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**THE WORST PLACE ON EARTH TO BE A WOMAN: NOVELISTS,  
PLAYWRIGHTS, AND MEMOIRISTS ON THE CONGO ARMED CONFLICTS  
(1996-2010)**

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**THE WORST PLACE ON EARTH TO BE A WOMAN: NOVELISTS,  
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CONFLICTS (1996-2010)**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

To my late father, François Migumbu Kahozi, for all his sacrifices.

To my supportive family without whom I could not have completed this work.

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This dissertation calls attention to six important contemporary texts that portray the effects of the Congo armed conflicts on individuals and their communities. Using trauma and literary theories, I examine how the psychological consequences of war are represented in two novels by Pius Ngandu Nkashama and Mashingaidze Gomo, two plays by Lynn Nottage and Fabien Honor  Kabeya Mukamba, and two memoirs by Lisa J. Shannon and Joseph Mwantuali.

My dissertation demonstrates how the selected writers help their readers understand the long-lasting devastating impact of violence on civilians by recreating in their texts moments and symptoms of emotional and psychological trauma. By focusing on the narrative and stylistic techniques these writers deploy in their texts, I reveal the differences and similarities in the way they approach the various issues of armed conflicts and in the goals they are attempting to achieve in their texts. Some of these writers, as this work illustrates, present fragmented speeches and dialogues to draw attention to the

effects of traumatic memories while others incorporate songs and poems into their texts to highlight the role that music and poetry can play in the healing of trauma. My dissertation ultimately shows that the differences among the selected writers underscore the complexities involved in the narration of war stories.



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## INTRODUCTION

August 29, 1998 is a day that remains imprinted in indelible marks in my memory. With my own eyes, in a street close to the neighborhood where my family and I lived, I witnessed the lynching and burning of a man suspected of being a Tutsi<sup>1</sup> and a collaborator of the Rwandan army. For several days, I could not get the horrible scene out of my mind. My ears kept hearing the screaming of this young man who was burned alive.<sup>2</sup> It took me several weeks to finally realize that the killing of this man was not a mere nightmare but an event that actually occurred.

This haunting event took place in one of the most populated neighborhoods of Kinshasa, a city that, until August 1998, has been largely spared the devastation wrought on the eastern part of the Congo by many years of armed conflicts. All the major cities in northeastern and eastern Congo had already fallen under the attacks of Ugandan and Rwandan soldiers who were determined to overthrow the Kabila's regime. To hasten the

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<sup>1</sup> The Tutsi (make up about 14% of Rwanda's population), the Hutu (about 85%) and the Twa (about 1%) are the three main ethnic groups in Rwanda. Between 1900 and 1960, the German and Belgian colonists implemented a system of racial classification and discrimination to strengthen their control over the land. Because of the facial features of the Tutsi (they were seen as more "white" looking than the other groups), the colonists treated this group as a biologically superior group and gave them all positions of authorities. The Hutu, the majority group, were denied high education, land ownership and government positions. In 1959, during a period of violence, the Hutu overthrew the Tutsi and elected the first Hutu president, Greg wa Kayabanda. The Hutu-Tutsi tensions continued after independence and led to the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Numerous analysts have discussed the origin and development of the Tutsi-Hutu ethnic tensions, but see Prunier 1995, Gourevitch 1998, Mamdani 2001 and Strauss 2006.

<sup>2</sup> People from Rwanda have lived peacefully in the Congo throughout the period of the regime of President Mobutu. Tensions between people from both countries began right after the end of the Rwandan genocide when Hutu genocidaires escaped into eastern Congo and formed rebel groups. For a discussion of the tensions between Rwandan and Congolese populations, see Prunier 2009.

end of Kabila's reign, Rwandan forces and their allies decided to launch an offensive against Kinshasa from the west. They successfully airlifted hundreds of troops to Kitona, an important military air base located 300 kilometers from the capital, and in few days, these soldiers marched towards Kinshasa, capturing not only all the towns but also the port of Matadi (Congo's only oceanic port), all the major oil facilities, and more importantly, the Inga dam complex, the main source of electrical power for the whole country. To cause chaos in Kinshasa and provoke popular uprisings against Kabila, the Rwandan forces decided to shut down the Inga dam and stop any supply of gas to the capital. For several days, Kinshasa was plunged into darkness and the populations had to survive without any running water and gas. It did not take long for life to become unbearable for all families.

After reaching Kinshasa in the morning of August 26, 1998, the Rwandan forces surrounded the city, attempting to seize control of the airport, the building of the state television and the Parliament. However, all their efforts failed, mainly due to the ferocious counter-offensive of the Zimbabwean forces, Kabila's main allies. During the hours and days that followed, Congolese soldiers and their allies captured hundreds of Rwandan soldiers and in almost all the neighborhoods of the capital, civilians started hunting for and attacking all Tutsis and any person who looked like a Tutsi. Many individuals lost their lives by being lynched and burned alive.

The experience of these disturbing events has led me to recognize and reflect on the trauma of war that have always been so common among populations in eastern Congo. For the first time, the pain of war was no longer something that I simply heard

about, the mental anguish of armed conflicts was not a foreign experience any more. War and its devastation became real.

As the years passed and the armed conflicts continued in eastern Congo, my interest in understanding war trauma of local populations grew. I intently turned to literature, art, music and blogs to explore how the pain of civilians was described. Several questions have preoccupied my mind: how do writers and artists represent unspeakable atrocities that soldiers perpetrate in the Congo on almost a daily basis? What are the narrative techniques that they employ to raise awareness about the horrors of war? How is the representation of novelists different from that of playwrights or memoirists? What can readers learn about war and trauma in the Congo from these representations? How do specific conceptions of genre influence and define how writers and artists portray violence, especially violence on women and children? In which ways are writers and artists contributing to the global debate on issues of armed conflicts in the Congo? This project was inspired not only by all these questions but also by the scale of the violence confronting civilians.

Indeed, the armed conflicts have produced violent deaths in eastern Congo for over two decades now. Casualties exceed more than five million people, social structures of local communities are damaged, and the ecosystem is totally disturbed. Since the human, social, and environmental costs of these wars are so vast, several voices among not only writers, filmmakers and artists but also State and UN officials, political and human rights activists, academics, church leaders, journalists and humanitarian aid workers have risen to foster public awareness about the terrible impact of hostilities on populations. As a result, a rich and wide variety of texts about the Congo armed conflicts

have been produced. However, because of this large number and variety of materials, the selection of specific works for my dissertation turned out to be quite challenging.

At the beginning of the project, I thought it important to add blogs, songs and visual arts to my selection of works as these approaches deal with issues of war from a different perspective and their works often raise similar questions that novelists or playwrights are posing. And, when it came to the selection of memoirs, I found that there are dozens of texts written by both Congolese and foreigners. The majority of them deal with the experiences of Congo child soldiers and sexually assaulted women. Intrigued by the stories of these memoirists, I quickly thought about analyzing four or five of their texts. As for personal blogs, they were probably the group that offered the largest number of materials. Several activists and intellectuals, inside and outside the Congo, use blogging platforms to distribute information and engage with the public. Picking out the appropriate blog for my project proved to be a challenging task.

It soon became obvious that the addition of blogs, songs, plastic arts and multiple other texts to my analysis would make my project increase so much in size that I would not have enough time to complete it. Eventually, I decided to limit my selection to two novels, two plays and two memoirs. I chose these particular texts because, first, they all explore issues of violence and trauma in the Congo from different standpoints and secondly, they each raise specific questions about the power and limits of language when it comes to the literary representation of war trauma. Within each category, I purposefully selected a text written by a Congolese and another one from a foreigner. I find it important to examine the differences (and similarities) in the narrative techniques that

both insiders and outsiders use to portray the psychological consequences of violence on local populations.

Indeed, most publications and studies about the violence in Congo for the most part deal with the political, economic and social causes and consequences of the conflicts. However, the psychological impact of hostilities on both individuals and their communities receives little attention. Addressing this gap, my dissertation brings together specific texts and examines how these writers, as historical witnesses, represent the psychological effects of Congo armed conflicts on both civilians and their communities. To help readers understand the long-lasting devastating impact of violence and give voice to the silenced victims, these writers recreate in their texts moments and symptoms of emotional and psychological trauma. And, examining the variety of these texts, I also argue, provides us with a glimpse of major preoccupations of the writers and allows us to get a broader view of the experiences of the victims.

Indeed, using different approaches, the selected texts depict individual characters as battling with guilt, anxiety, fear, helplessness, amnesia, repressed memory and different types of intrusive recollections. They also portray the damaging psychological impact of war on larger communities, thus demonstrating that the effects of hostilities go beyond the individual and their close family. That is why, considering the horrific violence in eastern Congo as a collective trauma, I analyze the language, the narrative strategies, and the stylistic devices that writers employ in their texts to show how war affects not only the individual's psyche but also the basic fabric of their social life.

In addition to examining how writers represent the negative impact war is having on populations, my work also pays attention to their representation of people's positive

responses to trauma. Armed conflicts in the Congo, these writers demonstrate, not only leave many people confused and vulnerable, they also serve as a catalyst for positive changes within communities. In the midst of human destruction and desolation, individuals find the strength to rebuild their lives and bring their communities together again. In this regard, many doctors and health professionals are playing a crucial role in alleviating the anguish of victims and helping survivors heal from their pain.

### **Conceptualizing War and Its Aftermath**

Before describing each chapter of my dissertation, I consider it important to define some key terms that I am deploying throughout my work. These key terms include violence, sexual violence and child soldiers. After defining these terms, I also offer a brief discussion of the relationship between psychology, violence, trauma and literature. In this specific section, I define these additional terms: trauma, memory, fragmentation, collective trauma and insidious trauma.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation” (WHO 2016). As for psychologists, violence is defined as an aggressive behavior that aims to cause physical or psychological injury through the use of physical force. They identify several types of violence including street violence, domestic violence and family violence (Englander 2007).<sup>3</sup> Violence is also divided into three main categories, namely, direct, structural, and cultural violence. Direct violence (also called personal or behavioral

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<sup>3</sup> In *Understanding Violence*, Elizabeth Kandel Englander reviews important areas of research on violence and offers a unique summary of its causes and effects, especially its effects on children.

violence) involves any form of action committed by an individual or a group of individuals against self, another person or other people that causes death or injury (Galtung 1969, 167-68).<sup>4</sup> Structural violence (also called indirect or institutionalized violence) refers to social injustices that political, economic and social institutions maintain through acts of discrimination, oppression and exploitation. While the perpetrator(s) of direct violence can easily be identified, the instrument(s) behind structural violence remain(s) cannot be practically searched for (Galtung 1990, 293-95). This type of violence results from an unequal distribution of resources and power. Examples of structural violence include poverty, hunger, homelessness and lack of medical care. As for cultural violence, it involves any aspects of culture that an individual, a group of people or an institution may use to legitimize direct or structural violence (Galtung 1990, 295-99). My dissertation will concentrate on direct violence, which includes war (or military violence).

