bloomington : London :
Mudimbe, V.Y., 1988. The invention of Africa : gnosis, philosophy, and the order of knowledge., African systems of thought. James Currey; Indiana U.P., London : Bloomington :
Mujila, F.M., 2015. Tram 83 /. Jacaranda, London :
Naipaul, V.S., 1981. The return of Eva Perón: with The killings in Trinidad. Vintage Books, New York.
Naipaul, V.S., 1974. Conrad's Darkness.
Naipaul, V.S., n.d. A New King for the Congo | by V.S. Naipaul | The New York Review of Books [WWW Document]. URL https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1975/06/26/a-new-king-for-the-congo/ (accessed 1.11.21).
Nancy Rose Hunt, author, 2016. A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo / Nancy Rose Hunt. Duke University Press, Durham.
Natufe, O.I., 1984. THE COLD WAR AND THE CONGO CRISIS, 1960-1961. Afr. Riv. Trimest. Studi E Doc. Dell'Istituto Ital. L'Africa E L'Oriente 39, 353–374.
Ndaliko, C.R., 2016. Necessary noise : music, film, and charitable imperialism in the east of Congo /. Oxford University Press, New York, NY :
Ndi, G.S., 2017. State/Society: Narrating Transformation in Selected African Novels. LIT Verlag Münster.
Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S., 2013. The Entrapment of Africa within the Global Colonial Matrices of Power: Eurocentrism, Coloniality, and Deimperialization in the Twenty-first Century. J. Dev. Soc. 29, 331–353. https://doi.org/10.1177/0169796X13503195
Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., 2015. Decoloniality as the Future of Africa. Hist. Compass 13, 485–496. https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12264
Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., 2012. Coloniality of power in development studies and the impact of global imperial designs on Africa. Australas. Rev. Afr. Stud. 33, 48.
Needham, A.D., Aidoo, A.A., 1995. An Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo. Mass. Rev. 36, 123–133.
Nelson, C., Grossberg, L., 1988. Marxism and the interpretation of culture. Macmillan, London.
Neocosmos, M., 2014. Thinking Political Emancipation and the Social Sciences in Africa: Some Critical Reflections. Afr. Dev. 39, 125–158.
Nevin, T.R., Nevin, T., 1996. Ernst Jünger and Germany: Into the Abyss, 1914-1945. Duke University Press.
Newbury, D., 2012. The Continuing Process of Decolonization in the Congo: Fifty Years Later. Afr. Stud. Rev. 55, 131–141.
Nixon, R., 1991. Preparations for Travel: The Naipaul Brothers' Conradian Atavism. Res. Afr. Lit. 22, 177–190.
Nottage, L., 2010. Ruined, A Nick Hern book. Nick Hern Books, London.
Nwaubani, E., 2001. Eisenhower, Nkrumah and the Congo Crisis. J. Contemp. Hist. 36, 599–622.
Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002. The Congo from Leopold to Kabila : a people's history /. Zed Books, London:

Opondo, S.O., 2008. Genre and the African City: The Politics and Poetics of Urban Rhythms. J. Cult. Res. 12, 59–79. https://doi.org/10.1080/14797580802090984
Opondo, S.O., Shapiro, M.J. (Eds.), 2012. The new violent cartography: geo-analysis after the aesthetic turn, Interventions. Routledge, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York.
Pageaux, D.-H., 1985. "Entre le renouveau et la modernité: vers de nouveaux modèles?" Notre Libr. 31–35.
Parks, G., 1965. Not just an American problem, but a world problem 16.
Peffer, J., 2008. Snap of the Whip/Crossroads of Shame: Flogging, Photography, and the Representation of Atrocity in the Congo Reform Campaign. Vis. Anthropol. Rev. 24, 55–77.
Petras, J., 1999. NGOs: In the service of imperialism. J. Contemp. Asia 29, 429–440. https://doi.org/10.1080/00472339980000221
Pierson, R.R., Chaudhuri, N., McAuley, B., 1998. Nation, empire, colony: historicizing gender and race. Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
Pinkney, R., 2009. NGOs, Africa and the global order /. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke ; New York, NY :
Pitcho Womba Konga: «Etudier Napoléon à l'école, c'est bien mais il faudrait aussi parler de Lumumba» [WWW Document], 2017. . Le Soir. URL https://www.lesoir.be/123239/article/2017-11-08/pitcho-womba-konga-etudier-napoleon-lecole-cest-bien-mais-il-faudrait-aussi (accessed 2.22.20).
Pour une "littérature-monde" en français, 2007. . Le Monde.fr.
Prager, B., 2010. Landscape of the Mind: The Indifferent Earth in Werner Herzog's Films, in: Cinema and Landscape: Film, Nation and Cultural Geography: Film, Nation and Cultural Geography. Intellect, Bristol, pp. 89–103.
Qian, Z., 2006. Ezra Pound and his first Chinese Contact For and Against Confucianism. Paideuma 35, 157–177.
Rai, S., 2002. Gender and the political economy of development : from nationalism to globalization /. Polity Press, Cambridge :
Rancière, J., Elliott, G., 2011. The emancipated spectator. Verso, London; New York.