War has conventionally been considered as an impersonal or collective act of aggression and hostility. Not only does it cause pain, death, dismemberment, injuries but it also brings about terrible stress, hopelessness and grief. Both soldiers and civilians experience the violence of war, with effects remaining long after hostilities have ended. The tragedy of war is that other destructive forms of violence such as sexual violence often accompany it.

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<sup>4</sup> In his 1969 seminal essay, Johan Galtung introduced the distinction between direct and structural violence for the first time. Since then, he and other scholars have developed both concepts to offer more tools for peace and war research. In his 1990 article, Galtung introduced the concept of cultural violence and noted that examples of aspects of culture that can be used to justify direct or structural violence include “religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science---logic, mathematics---“(Galtung, 1990).



Sexual Violence is frequently used interchangeably with “violence against women.” The United Nations defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (WHO 2016). It is important to note that sexual violence is not limited to rape or to any forms of physical invasion of the human body. It may include acts that do not involve sexual penetration. The International Criminal Court has explicitly listed several forms of sexual violence. They include rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, and enforced sterilization (United Nations 1998).<sup>5</sup>

In times of war, rape and sexual slavery are probably the most prevalent forms of sexual violence. Military groups use sexual violence to inflict more than physical pain. They seek to terrorize populations and cause deep and long-lasting emotional wounds and social shame. Whenever an individual is sexually assaulted during war, their whole family and community are impacted by the victim’s loss of dignity and self-worth. Military groups also use rape to change the ethnic make-up of the next generation or infect women with HIV.<sup>6</sup>

Children constitute the group of people most deeply affected by military violence.

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<sup>5</sup> The literature on sexual violence is rich and varied. For a clear summary of main issues, see Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (1993) and Nicola Henry, *War and Rape: Law, Memory, and Justice* (2011).

<sup>6</sup> UN agencies estimate that, between 100,000 and 250,000 women were raped in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide; more than 60,000 women were raped during the civil war in Sierra Leone (1991-2002), more than 40,000 in Liberia (1989-2003), up to 60,000 in the former Yugoslavia (1992-1995), and at least 200,000 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since 1998. See United Nations, *Background Information on Sexual Violence Used as a Tool of War*, <http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/about/bgsexualviolence.shtml> (Accessed January 21 2016).

For the most part, they suffer from the loss of parents, siblings and sense of community. Some of these children are also forced to engage in military violence by government armies as well as rebel groups. International agencies believe that about 250,000 children still serve as “child soldiers” in irregular and regular military groups around the world (Warchild 2016).<sup>7</sup> The use of child soldiers of course raises numerous serious questions. Some of these questions are: how can one properly define a “child soldier” if notions of childhood are culturally constructed? What should be the legal minimum age for joining an army or recruiting a soldier?<sup>8</sup> Can a child who joins a military group voluntarily be considered a soldier? Should a girl who is recruited and used as a sexual slave also be considered as a child soldier? Should child soldiers who commit atrocities be prosecuted for their crimes? Who should be held accountable for the recruitment of these child soldiers? Is it the leaders of the armed group, the government or the international community?<sup>9</sup>

### **Psychology of War, Violence, and Trauma in Literature**

On 1 May 2008, The Economist published “Atrocities Beyond Words”, an article on the “barbarous campaign of rape” in the Congo that declares that the violence was “on

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<sup>7</sup> Among these 250,000 child soldiers, it is estimated that 40% of them are girls who are often used as non-combatant “wives” (sex slaves) of the male combatants. It is also important to note that, not all children engage in active military combat. Some are used as porters, cooks, messengers or spies, See Warchild, *Child Soldiers*, 2016, <https://www.warchild.org.uk/issues/child-soldiers> (Accessed February 3, 2016)

<sup>8</sup> In 1996, Graça Machel, an expert of the UN Secretary-General and former Minister of Education of Mozambique, compiled a groundbreaking report in which she described the devastating impact of war on girls and boys. The report addressed legal and political questions that are associated with the use of child soldiers and included a number of concrete recommendations for the protection of children in armed conflict. The report has been released as a book in 2001. See Graça Machel, *The Impact of War on Children* (2001).

<sup>9</sup> Roméo Dallaire and Michael Wessells address these questions in their respective books. See Micheal Wessells, *Child Soldiers* (2006) and Roméo Dallaire, *They Fight Like Soldiers, They Die Like Children: The Global Quest to Eradicate the Use of Child Soldiers* (2010).

a scarcely imaginable scale.”<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Ashley Judd and John Prendergast, reporting for CNN, described the violence in the Congo as “unspeakable.”<sup>11</sup> Although the atrocities perpetrated in the Congo might be considered inexpressible or unimaginable, they are not necessarily unrepresentable. Indeed, in the face of shocking and unspeakable violence, literature often becomes an effective tool for conveying and transmitting the scale of the traumatic experience.

Trauma is commonly defined as an individual’s emotional response to a catastrophic, tragic, frightening or violent event so intense that it leaves long-lasting psychic damage. It also often refers to the tragic experience or event itself. Quoting psychologist Richard McNally, Michelle Balaev asserts that the definition of trauma may include three variables: “an objectively defined event, the person’s subjective interpretation of its meaning, and the person’s emotional reaction to it” (Balaev xii). For Cathy Caruth, the event itself cannot define trauma; rather, she declares in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, “the pathology consists solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (4).

At the heart of a traumatic experience lies memory or the process of remembering the tragic event.<sup>12</sup> And, the question about how victims remember trauma is surrounded

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<sup>10</sup> See The Economist, *Atrocities Beyond Words: A Barbarous Campaign of Rape*, May 1, 2008, <http://www.economist.com/node/11294767> (Accessed April 24, 2014)

<sup>11</sup> See Ashley Judd and John Prendergast, *Electronics Fuel Unspeakable Violence*, September 30, 2010, <http://www.cnn.com/2010/TRAVEL/09/30/ashley.judd.africa/> (Accessed April 24, 2014)

<sup>12</sup> Lynn Abrams offers in *Oral History Theory* (2010) a clear summary of the different kinds of memory systems. Understanding these systems is important when one examines the differences and similarities between the mechanisms of traumatic memory and ordinary memory. These are the memory systems that Abrams presents: semantic memory (recording of facts and concepts), procedural memory (helps the learning of skills and habits), working memory (helps with

by controversies. As Richard McNally observes in *Remembering Trauma*, some experts believe that tragic events are “engraved on the mind” and can never be forgotten while others believe that the mind shields itself from the tragedy by “banishing traumatic memories from awareness, making it difficult for many people to remember their worst experiences until many years later” (1). One can gather from these controversies that experts agree that victims of horrifying events end up remembering the catastrophic experience at some point in time. For some experts, victims can remember the experience right after its occurrence because they cannot forget it. For the others, the tragic experience and the moment of remembering are separated by a period during which victims simply forget what happened to them.

I also personally believe that the act of forgetting is important to the process of remembering traumatic experiences. Whether the event is engraved on our mind or we banish it from awareness for a while and remember it later on, the mind still cannot remember everything after a certain period of time. Some details of the event are not fully recorded and those that are fully recorded are not always remembered in their fullness. As Marita Sturken suggests in *Tangled Memories*:

All memories are “created” in tandem with forgetting: to remember everything would amount to being overwhelmed by memory. Forgetting is a necessary component in the construction of memory. Yet the forgetting of the past in a culture is often highly organized and strategic (Sturken 7).

The act of forgetting also raises another set of questions simply because forgetting does not necessarily mean that the event is totally wiped out of one’s mind. What happens to

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everyday events), episodic or autobiographical memory (helps with the recording of particular incidents) and flash-bulb memory or vivid memory (helps capture the event in vivid details). See Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (2010). pp. 83.

those memories that are forgotten but not wiped out? Why are they forgotten? I believe the answers to these questions lie in the relationship between not only context and traumatic memory but also emotional stress and memory. As McNally explains in *Remembering Trauma*, context and intense stress affect the way one remembers or forgets traumatic events. What one remembers or forgets, McNally observes, “depends on the context of recollection” and extreme stress can either improve or stands in the way of traumatic memory (40-50).

In past decades, the boundaries of trauma research have considerably extended beyond the study of extreme stress or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), an anxiety disorder that affects the lives of people exposed to a terrible and life-threatening event like a natural disaster, war, accident, natural disaster or rape. Today, trauma studies involve several scholarly disciplines, including literary criticism. Literary criticism has embraced trauma as an area of investigation, allowing both psychiatrists and literary critic to understand better the mechanisms of traumatic experiences<sup>13</sup>.

In *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, Laurie Vickroy identifies the existence of a genre of contemporary fiction, which explicitly addresses trauma issues. Labeling this genre as “trauma narratives”, Vickroy defines them as “fictional narratives that help readers to access traumatic experience” (1). These texts, she explains, do not limit themselves to the presentation of trauma as subject matter or character study, they

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<sup>13</sup> A lot research has been conducted on the effects that traumatic events have on literature. Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub are among those who have made the major contributions. The theory that has emerged from their research is commonly called “trauma theory”. Felman and Laub present in *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992) the main concerns in Trauma Theory. In this book, they address these questions: “what is the relation between literature and testimony, between the writer and the witness? What is the relation between the act of witnessing in testifying, and the act of writing and of reading, particularly in our era?” (xiii).

incorporate “the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of traumatic experience within their underlying sensibilities and structures” (3). Examining the fiction of Toni Morrison, Jamaica Kincaid, Marguerite Duras, Dorothy Allison, Larry Heinemann, Pat Barker, and Edwidge Danticat, Vickroy argues that the various trauma texts of these authors can be considered as “authentic” as the testimonies of survivors (21). Here, Vickroy refutes the idea that only survivors can adequately express the horror of an event and provide legitimate trauma stories. She asserts that, while popular fiction and films, because of their use of trauma for mere sensationalism, fail to engage readers or viewers’ critical thinking, “trauma narratives” appear more authentic in their expression of the traumatic experience thanks to the various literary techniques authors employ. Vickroy believes that these techniques serve the purpose of stimulating in the reader an “empathetic unsettlement,” a term she borrows from Dominick LaCapra (xi). “Trauma narratives”, Vickroy comments, take readers beyond a simple identification with victims; these texts seek to engage readers’ critical thinking and ultimately allow them to “critique oppressive forces and question the effectiveness and costs of the survival tactics victims employ...” (xiii).

As Vickroy demonstrates in her study, narratives are key elements that bring literature and psychoanalysis together. In both fields, the acts of telling (or writing) and listening to (or reading) trauma stories are important. However, this act of narrating trauma experiences presents a paradox that lies at the center of the relationship between trauma studies and literary criticism. Trauma compels its victims to speak and share their stories while at the same time; it makes it difficult for them to translate their experience into speech. To expose itself, the traumatic event has to resort to language while still

disrupting it. As Leigh Gilmore puts it in *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*,

...crucial to the experience of trauma are multiple difficulties that arise in trying to articulate it. Trauma mocks language and confronts it with its insufficiency. Yet at the same time language about trauma is theorized as an impossibility, language is pressed forward as that which can heal the survivor of trauma (6).

By its very nature, traumatic pain exceeds articulation and destabilizes language. This linguistic destabilization is both provoked and accentuated by the fact that the traumatic experience itself is not accessible to memory or to consciousness when it occurs. As a consequence, a delayed return to---or repetition of---the traumatic event often has to take place to allow victims of trauma to try and comprehend the horrible event they experienced. Describing this return in *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth states,

...the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. The repetitions of the traumatic event---which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight---thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known, and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing (91-92).

Because of the tension that exists between traumatic experience and its representation, Caruth argues in *Unclaimed Experience*, trauma is not “locatable” in the original tragic event that occurred in the past, but “rather in the way its very unassimilated nature---the way it was precisely not known in the first instance---returns to haunt the survivor later on” (4).

Similarly, in *Trauma Fiction*, Anne Whitehead recognizes this paradox and asks:

“if trauma comprises an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation, how then can it be narrativised in fiction?” (3). Trauma theory, Whitehead answers, provides new ways of representing traumatic experiences to fictional writers who are less preoccupied with knowing “what is remembered of the past” than “how and why it is remembered” (3).

Highlighting the important role literature (especially fiction) plays in trauma studies, LaCapra declares in *History in Transit*, “...fiction may well explore the traumatic, including the fragmentation, emptiness, or evacuation of experience, and may raise the question of other possible forms of experience. It may also explore in a particularly telling and unsettling way the affective or emotional dimensions of experience and understanding. (132). For both LaCapra and Caruth, literature is “a prime, if not the privileged, place for giving voice to trauma” (LaCapra, *Writing History*, 190).

Fragmentation (or rupture or disorganization) is indeed an important theme that brings trauma theory and literary criticism together. Scholars in both fields are preoccupied with reconstructing and making sense of the fragmented memory. Defining trauma as “an injury to mind or body that requires structural repair,” psychologist Elizabeth Waite states in *Trauma and Survival: Post-Traumatic and Dissociative Disorders in Women* that “the main effect of trauma is disorganization, a physical and/or mental disorganization that may be circumscribed or widespread”. This disorganization, Waite adds, causes “fragmentation of self, shattering of social relationships, erosion of social supports” (22, 92). To recover from this psychological chaos, it is then crucial for individuals or their communities to be willing to revisit the fragmentation that has taken place after the moment of the traumatic experience. It is in this context that, I believe, literature plays an



important role as it provides the necessary tools for what might be described as the “revisitation of trauma.”

For this revisitation of trauma to be successful, the silenced victim must regain their voice. They should be given the opportunity of speaking their pain and their loss. This act of speaking becomes useful only when there is a listener who plays an important role as they allow the silenced victim to reconstruct their shattered memory.

Trauma is studied not only as an individual experience but also as a collective dynamic. Whenever an individual is traumatized, their whole community is often directly or indirectly affected. Likewise, when whole communities experience an atrocious event, the trauma impacts each individual and their respective family for many generations to come, opening way to what is described as insidious trauma.

The concepts of collective trauma and insidious trauma are two important terms in trauma theory that are particularly relevant to my discussion of fragmented memory in the selected works about the armed conflicts in the Congo. For example, to make sense of what the first-person narrator is saying in Pius Ngandu Nkashama’s novel, I argue, we need to approach his speeches from the standpoint of collective and insidious trauma since, unlike the third-person narrator who introduces the reader to trauma that is triggered by a singular event in the life of the main character, the first-person narrator mimics the symptoms of collective trauma as a chronic occurrence.

The concept of insidious trauma was first developed by a feminist psychotherapist, Maria P. Root. In her study of the sociopolitical context of violence directed toward women of color, she argues that insidious trauma is “characterized by repetitive and cumulative experiences. It is perpetrated by persons who have power over one’s access to

resources and one's destiny, and directed towards persons who have a lower status on some important social variable" (Root 374). Insidious trauma, Root explains, involves several types of experiences such as "repeated oppression, violence, genocide, or femicide--both historical and contemporary" (Root 374). Unlike the effects of other types of trauma, those of the insidious trauma are not always violent; but they still have the power to threaten the well being of the victim(s). Moreover, the effects of insidious trauma are intergenerational as they can be passed down from one generation to another through stories of discrimination, photographs of horrible events or videos of atrocities (Root 374).

The concept of insidious trauma offers, for example, a useful framework for understanding the incoherent speeches of the first-person narrator in Ngandu Nkashama's novel. As one pieces together and analyzes the words of this narrator, one can perceive in them the description of some "unresolved traumatic experiences" of the Congolese people (Root 374). Throughout the novel, the first-person narrator speaks about injustices and oppressions that are not easily recognizable in the lives of Congolese. These traumatic experiences remain unrecognizable for the most part because they are socially sanctioned and deeply embedded within the Congo cultural discourse.

### **Organization**

Each of the chapters of this dissertation attempts to resolve a specific set of questions. However, before examining each text, I offer in the first chapter a political and historical analysis of the present situation. I demonstrate how the ongoing crises in eastern Congo are rooted in not only the country's long history of human exploitation and corruption but also the aftermath of the 1994 genocide in neighboring Rwanda. The first chapter, entitled "Africa will Write its Own History: The Political and Historical Context

of Congo Armed Conflicts”, describes Congo pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial history; more specifically, the roles King Leopold II’s reign of terror, the Belgian colonization, and former President Mobutu’s dictatorship have played in creating a cycle of traumatic violence and economic exploitation in the history of the Congolese society. This section also explores the specific characteristics of Congo’s present armed conflicts in order to understand why they constitute such an important topic of research.

In the second chapter, entitled “Remembering our Nightmares: Personal and Collective Trauma in Pius Ngandu Nkashama’s *En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmiers* and Mashingaidze Gomo’s *A Fine Madness*”, I analyze Pius Ngandu Nkashama’s *En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmiers* (2009) and Mashingaidze Gomo’s *A Fine Madness* (2010). The first text depicts the traumatic impact of war on the life of a child who has witnessed the killing of his entire family while the second text presents the story and the thoughts of a Zimbabwean war combatant who fought in the Congo. This chapter discusses the impact of Congo wars on people by examining specifically the multiplicity of languages, genres, and voices used in the two novels. While Mashingaidze Gomo, a former Zimbabwean air force pilot, weaves together verse and prose narratives, Pius Ngandu Nkashama, a Congolese novelist, mixes a fictional story with excerpts from news reports and documentaries; both of them allowing their readers to understand better the complex nature of war and its consequences. Both novels depict not only personal traumas but also collective ones, which are explored from a personal point of view.

The third chapter, entitled “Dance Like It’s the Ending of War: Individual and Collective Trauma in Lynn Nottage’s *Ruined* and Fabien Honoré Kabeya Mukamba’s *Anifa, ou, Meme en Enfer*”, discusses the effects of war on women by analyzing two

plays: *Ruined* (2009) by Lynn Nottage, an American playwright, and, *Anifa, ou, Môme en Enfer* (2001) by Fabien Honoré Kabeya Mukamba, a Congolese playwright. Both Nottage and Mukamba explore women's resilience in war by portraying the lives of strong female characters. Nottage's *Ruined* specifically tells the story of abused women who take refuge from violence in a bar owned by Mama Nadi, the central character. Holding a disturbing past inside her own heart, Mama Nadi receives these traumatized women and employs them as waitresses and prostitutes. To heal from their pain, these Mama Nadi's adopted "children" sing songs and recite poems. In this section, my work focuses on not only the literary depiction of the effects of trauma but also the specific narrative strategies that each playwright uses to make their respective play a tool of global and social awareness. Lynn Nottage uses in *Ruined* a frame that resembles that of a woman-centered soap opera while Fabien Mukamba uses a war story to discuss issues of gender inequality and discrimination within Congolese society.

Indeed, Mukamba's *Anifa ou Môme en Enfer* centers on the life of a woman, Anifa, who disobeys her husband's instruction and enrolls in the army to fight alongside him in a war against a foreign army that has invaded their land. Both Anifa and her husband end up being captured by their enemies but later on, thanks to Anifa's act of heroism, the national army manages to defeat the invaders and secure victory. Both *Ruined* and *Anifa ou Môme en Enfer* also depict personal and collective experiences of trauma. However, while *Ruined* describes specific heartbreaking events, *Anifa ou Môme en Enfer* represents trauma as a general, long lasting and troubling reality. This chapter ends with an examination of the literary representation of resilience and heroism as two important positive responses to traumatic experiences.

To investigate the relationship between personal testimonies and war trauma in the Congo, the fourth chapter, entitled “Collecting Stories: Testimony and Trauma in Lisa Shannon’s *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen* and Joseph Mwuantuali’s *Tell This to My Mother*”, studies two memoirs: *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen: An Ordinary Family’s Extraordinary Tale of Love, Loss, and Survival in Congo* (2015) by Lisa Shannon, an American Human Rights activist, and, *Tell This to My Mother* (2013) by Joseph E. Mwantuali, a Congolese author. This section analyzes how Shannon uses a novelistic and poetic style to describe the trauma of Congolese families and engage her readers. To understand the narrative techniques that Shannon uses in *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen*, I argue here, it is important to read it in contrast to Lisa Shannon’s preceding memoir, *A Thousand Sisters: My Journey into the Worst Place on Earth to be a Woman* (2010). The strength of Shannon’s second memoir is built on the limits and weaknesses of the first one. In *Tell This to My Mother*, Joseph Mwantuali uses similar techniques that Shannon employs in *Mama Koko*. Mwantuali’s book tells the story of Coco Ramazani, a Congolese orphan who was tricked into the rebellion in eastern Congo and faced death in military camps. To engage his readers and convince them of the importance and validity of the narrated acts, Mwantuali uses specific storytelling techniques as he recounts tragic stories of victims of sexual violence.

All these selected writers structure their texts in different ways and use different stylistic devices to convey their messages; yet, they are all driven by the same desire of breaking the silence and denouncing the absurdity and the horrors of Congo wars. Two specific themes emerge from their texts: hope and resilience. Although they face violence, poverty, and diseases on a daily basis, the people of eastern Congo continue to hope and

fight for the restoration of their dignity. The works that I analyze in this dissertation also share two common characteristics: first, they all raise public awareness about the enormity of the violence of the Congo armed conflicts by portraying traumatic events. They explore these events on both a thematic and formal level. Secondly, the selected works depict individuals who, despite their traumatic experiences, they manage to overcome them.