Reid, S.A., 2020. Overlooked No More: Andrée Blouin, Voice for Independence in Africa. N. Y. Times.
Reinders, R.C., 1968. Racialism on the Left ED Morel and the "Black Horror on the Rhine." Int. Rev. Soc. Hist. 13, 1–28.
Renton, D., Seddon, D., Zeilig, L., 2007. The Congo: plunder and resistance. Zed Books.
Rodney, W., 1972. How Europe underdeveloped Africa. Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, London 141 Coldershaw Rd, W.13.
Rosoux, V., 2014. The Two Faces of Belgium in the Congo: Perpetrator and Rescuer. Eur. Rev. Int. Stud. 1, 16–38.
Rotberg, R.I., 2003. Failed states, collapsed states, weak states: Causes and indicators. State Fail. State Weakness Time Terror 1, 25.
Roy, A., 2006. Praxis in the Time of Empire. Plan. Theory 5, 7–29. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095206061019
Roy, A., 2004. The NGO-ization of resistance | Pambazuka News [WWW Document]. URL https://www.pambazuka.org/governance/ngo-ization-resistance (accessed 1.15.20).
Said, E.W., 2012. Culture and imperialism. Vintage.
Salem, S., 2020. Anticolonial Afterlives in Egypt: The Politics of Hegemony [WWW Document]. Camb. Core. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108868969
SARR, F., 2019. AFROTOPIA. UNIV OF MINNESOTA PRESS, S.l.
Saunders, F.S., 2013. The cultural cold war: the CIA and the world of arts and letters.

Says, L., 2017. Film Review: N.G.O. – Nothing Going On. Afr. LSE. URL https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2017/05/11/film-review-n-g-o-nothing-going-on/ (accessed 1.14.20).
Schneider, V., 2020. How the legacy of colonialism built a palm oil empire [WWW Document]. Mongabay Environ. News. URL https://news.mongabay.com/2020/06/how-the-legacy-of-colonialism-built-a-palm-oil-empire/ (accessed 1.20.21).
Scott, D., 2004. Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment. Duke University Press, Durham.
Selasi, T., 2015. Taiye Selasi: stop pigeonholing African writers. The Guardian.
Selina Wamucii, 2020. African coffee farmers are losing billions every year from exploitative prices » Selina Wamucii. Selina Wamucii. URL https://www.selinawamucii.com/african-coffee-farmers-are-losing-billions-every-year-from-exploitative-prices/ (accessed 8.1.20).
Service, T.N., n.d. Sixty years since historic Lumumba speech launched Congo independence [WWW Document]. Trib. News Serv. URL https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/world/sixty-years-since-historic-lumumba-speech-launched-congo-independence-106072 (accessed 8.12.20).
Shakur, A., 2014. Assata an autobiography.
Shannon, L., 2010. A thousand sisters: my journey of hope into the worst place on earth to be a woman. Seal Press : Distributed by Publishers Group West, Berkeley, Calif.
Singh, J., 2018. Unthinking mastery: dehumanism and decolonial entanglements.
Sliwinski, S., 2009. The Aesthetics of Human Rights. Cult. Theory Crit. 50, 23–39.
Smith, K.J., 2016. The DRC's Coffee Might Be Served at a Starbucks Near You | FrontLines May/June 2016 | U.S. Agency for International Development [WWW Document]. URL https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/frontlines/may-june-2016/drc-coffee-might-be-served-starbucks-near-you (accessed 12.2.19).
Sony Lab'Ou Tansi, 1979. Conscience de tracteur: pièce primëe lors du Concours théâtral. Nouvelles Editions Africaines CLE, Yaounde.
Soumaré, R., 2016. "How to Become Globalized Without Losing Your Mind: A Conversation with Alain Mabanckou," by Rokiatou Soumaré [WWW Document]. World Lit. Today. URL https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/september/how-become-globalized-without-losing-your-mind-conversation-alain-mabanckou-rokiatou (accessed 11.14.19).
Spurr, D., 1993. The rhetoric of empire: colonial discourse in journalism, travel writing and imperial administration / David Spurr., Post-contemporary interventions. Duke University Press.
Stanard, M.G., 2011. Selling the Congo: A History of European Pro-empire Propaganda and the Making of Belgian Imperialism. U of Nebraska Press.
Stanley, H.M., 2011. The Congo and the Founding of its Free State: a Story of Work and Exploration. Volume 2 Volume 2. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
Stevens, M., 2008. Curve of the World, Reprint edition. ed. Simon and Schuster, New York.
Stoler, A.L. (Ed.), 2013. Imperial debris: on ruins and ruination. Duke University Press, Durham ; London.
Swindells, J., 1995. Uses of autobiography / edited by Julia Swindells. Taylor & Francis.
Tansi, S.L., 2016. The Shameful State [WWW Document]. Indiana Univ. Press. URL http://www.iupress.indiana.edu/isbn/9780253019257 (accessed 7.22.18).
Tansi, S.L., 1988. La vie et demie : roman, Points ; Seuil, [Paris] :
Taussig, M., 1992. Culture of terror - space of death: Roger Casement's Putumayo report and the explanation of torture. Colon. Cult. 135–173.