This dissertation breaks new ground for two main reasons. First, it focuses on psychological issues of armed conflicts in the Congo, issues often overlooked when journalists, lawmakers, activists, UN officials or state representatives discuss war in the Congo. Indeed, as Séverine Autesserre attests in *Dangerous Tales*, three main narratives characterize discussions that most intellectuals have on the Congo armed conflicts (3). First, the illegal exploitation of natural resources is often presented as the primary cause of violence. Secondly, sexual violence against women and girls is described as the main consequence of hostilities and finally, the restoration of state authority is cited as the primary solution to the conflicts. To a certain degree, the development of these three narratives has been instrumental in helping the international community not only understand some of the important challenges that Congolese face but also establish effective restorative programs. For example, after the narrative about the illegal exploitation of Congo natural resources became prominent, several western countries have implemented new laws regarding the distribution of Congo conflict minerals. All public and private companies that purchase materials from suppliers in Central Africa are now obligated to review their supply chains and insure that their minerals do not fund conflicts in eastern Congo. However, as Séverine Autesserre adds in *Dangerous Tales*, the focus on these three above-mentioned narratives has also had some negative effects since it has

obfuscated other important topics related to the consequences of Congo armed conflicts (3-4). Indeed, when authors discuss the consequences of the conflicts, they often overlook the psychological effects of hostilities. By exploring the representation of violence and trauma in my selected texts, my dissertation then makes a critical contribution to our understanding of short-term and long lasting consequences of Congo armed conflicts on civilians, especially women and children.

Secondly, my dissertation breaks fresh ground because it proposes the armed conflicts in the Congo as an important area of research on the relationship between war and trauma. Within trauma studies, a considerable number of texts focus on national and transnational events such as the slavery in the US, the Holocaust, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, WWI & WWII, the Vietnam War, the Bosnian war and genocide, the Iraq War, the Afghanistan War, the Apartheid in South Africa or the Rwandan Genocide. Incorporating more contemporary wars such as the Congo armed conflicts in trauma studies has the potential to advance the scholarship on war trauma by offering new insights and this on a region that needs much more attention.

## CHAPTER I

### AFRICA WILL WRITE ITS OWN HISTORY: THE POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF CONGO ARMED CONFLICTS

This chapter provides a political and historical context for the armed conflicts in the Congo and examines the roles played by the trio of King Leopold II, the Belgian colonization, and the dictatorship of President Mobutu. Congo armed conflicts, though having a serious political, psychological, social, economic, and environmental impact on the country, are rooted in tensions that have characterized the political history of northeastern Congo, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi since the beginning of the European occupation.<sup>14</sup> From the day the Democratic Republic of Congo became independent on June 30, 1960 to December 2010, the country has suffered from seventeen civil wars and as a result of these armed conflicts, more than four million people have died (Kisangani 2012, 1). Most analysts agree that the origins of the current crisis lie deep in the history of central Africa region and causal links are to be established between the Congo Free State, the Belgian colonial rule, Mobutu's dictatorship, and the Congo's situation at the end of the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Europeans began to take great interest in Africa between the 1400s and 1800s. During this period, they mainly set up trading posts in coastal regions. Because of the Slave Trade, they increased their involvement in the continent in the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The occupation of Congo started in the late 1870s when King Leopold II hired British adventurer Henry Morton Stanley to explore Central Africa and obtain territory for the King. Stanley traveled to the Congo and signed several treaties with local chiefs. For more details about the European occupation of Central Africa, see Lamar Middleton, *The Rape of Africa* (1936); Henry M. Stanley, *In Darkest Africa* (1907); Mia Carter and Barbara Harlow, *Archives of Empire* (2003); and Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa, 1876-1912* (1991).

<sup>15</sup> For example, Emizet Kisangani in *Civil Wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 1960-2010* (2012) and Nzongola-Ntalaja in *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People's History* (2002) highlight the long-lasting impact of the system of state-condoned exploitation of national resources that the colonial administration established. This system was passed along from King



In contextually examining Congo's colonial legacy, one can highlight some of the root causes fueling these recent armed conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo. King Leopold II, in the late 1800s, created the *Congo Free State* in the region known today as the Democratic Republic of Congo (From now on, I will refer to this country as "the Congo" to distinguish it from the Republic of Congo). Leopold II became infamous for the brutality of the regime he established throughout the land to extract and exploit both ivory and rubber. And from 1889 to 1911, Leopold II's savage exploitation, sustained by enslaved labor, executions and mutilations, cost the lives of more than eight to ten million Congolese, a death toll of "Holocaust dimensions" as Hochschild describes it in *King Leopold's Ghost* (Hochschild 3-4).

To pave the way for the creation of the Congo Free State in 1885, King Leopold II made several important moves. On September 1876, at the King's request, the *Brussels Geographic Conference* was held in Brussels. Explorers and leaders of geographical societies from France, Britain, Germany, Italy, and Austria-Hungary met for three days to discuss future European penetration and occupation of Africa. There were of course no delegates from Africa. Discussions during the conference were conducted in such a way that the European activities in Africa were legitimized and validated. Africans were said to be incapable of exploiting by themselves the resources of their lands and it was then crucial for Europeans to intervene and help develop the African continent economically. Because of its outcomes, the 1876 conference in Brussels is often considered as the

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Leopold II to the Belgian colonial administration and to the regimes of President Mobutu and Laurent-Desiré Kabila. Other causes that analysts address are: the social divisions along ethnic and regional lines, the lack of political freedom, and the weakness of the state. For a detailed discussion of the causes of the Congo armed conflicts, see Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa* (2009); Ndikumana and Kisangani, *The Economics of Civil War: The Case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo* (2005); Prunier, *Africa's World War* (2009); and Weiss, *War and Peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo* (2000).

effective beginning of the “Scramble for Africa.” At the end of the conference, the delegates decided to create the *Association Internationale Africaine* (AIA), a scientific, humanitarian, and independent organization whose mission was to advance the European exploration and abolish the Arab slave trade.

Chairing the AIA, King Leopold II sent out several expeditions to the Congo, for the most part led by the explorer Henry Morton Stanley who signed treaties with local chiefs. According to these treaties, local leaders accepted the transfer of their sovereignty to the *Association International du Congo* (AIC), another organization that King Leopold II created for the purpose of legitimizing his activities in the Congo. However, it did not take long for conflicts to arise between the Portuguese, Germans, and French over the territories claimed by King Leopold II. These conflicts were eventually resolved at the Berlin conference of 1884-1885 during which the African continent was officially divided between the European powers.<sup>16</sup>

One of the outcomes of the Berlin conference was the confirmation of King Leopold’s colony---renamed the *Congo Free State* on May 29, 1885---as a private property of the AIC; essentially allowing the vast territory of more than two million square kilometers in Central Africa to become the private possession of a single man.

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<sup>16</sup> Several scholars have highlighted the commercial nature of the Berlin conference. For example, George Shepperson observed in *The Centennial of the West African Conference of Berlin, 1884-1885* (1985) “while diplomatic in form, the conference was economic in fact” (41). The trade rules that European powers established mainly gave each country the right of free movement throughout the continent, the right to own lands and properties, the right to import goods without having to pay duty fees or transit charges. For details about all these trade rules, see *The General Act of the Berlin Conference*. For more discussion about the economic interests of the Berlin conference, see Sybil Crowe, *The Berlin West African Conference, 1884-1885* (1942); Roger Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism: The Scramble for Empire, Suez, and Decolonization* (2006); and Muriel Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa* (1999).

Commenting on King Leopold's acquisition and the deceptive nature of the name "Congo Free State," Fieldhouse wrote:

Leopold created an administrative façade in Brussels with names appropriate to a sovereign state. A flag was designed and a national anthem written. Within the Congo, there was a governor-general, but no executive or legislative council. Provincial government was based on large districts subdivided into zones, each under a European officer. Despite the administrative structure and the name, all power in the Congo remained in Leopold's own hands. Congo Free State finances were indistinguishable from his own. (Fieldhouse 357)

As he acquired the Congo, King Leopold II had one main goal: to enrich himself by exploiting the resources of the land. The *Congo Free State* was nothing but a financial investment that had to produce profits and for its owner, all possible means had to be employed to maximize the dividends. Ivory and rubber were the two main natural resources that King Leopold chose to exploit with the use of monopoly capitalism and forced labor. The King opened all the lands that lacked natural resources to free trade while he assigned his own agents to control and exploit any productive territories. Using brutality, force, intimidation, and coercion, these agents helped the King make considerable profits that surpassed all the investments made. Explaining the causes of the use of brutal methods by King Leopold's agents, Fieldhouse writes:

Only African labor could turn natural resources into profitable commodities, and Africans were reluctant to work for the low wages offered by Leopold's agents. The solution used was to impose a tax payable in labor or in renders of specified goods. This led to exceptionally brutal abuses in the Congo because no attempt was made to supervise or control subordinate European and African officials. The officials pushed and punished the native population at will and terrorized the region. Countless thousands, perhaps millions, died. Reports made by independent

foreign observers shocked international opinion, particularly in Great Britain.  
(Fieldhouse, 358)

Despite King Leopold's efforts to keep the details of his oppressive operations secret from the international community, stories about the harsh treatment of the natives began to trickle out of the Congo and eventually caused criticism and protest around the world. In the United States, several intellectuals used various tools such as personal testimonials, newspapers, journals, missionary reports, and photographs to raise awareness about King Leopold's horrible activities in the Congo and persuade the US government to intervene. For example, George Washington Williams, an American Civil War veteran, after traveling to the Congo in 1890, wrote on July 18, 1890 an open letter to King Leopold II in which he condemned the brutality of his agents. The letter entitled "An Open Letter to His Serene Majesty Leopold II, King of the Belgians and Sovereign of the Independent State of Congo" called for the creation of an International Commission to investigate the crimes committed against Congolese. Addressing the King, George Washington Williams wrote:

All the crimes perpetrated in the Congo have been done in your name, and you must answer at the bar of Public Sentiment for the misgovernment of a people, whose lives and fortunes were entrusted to you by the august Conference of Berlin, 1884—1885. I now appeal to the Powers which committed this infant State to your Majesty's charge, and to the great States which gave it international being; and whose majestic law you have scorned and trampled upon, to call and create an International Commission to investigate the charges herein preferred in the name of Humanity, Commerce, Constitutional Government and Christian Civilization.  
(Franklin 243-44)

In Europe, Edmund Dene Morel and Roger Casement are among the intellectuals who played an important role in exposing the abuses of King Leopold's ruthless regime in the Congo. They founded in Liverpool in 1903 the *Congo Reform Association*; a British organization whose primary goal was to collect evidence of atrocities in the Congo, raise awareness of the public and politicians, and put an end to King Leopold's regime. The *Congo reform Association* became so successful in opposing the Belgian King and raising people's awareness that it gained the support of several writers such as Arthur Conan Doyle, Mark Twain, Joseph Conrad, and Anatole France whose literary production contributed significantly to the cause of Morel and Casement's organization.

Joseph Conrad's 1902 novel *Heart of Darkness*, for example, is considered as one of the earliest and most notorious accounts on the "first major international atrocity scandal in the age of the telegraph and the camera" (Hochschild 4). Joseph Conrad, a retired seaman, describes the Congo's brutal destruction through the mind and eyes of his main character, Marlow, who travels on behalf of a Belgian trading company on a steamboat upstream on the Congo River to find Mr. Kurtz, a mysterious brutal ivory trader. At the end of the story, Marlow is brought face to face with human corruption as he finds Kurtz living as an insane savage in the middle of the jungle in a house surrounded by human skulls.

David Van Reybrouck, in *Congo: The Epic History of a People*, provides several personal testimonies of individuals who have experienced or witnessed the atrocities committed by King Leopold II's agents. For the author, "the Free State Administration contained out-and-out racists and sadists. Torture, abuses of power, and massacres

occurred. A person like René de Permentier, an officer in the Force Publique, reveled in completely pointless bloodbaths.” (Van Reybrouck 92)

In his own assessment of the Congo condition at the time, Robert Burroughs, in *Travel Writing and Atrocities* (2011), an important collection of texts and documents by novelists, journalists, missionaries and historians, narrates the fate of the native Congo people who fell victim to King Leopold-funded slave regimes in the *Congo Free State*. In addition to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902), some of the texts that Burroughs examines include Roger Casement’s *Congo Report* (1904) and *Diaries* (1910); E.D. Morel’s *King Leopold’s Rule in Africa* (1904) and *The Scandal of the Congo* (1904); and Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Crime of the Congo* (1909). All these texts have been instrumental in both raising awareness about human atrocities perpetrated against Congolese people and urging world leaders to take action against King Leopold’s regime.

By the beginning of 1908, the international pressure on Belgium mounted to such a degree that the king was left with no other option but to surrender the control of the Congo colony to the Belgian Parliament. On August 20, 1908, the King signed the annexation treaty with Belgium and on November 15, 1908, the Congo became a Belgian colony.

Although some of King Leopold II’s violent and brutal methods were abolished under the control of the Belgian Parliament, the economic exploitation of Congo’s resources continued.<sup>17</sup> And by the end of World War II, to solve the serious financial crisis that the war had caused, Belgium replaced the old ivory trade by a new trade in uranium, working together with the United States of America as its biggest importer. Despite all the

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<sup>17</sup> For more discussion on the nature of King Leopold’s regime and legacy, see Neal Ascherson, *The King Incorporated: Leopold II in the Age of Trusts* (1963) and Barbara Emerson, *Leopold II of the Belgians: King of Colonialism* (1979).

profits that King Leopold II and Belgium amassed from the exploitation of Congo's resources, the colony remained politically and administratively underdeveloped. The Belgian government deliberately established and promoted policies that prevented the rise of an educated Congolese leadership. By 1960, when the Congo was granted independence, very few Congolese had received any training in politics and administration. In the entire country, as Hochschild comments, "there were fewer than thirty African university graduates, no Congolese army officers, engineers, agronomists, or physicians, and of some five thousand management level positions in the civil service, only three were filled by Africans" (Hochschild 301). As a consequence, the celebration of the independence on June 30, 1960 was soon followed by five years of civil wars and political instability. This period, generally described as "the first Congo crisis," started with the mutiny of the armed forces on July 5, 1960, and ended with the military coup of former President Mobutu Sese Seko on November 24, 1965. (Nzongola-Ntalaja 95)

On June 30, 1960, diplomats and journalists came from around the world and gathered at the Palace of the Nation in the Chamber of Deputies in Leopoldville (now Kinshasa) to witness the transfer of power from Belgium to the Congo. King Baudouin made a patronizing speech in which he praised the Belgians' contributions to the Congo over the past decades. He commented that independence was the result of the work initiated by the "genius" of his great-granduncle, King Leopold II and continued by the Belgian pioneers who helped build the country and usher it into modernity. As for the King, the Congolese simply owed Belgium a debt of gratitude. Then, Joseph Kasavubu, the newly elected President, replied with a "diplomatic speech" (Van Lierde 220). However, Patrice Lumumba, the first elected Prime minister, though he was officially excluded from

the program, stood and responded to King Baudouin with an unexpected speech in which he challenged the King's paternalistic statements. In this famous speech, Lumumba denounced all the evils of colonial rule and reminded the audience that the independence was not graciously granted by Belgium but was the result of a long political fight.

Lumumba declared:

...no Congolese worthy of the name can ever forget that we fought to win it [the independence], a fight waged each and every day...The wounds that are the evidence of the fate we endured for eighty years under colonialist regime are still too fresh and painful for us to be able to erase them from our memory... (Van Lierde 221)

The King was so offended that he had to be persuaded not to return to Belgium immediately but stay and attend the other scheduled festivities. Only few days later, Lieutenant-General Emile Robert Janssens, the Belgian officer in charge of the Force Publique (the first name of the Congolese army), gathered Congolese soldiers in Léopoldville on July 5, 1960 and wrote on a blackboard, "Before independence=after independence". As for Janssens, the social and military order established under the Belgian colonial rule had to continue even under the new Congolese government (Van Lierde 229). Janssens' words offended Congolese soldiers so profoundly that they mutinied and attacked European settlers, sparking a long period of social chaos and political instability.

The chaos caused by soldiers' mutiny in Léopoldville was soon followed by Moïse Tshombe's declaration of the secession of the mineral rich province of Katanga; an important event that, due to its international ramifications, affected considerably the future of the Congo as an independent nation. Under the pretext of restoring order, the Belgian government took action and sent their troops to their former colony. They landed in Léopoldville and Elizabethville (capital of the Katanga province) on July 10, 1960, for the



declared purpose of protecting Belgian civilians, but, as Belgium openly expressed its support to Moïse Tshombé, it quickly became clear that their troops came to the Congo to safeguard Belgian economic interests in Katanga. For President Kasavubu and Prime Minister Lumumba, the Belgian intervention represented nothing but a serious infringement on the sovereignty of the newly formed nation and therefore, they immediately turned to the United Nations on July 12, 1960, to request the sending of peacekeeping troops to the Congo. With the support of the United States, the Soviet Union, and the Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld, the Security Council of the United Nations adopted on July 14, 1960 the resolution 143 (1960), by which it authorized the establishment of a peacekeeping force and called upon the Belgian government to withdraw its troops from the Congo. The UN resolution also requested the removal of all foreign mercenaries that were supporting Moïse Tshombé. The 1960 UN operation in the Congo (ONUC) became the largest and the costliest UN mission during the Cold War period.

Although the intervention of UN troops prevented the disintegration of the Congo, it created a series of complex challenges since these troops were not authorized to use force. Prime Minister Lumumba soon became disappointed by UN troops' inability to suppress the insurrection in Katanga and decided to attempt an invasion of Katanga with the help of the Soviet Union. Lumumba's decisions caused irreparable dissension within the Congo government and parliament as a large number of Congolese politicians and military officers were in favor of a political approach to the crisis. Lumumba's plans also created some uneasiness among Western leaders who did not approve of his threats of ending Katanga rebellion with the help of the Soviet Union.

As Nzongola-Ntalaja comments in *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila* (2002), Lumumba's radical and nationalist ideology was deemed a serious threat to western colonial powers. He emerged as one of the first African political leaders who denounced and opposed any forms of imperialism. After failing to invade Katanga and subdue Tshombe's rebellion, Lumumba ultimately decided to travel to the United States, hoping that he could receive military help from the American government. However, he returned to the Congo empty handed and disappointed at the United States' reluctance to provide any support to him. Before leaving Washington, Lumumba gave an interview to the Soviet Tass news agency that destroyed even further his relationship with the United States.

Lumumba said:

The Soviet Union has been the only great power which supported the Congolese people in their struggle from the beginning. I express the deepest gratitude of all our people to the Soviet Union and personally to Nikita Khrushchev for the moral support given by your country when we most needed it against the imperialists and the colonialists (Edgerton 192).

In his determination to resolve the political crisis, Lumumba eventually called the Soviet Union and requested military aid from its government. Fearful of the growing influence of the Soviet Union in Africa, western powers considered that decision as a serious threat that justified Lumumba's political and physical elimination. The conspiracy that precipitated his fall and assassination not only involved the United States (through the CIA), Belgian and UN officials, but also his Congolese political enemies, namely Joseph Kasa-vubu, Colonel Joseph Mobutu, and Moise Tshombe (Nzongola-Ntalaja 106-7).

In September 1960, upset by the actions of the Prime Minister, President Kasa-vubu dismissed Lumumba from the Congo government. The latter, with the support of the Senate, immediately opposed the President's decision and declared him deposed. As the

majority of the members of the parliament took sides with the President, two different political groups claiming legal power ruled the Congo. To put an end to this confusion, Colonel Joseph Mobutu, with the support of Belgium and the United States, decided to organize a coup d'état and removed both Kasavubu and Lumumba from power. Although Lumumba was placed under house arrest and protected by UN troops that were surrounding the Prime Minister's residence, he decided to join his supporters in Haut-Congo, a province in the northeast of the Congo, and establish a new government. Lumumba was successfully smuggled out of his residence at night and drove towards Stanleyville, the capital of Haut-Congo. Eventually, he was pursued and captured by Colonel Mobutu's soldiers in Port Francqui (the town has been renamed Ilebo) on December 1, 1960. Lumumba was flown to Léopoldville and then to the military barracks in Thysville on December 3, 1960.

Several films and documentaries have been made about the life and terrible fate of the first Prime Minister of the Congo. They all depict the physical abuses Lumumba suffered during the last days of his life from the soldiers loyal to Colonel Mobutu. On January 17, 1961, Lumumba was flown to Elizabethville so that his life could be in the hands of his greatest political enemy, the self appointed President of Katanga, Moïse Tshombe. Lumumba was accompanied by two of his former ministers, Maurice Mpolo and Joseph Okito. On the same day as they arrived in Katanga, they were beaten and tortured by both Katangan and Belgian officers. President Tshombe and his cabinet met during the day and decided on their physical elimination. At night, Lumumba and his two ministers were driven to an isolated place, lined up against a tree and shot one at a time. Their bodies

were buried on the same spot.<sup>18</sup> However, as several reports have suggested, the corpses of the three men were later on dug up and moved to another spot where two Belgian agents cut up Lumumba's body and dissolved it in acid. About the disposal of the body of Patrice Lumumba, Ludo De Witte wrote:

Lumumba, Mpolo and Okito were not to stay in their new grave in Kasenga for long. A definitive solution was planned over the next two days. Early in the afternoon of January 21, two Europeans in uniform and a few black assistants left for Kasenga in a lorry belonging to the public works department and containing road signs, geometrical instruments, two demijohns filled with sulphuric acid, an empty 200-litre petrol barrel and a hacksaw. According to Brassinne, all the equipment was provided by the public works department. According to Verscheure and Belina, the sulphuric acid came from the Union Miniere. On their arrival, they unloaded the road signs and theodolite to make passers by think that they were doing a land survey. But they could not find the grave, and had to stop searching at nightfall. Not until the evening of the next day did they find the grave and start their lugubrious task. The corpses were dug up, cut into pieces with knives and the hacksaw, then thrown into the barrel of sulphuric acid. The operation took hours and only ended the next morning, on January 23. At first the two Belgians wore masks over their mouths but took them off when they became uncomfortable. Their only protection against the stench was whiskey, so according to Brassinne, they got drunk. One of the black assistants spilt acid on his foot and burnt it badly. They discovered that they did not have enough acid and only burnt part of the bodies.