Taussig, M.T., 2010. Shamanism, colonialism and the wild man: a study in terror and healing. Univ. of Chicago Press, Chicago.
Tayler, J., 2010. Facing the Congo. Abacus, London.
Thiong'o, N. wa, 1992. Decolonising the mind: the politics of language in African literature. East African Publishers.
Thomas, D., 2000. Officials Writers: The Engineers of the Congolese Soul. South Cent. Rev. 17, 77–102.
Thomas, D.R.D., 2002. Nation-building, propaganda, and literature in Francophone Africa [WWW Document].
Trapido, J., 2015. Africa's Leaky Giant. New Left Rev., II 5–40.
Trinh, T.M.-H., 1989. Woman, native, other: writing postcoloniality and feminism / Trinh T. Minh-ha., A Midland Book ; MB 503. Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
Trouillot, M.-R., 2015. Silencing the past: power and the production of history. Beacon Press, Boston.
Trouillot, M.-R., 2002. North Atlantic Universals: Analytical Fictions, 1492–1945. South Atl. Q. 101, 839–858. https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-101-4-839
United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) [WWW Document], n.d. . U. N. Organ. Mission Democr. Repub. Congo. URL https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/monuc/ (accessed 1.25.21).
Van Reybrouck, D., 2015. Congo: The Epic History of a People.
Veit-Wild, F., 2005. The Grotesque Body of the Postcolony : Sony Labou Tansi and Dambudzo Marechera. Rev. Litt. Comparée n o 314, 227–239.
Villafaña, F., 2009. Cold war in the Congo: the confrontation of Cuban military forces, 1960-1967. Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, N.J.
Wai, Z., 2012. Neo-patrimonialism and the discourse of state failure in Africa. Rev. Afr. Polit. Econ. 39, 27–43.
Wainaina, B., 2019. How to Write About Africa. Granta Mag. URL https://granta.com/how-to-write-about-africa/ (accessed 7.31.19).
Walker, M.B., 2005. Philosophy and the maternal body: reading silence.
Walter Rodney, author, 2018. How Europe underdeveloped Africa / Walter Rodney. Verso, London ; Brooklyn, NY.
Waṭṭār, al-T., 2000. The Earthquake /, Middle Eastern fiction series. Saqi, London :
Watts, C., 1983. "A Bloody Racist": About Achebe's View of Conrad. Yearb. Engl. Stud. 13, 196–209. https://doi.org/10.2307/3508121
Weber, M., Gerth, H., Mills, C.W., 2015. From Max Weber: Essays in sociology.
Wenzel, J., 2010. Bulletproof: Afterlives of Anticolonial Prophecy in South Africa and Beyond. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
Wenzel, J., 2006. Remembering the Past's Future: Anti-Imperialist Nostalgia and Some Versions of the Third World. Cult. Crit. 1–32.
West-Pavlov, R., 2017. Participatory Cultures and Biopolitics in the Global South in In Koli Jean Bofane's Congo Inc. Res. Afr. Lit. 48, 105–121.
Wiesenberger, R., n.d. Bodys Isek Kingelez: City Dreams – Art Papers [WWW Document]. URL https://www.artpapers.org/bodys-isek-kingelez-city-dreams/ (accessed 3.20.20).
Willame, J.-C., 1972. Patrimonialism and Political Change in the Congo. Stanford University Press, Stanford, Calif.
Williams, R., Orrom, M., 1954. Preface to film [by] Raymond Williams [and] Michael Orrom. Film Drama, London.
Williams, Y., 2012. "They've lynched our savior, Lumumba in the old fashion Southern Style": The Conscious Internationalism of American Black Nationalism, in: Slate, N. (Ed.), Black Power beyond Borders: The Global Dimensions of the Black Power Movement, Contemporary Black History. Palgrave Macmillan US, New York, pp. 147–167. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137295064_8

Wilson, K., 2012. Race, racism and development: interrogating history, discourse and practice / Kalpana Wilson. Zed Books, London ; New York.
Wrong, M., 2001. In the footsteps of Mr. Kurtz: living on the brink of disaster in Mobutu's Congo /. HarperCollins Publishers, New York :
Wynter, S., 2003. Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument. CR New Centen. Rev. 3, 257–337. https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2004.0015
Yewah, E., 1996. Congolese Playwrights as Cultural Revisionists. Theatre Res. Int. 21, 219–228. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0307883300015339
Yole!Africa: The Art of Empowering Youth! [WWW Document], n.d. . Art Empower. Youth. URL https://yoleafrica.org/ (accessed 8.20.20).
Zeilig, L., 2008. Lumumba: Africa's lost leader. Haus, London.
Zeleza, P., 2006. The Troubled Encounter Between Postcolonialism and African History1. J. Can. Hist. Assoc. Rev. Société Hist. Can. 17, 89–129. https://doi.org/10.7202/016592ar
Žižek, S., 2010. Living in the end times. Verso, London.
Zvomuya, P., 2008. A forum for African writers [WWW Document]. MG Online. URL https://mg.co.za/article/2008-08-14-a-forum-for-african-writers/ (accessed 7.7.18).