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<sup>18</sup> The location of Lumumba's death deserves special attention. Katanga has always been the wealthiest province of the Congo and even after the independence of the Congo, Belgian authorities have tried to keep control of both its administration and natural resources. Because of his anti-imperialist opinions and decisions, Lumumba soon became the enemy of Katanga's local authorities. By transferring the Prime Minister to Katanga, Congo authorities and Belgian leaders knew very well what his fate would be. The manner in which Lumumba was killed also deserves closer examination. His enemies made sure that he was killed and his body was destroyed in acid. By performing this act in secret, they prevented Lumumba from having a burial place. And in the absence of a burial place, there is no possibility of organizing a memorial. Lumumba's murderers committed then more than a murder. They skillfully tried to manipulate the history of both the country and the person of Lumumba.

According to Verscheure, the skulls were ground up, and the bones and teeth (that neither acid nor fire can destroy) were scattered on the way back. The same occurred with the ashes. Nothing was left of the three nationalist leaders; nowhere could their remains, even the most minute traces of them, be found. (Ludo De Witte 141)

It took several decades for Belgium to acknowledge its responsibility in the physical elimination of Lumumba. In February 2002, the Belgian government, admitted to a “moral responsibility,” and officially offered its apologies to the Congolese people. However, it is worth noting that the assassination of Lumumba and the horrible disposal of his body are historically significant in that they forcefully exemplify the savagery and hypocrisy of Western imperialism. They clearly illustrate the extent to which imperialist forces can go to prevent African nations from controlling and profiting from their own national resources.

Patrice Lumumba’s death on January 17, 1961, remains one of the most tragic events that occurred during this period of political instability<sup>19</sup>. Because of the significance of his ideas and the historical importance of his physical elimination, Ludo De Witte, author of one of the well-researched books on Lumumba’s assassination, qualifies it as “one of the twentieth century’s most important political assassinations” (De Witte xviii). His assassination was so tragic that several nations around the world, following its announcement by the Katangan Government, mourned the loss of the Congolese leader. On February 14, 1961, The Ghanaian President, Kwame Nkrumah, broadcast these words to his people:

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<sup>19</sup> Patrice Kanza’s *Conflict in the Congo: The Rise and Fall of Lumumba* (1972) offers a clear analysis of the significance of Lumumba’s short career as prime minister of the new Republic of the Congo. It is important to note that the author worked as Lumumba’s minister for UN affairs.

Somewhere in Katanga in the Congo---where and when we do not know---three of our brother freedom fighters have been done to death...About their end many things are uncertain, but one fact is crystal clear. They have been killed because the United Nations...not only failed to maintain that law and order, but also denied to the lawful Government of the Congo all other means of self-protection...The time has come to speak plainly. The danger in the Congo is not so much the possibility of a civil war between Africans but rather a colonialist war in which the colonial and imperialist powers hide behind African puppet regimes... (Nkrumah 129-31).

A week after the announcement of Lumumba's death, Frantz Fanon released a eulogy in *Afrique Action* entitled "The Death of Lumumba: Could We (Africans) Have Done Otherwise?" Fanon answers positively to this question, arguing that African nations should have come directly to the rescue of the first prime minister of the Congo instead of "agreeing to send their troops under the guise of the UN". As for the author, these African nations have suffered a "historic moral defeat" since, although they were armed with weapons; they remained passive when the Congo state collapsed before their very eyes and Lumumba was condemned to death (Fanon 222).

Few days before his assassination, Lumumba brilliantly summarized his revolutionary ideas in a letter he wrote to his wife, a letter that Ludo De Witte describes as Lumumba's political testament. Lumumba wrote:

...I have never doubted for a single instant that the sacred cause to which my comrades and I have dedicated our entire lives would triumph in the end. But what we wanted for our country---its right to an honorable life, to perfect dignity, to independence with no restrictions---was never wanted by Belgian colonialism and its Western allies, who found direct and indirect, intentional and unintentional support among certain senior officials of the United Nations, that body in which we placed all our trust when we called on it for help... (De Witte 184).

Several other historical texts reflect on the legacy of Lumumba and the impact of his assassination on African politics. As Carina Yervasi observes in *Belgium and its Colonies*, many historians and political analysts admit that his assassination constitutes “the event that has most profoundly affected post-independent Africa and led to violence and upheaval in Congo” (Yervasi, 38). The impact of Lumumba’s life, work and death has also been the subject of several literary works and films, including Césaire’s play *A Season in Congo*, Ronan Bennett’s novel *The Catastrophist*, Barbara Kingsolver’s novel *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998), Canel Fausto’s film *El Congo* (1961), and Raoul Peck’s films *Lumumba: La mort du Prophète* (1992) and *Lumumba* (2000).<sup>20</sup>

In all these materials, Lumumba is portrayed as a nationalist and charismatic leader whose ideas and decisions were not well understood and accepted by most of his contemporaries. In Césaire’s play, for example, Lumumba, as a Christ-like figure dies like a martyr, assassinated by forces of evil that cannot stand his nationalist vision on the Congo and Africa. And, both Peck’s films describe Lumumba as falsely accused as a “communist” and “a puppet of Russia,” an accusation that justified his US-backed assassination. Although these films do not detail the economic and political factors that precipitated the post-independence chaos in Congo, they still illustrate, through the assassination of Lumumba, the impact of the colonial legacy of human exploitation.

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<sup>20</sup> Raoul Peck’s films offer great insights into the scale of the tragedy of Lumumba’s political and physical elimination. The first film, *Lumumba: La mort du Prophète* (1992) weaves together autobiographical and historical materials. In the film, Peck incorporates family photos, personal testimonies and anecdotes, allowing viewers to understand the history of Lumumba’s life and career from multiple angles. The second film, *Lumumba* (2000), focuses on Lumumba’s final months and attempts to restore the contested history of the Congolese leader. It is important to note that, although he was born in Haiti, Peck has lived and studied in the Congo for more than 20 years. His family joined their father, Hebert Peck, who worked at that time in the Congo as professor of agriculture. For more discussion on Peck’s films, see Burlin Barr, *Raoul Peck’s ‘Lumumba’ and ‘Lumumba: La Mort du Prophète’: On Cultural Amnesia and Historical Erasure* (2011).

Peace and order were not restored after Lumumba's assassination. On the contrary, the Congo endured five years of political chaos characterized by secessions, rebellions, and civil wars. From January 1960 until November 1965, Kasavubu was able to rule again as President while several short-lived governments took over in quick succession. Moise Tshombe, after ending the Katanga secession in January 1963, was among those who became Prime Minister during this period of instability.

In 1964, Pierre Mulele started another rebellion in Haut-Congo that caused turmoil and chaos all over the Congo. Within a short amount of time, his forces were successful in occupying two thirds of the country. It took almost a year for the Congolese army, led by Joseph Mobutu, to reconquer the entire territory. In the meantime, in the capital of the country, politicians were once again divided between two groups that claimed legal power. Although Moise Tshombe, leading the "Congolese National Convention," won a large majority in the March 1965 elections, President Kasavubu decided to appoint as prime minister one of Tshombe's political enemies, Evariste Kimba. After the Congo Parliament twice refused to validate Kimba's appointment, the Congo government was again paralyzed. Under the pretext of putting an end to the political confusion and restoring order, General Joseph Mobutu, with the support of his officers, decided to seize power on November 24, 1965.

However, the legacy of oppression and human exploitation that had always characterized all political institutions in the Congo also affected the dictatorial regime of President Joseph Mobutu who, together with his family members and ministers, capitalized on the resources of the Congo and increased their own personal wealth while the majority of the population remained poor. Once he came to power in 1965 and assumed the



presidency, Mobutu proclaimed sole political power for five years and promised to surrender it to civilians after unity and peace have been restored across the country. However, he quickly abolished all existing institutions, put an end to all political movements in an attempt to eliminate all potential political opponents and established a single political party, the “Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution” (MPR), making membership obligatory for all citizens. Several former political leaders, including the former President Kasavubu, were incarcerated and sent into internal exile and restricted within their home villages. All social, professional and youth organizations were also replaced by a single MPR-controlled organization while the Church, universities and the press were also subjected to the control of the Head of State. And, to dissuade any Lumumba’s disciples from opposing his regime and persuade the international community that he was not involved in the assassination of the former Prime Minister, Mobutu ironically proclaimed Patrice Lumumba as the first national hero of the Congo.

The “Pentecost Hanging” or “Pentecost Plot” remains one of the most important historical events of this early period of Mobutu’s oppressive rule. Only six months after his coup, Mobutu ordered the public execution in Kinshasa of Evariste Kimba, Emmanuel Bamba, Jerome Anany and Alexandre Mahamba; four politicians from the civil war years, accused of plotting a coup against the new regime. Interestingly, the four plotters were all former ministers in Patrice Lumumba’s government. At the time of Mobutu’s coup, Kimba was the prime minister of the government and Anany the defense minister. To ensure that the largest possible crowd witness the executions of these four men, the government declared a holiday and invited people over the radio to attend both their trial and hanging in a public square at the center of Kinshasa. Through this event, Mobutu reinforced his

authoritarian message and demonstrated his intention of establishing an autocratic regime that would strike without mercy at all those who seek to overthrow it. This is how Mobutu justified the executions:

One had to strike through a spectacular example, and create the conditions of regime discipline. When a chief takes a decision, he decides---period. I have decided, in the name of the high command, that we will be in power for five years--full stop. A group of politicians therefore has no business playing the game of the financiers to provoke further disorders and troubles in the country... (Young and Turner 57)

Power consolidation required not only the physical elimination of all potential critics of the regime but also the total control of both media and people's civil and political life. No free and democratic elections were organized throughout the reign of Mobutu.<sup>21</sup> Whenever some forms of national elections were held, Mobutu was the only presidential candidate that the people had to choose. And to further consolidate his power throughout the years, President Mobutu established an impressive well-orchestrated cult of his personality with a large number of intelligence services devoted to controlling people's allegiance to him. Mobutu gave himself several titles that were repeated daily on radio and television. He was hailed as "The Father of the Nation," "The Helmsman," "The Enlightened Guide," "The Guide of the revolution," "The Founding Father," "The Messiah," "The Supreme Combatant," "The Savior of the People," "The Peacemaker," "The Guarantee of Unity,"

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<sup>21</sup> The regime occasionally organized presidential elections to give the impression that Mobutu was legitimately chosen to lead the country. During all these elections, Mobutu was the only candidate because no political opponent was allowed to run for the President's office. At the polling station, voters were presented a green and a red card. The green card was said to symbolize Mobutu's candidacy and the red one was said to be an image of blood and chaos that will occur if people do not choose the green card. The results of these elections were always identical: Mobutu always won with 99.99% of the vote. For more details about Mobutu's handling of personal liberties, see Ghislain Kabwit, *The Roots of the Continuing Crisis* (1979) and Mabiengwa Emmanuel Naniuzeyi, *The State of the State in Congo-Zaire: A Survey of the Mobutu Regime* (1999).

and “The Reconciler.” Almost everyday, a photograph of Mobutu was at the front page of any newspapers or magazines that dedicated several pages of their daily or weekly releases to the “exploits” of the “Guide” whose portrait was placed in all public places and offices. Large music and dance groups were created for the only purpose of praising Mobutu in popular meetings that were often organized all over the country in honor of his name. In all schools, the first fifteen minutes were dedicated to singing the various titles and names of Mobutu and huge demonstrations, known as “marches de soutien,” were held simultaneously in all major cities each time Mobutu made an important speech, presented a new project or returned from an important foreign trip. Mobutu’s cult of personality rose to such heights that, on several occasions, the official media were instructed not to mention any other name except Mobutu. Any other public figures had to be referred to only by their titles (Young and Turner 169).

During his regime, Mobutu made several political and economic decisions that profoundly impacted the lives of millions of Congolese for several decades. In an effort to rid the country of all traces of colonialism, stop the growing influence of Western culture, and create a strong national identity, Mobutu established in April 1971 the doctrine of “authenticity” which served as the centerpiece of state ideology (Young and Turner 65). Presenting the new doctrine as the ultimate key to “mental decolonization” and “cultural disalienation,” the regime ordered the elimination of Christian and European names (Mobutu renounced “Joseph-Désiré” and renamed himself “Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Zabanga” meaning “the all-powerful warrior who will go from conquest to conquest, leaving fire in his wake”), the change of the country’s name from Democratic Republic of Congo to Republic of Zaire on October 27, 1971, and the banning of western

attire and ties (men were forced to wear an “abacos” (shorthand for “à bas le costume”--- “down with the suit”).

Soon, authenticity was followed on November 30, 1973, by "Zairianization," a program that caused the economic decline of Mobutu's regime since it consisted in an obscene confiscation and expropriation of all businesses and factories belonging to foreigners. By this time, the majority of businesses, farms, plantations and factories across the country were owned and managed by Belgian, French, Portuguese, Italian, Greek, Jewish, Indian and Pakistani traders who, for the most part, came to the Congo (called *Zaire* during this period) since the early colonial period. The expropriated businesses were handed over to politically selected Zairians (described as ‘sons of the country’) who had no prior experience in the management of the businesses they inherited.

As might have been expected, within months, some of these businesses collapsed as their new owners and managers, scrambling for freebies, failed to re-invest part of the profits into their businesses. As Michela Wrong describes it, as soon as the former expatriate managers left, the new Zairian owners “pocketed savings, sold herds, dumped equipment on local markets and ripped up bushes. The proceeds were spent on luxury items, with imports of Mercedes-Benz hitting an African record one year after Zairianization. Ordinary Zairians, supposed beneficiaries of the process, watched in shock as businesses closed, prices rose, jobs were doled out by new bosses on purely nepotistic lines, and shelves emptied” (Wrong 93).

By the end of the 70s, because of the disastrous consequences of Zairianization and other political and economic policies that followed, the country's economy was brought to its knees. Surprisingly, the more the economy decayed, the richer President Mobutu and

state officials became. For three decades, most of Congo's resources and wealth were simply siphoned off to Mobutu, his family and top leaders. Toward the end of his reign, Mobutu's personal fortune was estimated at several billion dollars, almost equivalent to the country's foreign debt.

Most of Mobutu's wealth was deposited in several Swiss bank accounts. However, soon after the dictator's death, all these accounts were frozen, creating a series of complex legal problems. But in 1997, the Congo government took action and requested legal assistance from Switzerland to trace and return all Mobutu's money. For the government of the Congo, since Mobutu's fortune has been gained illegally, all his money in Swiss banks belonged to the Congo and Switzerland had the moral and legal responsibility of returning it to the Congolese people. Despite the claims of the Congo government, Swiss authorities decided to keep all accounts frozen until July 2009 when they agreed to unblock them and hand over all the assets to Mobutu's heirs. The decision of the Swiss government has raised important questions regarding the role Switzerland has played in facilitating the illegal exploitation of resources of African countries.

The kleptocratic nature of Mobutu's regime has been the subject of many books and films. *Mobutu, King of Zaire* (1999) by Thierry Michel is probably the work that has attracted the greatest public attention. In his three-part documentary, Thierry Michel, reflecting on the history of the Congo, details the causes and consequences of Congo's economic collapse. Mobutu is depicted as one of the most corrupt leaders the world has ever known, a greedy dictator who has capitalized on his country's resources to increase his personal fortune.

Despite his mismanagement of the resources of the state, Mobutu managed to remain in power for more than a quarter of a century (November 24, 1965---May 17, 1997) thanks to not only the use of his power and wealth to control or eliminate all potential opponents but also “the external sponsorship and backing by the United States and its Western allies”<sup>22</sup> (Nzongola-Ntalaja 141).

The longevity of Mobutu’s regime can also be attributed to his cleverly orchestrated appropriation of Congo traditions, rites and customs. During his reign, Mobutu made sure that all village chiefs became his close allies, with the expectation that they would offer and use their ancestral powers to help him rise and remain in power. After the fall of Mobutu, several of his former ministers and advisers made some revelations about his use of ancestral rites to ensure the longevity of his power. Sakombi Inongo, his former minister of media and communication who designed most of the propaganda graphics and videos, describes in Thierry Michel’s three-part documentary how Mobutu used to not only drink human blood but also have sexual intercourses with all his collaborators’ wives so as to increase his personal strength, influence and power.

The crises of governance during Mobutu’s reign have left a profound mark on not only the Congolese political history and economy but also literature. Congolese writers have played an important role in the political evolution of the country, particularly in denouncing the mismanagement of political power and national resources. Although the

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<sup>22</sup> Michael G. Schatzberg’s *Mobutu or Chaos? : The United States and Zaire, 1960-1990* (1991) and Sean K. Kelly’s *America’s Tyrant: The CIA and Mobutu of Zaire* (1993) are two books that offer clear insights into the roles played by the US government in the longevity of Mobutu’s regime. Both authors specifically highlight the roles played by the CIA. The intelligence agency was able to influence events in the Congo because it conducted much of the US foreign policy in the 60s and 70s.

Congo's governance conditions have determined the literary production, most writers have nevertheless resisted oppression and injustice with courage and determination.

It is important to know that during Mobutu's authoritarian regime, art, music and literature were considered important tools of political control. Consequently, any artistic productions and expressions were closely controlled by the state. Drama, for example, was specifically used as a popular tool of political mobilization. Though several texts from this period were simply instruments of propaganda for the regime, a great number of works were more engaged in the denunciation of the political corruption of Mobutu's regime. Therefore, most of the writers who boldly criticized the regime had to live and work in exile.

Mikanza Mobyem's *La Bataille de Kamanyola* (1976) is considered in the Congo as one of the first literary propaganda text. Written when the regime was promoting the doctrine of 'recours à l'authenticité,' the play seeks to portray Mobutu as the only chosen leader of the people. *La Bataille de Kamanyola* centers on a series of rebellions raging in eastern Congo and the victory the army eventually has over the rebels thanks to the personal involvement of the Commander in Chief Mobutu. In the play, a group of army soldiers are holding their positions at the bridge of Kamanyola for three weeks against an invisible enemy. After a while, all the soldiers and their officers are so terrified by the supernatural powers of the enemy that they call their military headquarters for help and reinforcements. Mobutu himself comes to the rescue of his troops and leads them to a great victory. The invisible enemy that Mobyem describes in *La Bataille de Kamanyola* are simply the *Simbas*, a group of fighters who still dwell in forests in eastern Congo and claim

that, because of their magical powers, they cannot succumb to bullets. In his fear, one of the soldiers of the national army in the play confesses:

Jamais vous n'en voyez un et pourtant ils sont partout. Ils sont invisibles mais là ils usent des fétiches: il suffit de pousser le cri....Et ils deviennent invisibles ou alors si on le voit, les balles glissent sur leur corps comme l'eau sur les plumes d'un canard. (24)

You will never see one of them and yet, they are everywhere. They are invisible because they use magic: you just have to release a shout... They become invisible and when we see them, bullets slide on their bodies like water does on the feathers of a duck.<sup>23</sup>

Mobutu is the only character in the play who does not fear the magical powers of the Simbas. When he arrives at the battle field, Mobutu encourages his troops and eventually kills the leader of the Simbas, a 'feticheur' who was thought to be undefeatable. By defeating the feticheur in the play, Mobutu emerges as a leader whose supernatural powers are greater than those of the enemy.

Unlike Mobyem and other writers who used their works to reinforce Mobutu's position as "the savior of the people," many other novelists, poets and dramatists have reflected on the excesses of the regime. Within the second group, Valentin Yves Mudimbe (who prefers the use of the initials "V.Y." or "V-Y" instead of the first name "Valentin Yves") is regarded as one of the first Congolese writers who courageously opposed Mobutu's regime by rejecting all the favors the dictator offered to him. In 1980, Mudimbe was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to teach in the United States and while he was abroad, Mobutu appointed him to a position in the Central Committee of the MPR. Through this appointment, Mobutu strategically hoped to legitimize his regime by co-opting the famous

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<sup>23</sup> All translations in the dissertation are my own unless otherwise noted.



writer into his political system. Being aware of Mobutu's methods of controlling the Congo intellectual class, Mudimbe refused to return to his country.

A great number of questions that Mudimbe raises in his fictional works are all related to the tensions and contradictions that have characterized the history of the Congo for more than a century. These tensions, as Mudimbe demonstrates in his novels, are rooted in the various crises that challenge the existence of the individual. For example, about his preference of the initials "V.Y." over the first name "Valentin Yves", Mudimbe stated:

The Usage of "V.Y." is a very practical one and reflects a political decision. In the early seventies Mr. Mobutu, in Zaire, in the name of authenticity, decided that all Zairean people were obliged to change their so-called European names to African names. That was very problematic for a number of people and as far as I was concerned, I looked for two names, two African names, beginning with "V. Y." I had published a number of books before that date and I didn't want to get new names which would complicate my own business and my own publications (...)  
This means that, depending on periods, on some of my documents I am "Valentin Yves" and on others "Vumbi Yoka." I decided that the easiest way of solving that problem, that tension between having two sets of first names, was to start using initials. (Desai 932)

In his novels, Mudimbe, using war as a central topic, criticized the damaging aspects of Mobutu's political policies. Mudimbe published *Entre les Eaux* (1973), translated as *Between Tides*; *Le Bel Immonde* (1976) or *Before the Birth of the Moon* in the English version; *L'Ecart* (1979), rendered in English as *The Rift*; and *Shaba Deux* (1989).

Although these novels address different topics, they share a common characteristic: they end in an impasse. In *Entre les Eaux* (1973) for example, the central character, Pierre Landu, decides to leave the church monastery and join maoist rebels in the jungle who are

fighting against the established regime. At the end of the story, Pierre Landu loses his faith in both God and the revolution. *Le Bel Imonde* (1976), telling a similar story, recounts a love affair between a government minister and a young woman whose father is fighting in rebellion against the regime. The novel does not close with a liberatory conclusion. On the contrary, corruption, greed, and the civil war manage to bring the minister's love affair to an end. In *Shaba Deux*, Mudimbe evokes an important event that marked the history of the Congo: the Shaba war that occurred from 28 May until 29 June 1978. The author describes his own text as "le roman des sans-pouvoir et des saints (qui) fait la nique à l'histoire des puissants et à l'immodestie diabolique des politiques (Shaba 10).

Both *Shaba Deux* and *Entre les Eaux* center on the relationship between the Church and the State. The two main characters in both novels, Pierre Landu and Mère Marie-Gertrude, come to doubt about the significance of the roles both institutions are playing in peoples' lives. The crises that both the priest and the nun are going through in their lives are those of the Congolese intellectual. Pierre Landu and Soeur Marie-Gertrude are questioning the ability of the church of providing satisfying answers to people's needs. It is important to remember here that, in the history of the Congo, the Church has always has a problematic relationship with the state because of the control it had over people's lives. From the period of King Leopold's regime in the Congo until now, the Congo Church has been a source of contradictions. For example, defending the Belgian King's regime, Victor Roelens, a Belgian Catholic missionary declared:

C'est au nom de la justice et de la Véritable humanité que nous, missionnaires belges, nous tenons à protester contre ces attaques dirigées contre Sa Majesté notre Roi et contre nos compatriots, attaques que nous croyons sans fondement sérieux...J'ai parcouru la partie de L'Etat du Congo qui s'étend du Tanganyika à

Stanleyville...J'ai trouvé partout l'ordre, la paix, la sécurité, l'abondance et la joie...En ma qualité de missionnaire, ayant à coeur la moralisation et le relèvement de la race noire, je ne puis qu'approuver tout règlement qui impose aux noirs un travail raisonnable...Sans le travail, le noir restera éternellement plongé dans la misère, le vice et la barbarie. C'est un enfant qu'il faut éduquer... (Marchal, E.D. Morel contre Léopold II, 268)

In the name of justice and True humanity, we, Belgian missionaries, we want to protest against these attacks against His Majesty our King and against our compatriots. We believe that these attacks have no valid foundation ... I have travelled across the Congo, going from Tanganyika to Stanleyville ... I have found everywhere order, peace, safety, abundance and joy... As a missionary, having at heart the moralization and the restoration of the black race, I can only approve any regulation that requires black people to perform a reasonable work ... Without work, the black person will remain eternally plunged into poverty, vice and barbarism. He is a child that needs to be educated...

During the period of colonization in particular, Belgian priests had an incredible influence on the lives of people. Unlike French colonies where State and Church were two separate institutions, Belgian colonies experienced a totally different situation. The Belgian State ruled through the Church. On the day of the independence of the Congo for example, there were six hundreds Congolese priests and one bishop but only fifteen university graduates.

Mudimbe's novels reflect not only on these contradictions about the relationships between Church and State but also on the nature of the impasse that the African individual has come to face because of the inability of their leaders to fulfill their responsibilities. Confronting historical and political events that have brought the Congolese nation to its knees, the author denounces the vices that are paralyzing Mobutu's regime.

It is important to understand that, by the beginning of the 80s, the period when the Zairian economy was sharply collapsing, most literary works no longer praised Mobutu but instead denounced the negative aspects of his rule. Congo's world of political and social corruption has been the basis of several works. Here, I would like to focus on the literary production of Sony Labou Tansi, one of the most famous Congolese writers who addressed the themes of oppression, armed conflicts, and the consequences of armed conflicts.

Sony Labou Tansi was born to a Zairian father and a Congolese mother on July 5, 1947 in Kimwanza, a territory close to Kinshasa (called Leopoldville at that time), the capital of the Congo. He moved to Brazzaville at the age of twelve, completed his education, worked first as a French and English teacher, then as an administrator for the government, and finally dedicated all his time to writing and to the theater. In 1979, he founded his own theater company called The Ricardo Zulu. He is the author of *Poèmes et Vents Lisses*, a group of poems published in 1995; and also of several novels including *La vie et Demie* (1979), *L'Etat Honteux* (1981), *Les sept solitudes de Lorsa Lopez* (1985), and *Le commencement des Douleurs* (1995). He also published several successful plays including *Conscience de tracteur* (1979), *La Parenthèse de Sang* (1981), *Je Soussigné Cardiaque* (1981) and *Antoine m'a Vendu son Destin* (1986).

Because of the nature of his works that mainly criticized the dictatorship in Africa, Labou Tansi soon became an enemy to the state and was several times detained and imprisoned. In *La Parenthèse de Sang* and *Je Soussigné Cardiaque*, Labou Tansi tackles the oppression caused by post-independence African authoritarian leaders (they are military for the most part) who mercilessly torture innocent individuals and violate human rights. In the first play, Sergeant Chavacha orders his soldiers to kill several family

members of a rebel named Libertashio. Martial, the nephew of the rebel, is tortured and cut piece by piece while the rest of the family is sentenced to death. The play depicts a system in which power is used, not to serve others, but to oppress and torture innocent people.

This very same system of exploitation and corruption that facilitated the longevity of Mobutu's regime contributed also to his collapse. As Nzongola-Ntalaja comments, the end of this regime "was due in large part to the increasingly corrupt mode of governance by the president and his large entourage of relatives, senior aides and political associates, plus cabinet ministers and managers of state enterprises" (Nzongola-Ntalaja 142). The more Mobutu and his advisers became wealthy the more distant they became from the people, causing the vast majority of the population to seek an alternative.

The destabilization of President Mobutu Sese Seko's corrupt regime was accelerated by the chaos that followed the 1994 Rwandan genocide. For about 100 days, the Hutu-dominated government forces organized the massacre of about a million Tutsi and moderate Hutu and following the counter-offensive of the Tutsi-dominated rebel group, led by the current Rwandan President Kagame, more than one million Hutu Rwandan refugees fled to camps in the northeastern region of the Congo (then Zaire). The presence of Hutu soldiers and militiamen (known as ex-FAR) among the civilian refugees caused increased instability in this region as Hutu soldiers kept using refugees camps in the Congo as military bases for launching attacks against Rwanda. In *Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe*, Gérard Prunier examines the complex and tragic consequences of the Rwanda Holocaust not only for the Congo but also for the whole central Africa and demonstrates how "the Rwandese genocide and its consequences did not cause the implosion of the Congo basin and its

periphery” but “acted as a catalyst, precipitating a crisis that had been latent for a good many years and that later reached far beyond its original Great Lakes locus...The Rwandese genocide has been both a product and a further cause of an enormous African crisis: its very occurrence was a symptom, its nontreatment spread the disease” (Prunier 2009, xxxi).

Indeed, toward the end of 1996, growing ethnic tensions along the Congo border paved the way to the First Congo War. Determined to put an end to the Hutu militias’ attacks on their territory and destabilize Mobutu’s armed forces that tacitly supported these ex-FAR, the Rwandan and Ugandan governments militarily equipped and backed an alliance of Congolese parties known as the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo (AFDL), led by Laurent-Désiré Kabila. Weakened by decades of corrupt rule, the Congo’s armed forces were unable to stop all the attacks of the AFDL forces and in May 1997, President Mobutu, crippled by his old age and a terminal prostate cancer, had to flee the country.

Laurent-Desiré Kabila’s rule did not last long before war broke out again in August 1998. After only few months in power and following his refusal to allow UN investigators into the country, Kabila not only alienated the United Nations and Western countries but also his former supporters, the Rwandan and Ugandan governments. The second Congo War, also called the “Great War of Africa” or “Africa’s World War” (August 1998-December 2002), started with the Rwandan-Ugandan joint invasion of eastern Congo and the intervention of several African states that came to the rescue of Laurent-Desiré Kabila’s regime. Toward the middle of 1999, the international community put pressure on all parties in the war to end the hostilities and sign the Lusaka Peace Accord (also known

as the Lusaka Cease-fire Agreement). Despite the signing of this peace treaty and the organization of an Inter-Congolese Dialogue, violence continued in various parts of the country, as some parties involved in the peace negotiations did not fully agree to end all the hostilities. The end of the second war was facilitated by the assassination of President Laurent-Desiré Kabila in January 2001, the installation of his son, Joseph Kabila, as the Congo's new President and the signing of the Global and All-Inclusive Agreement on the Transition in the Congo (also known as Pretoria II), a peace accord between the Congo government, civil society, the political opposition and former rebel groups.

The assassination of Laurent Kabila remains one of the great mysteries of recent Congolese history. What is known is that on the day he was killed, President Kabila was talking with Emile Mota, his health adviser, when his bodyguard Rashidi Kasereka asked for permission to speak to the Head of State. Acting like he wanted to whisper some words into the President's ear, he pulled out his gun and fired several shots into Kabila's body. He quickly ran out of the room and was presumably shot dead outside by another bodyguard. The death of the main witness to the murder has made it almost impossible to know the exact truth about the person (or the people) who plotted against President Kabila. By the time of his death, Kabila had so many enemies that several theories have been advanced regarding his assassination. Some fingers have been pointing at Kabila's *kadogos* (child soldiers) while other people have simply suspected Angola or Rwanda to be behind the terrible assassination.

Taking power at the young age of 29 years old, Laurent-Desiré Kabila's son, Joseph Kabila, quickly made treaties with Congo's neighbors and submitted to power-sharing agreements that Pretoria II established. Unlike his father, he agreed to share his

power with the political opposition and former rebel leaders, creating a new transitional government led by four vice-presidents. Despite his diplomatic intentions towards Congo's neighbors, Joseph Kabila has nevertheless perpetuated his father's corrupt and dictatorial system of governance, causing the northeastern regions of the Congo to remain largely unstable. Several armed groups have continued to fight throughout the past years.

The third period of Congo armed conflicts includes then all the hostilities that have occurred since December 2002---and are still occurring--- despite the signing of peace treaties, the installation of new members of parliament, and the organization of presidential elections in 2006 and 2011. This period is particularly marked by the brutal attack on the city of Goma (in Eastern Congo) in October 2008 by a new militia group, the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP), led by a former general, Laurent Nkunda.

Several striking aspects of the Congo armed conflicts have been the topics of discussion of scholars, political analysts and journalists.<sup>24</sup> One of these aspects is related to the complex and confusing nature of these wars. Many different factions have been fighting with so many different motives that defining these conflicts has not been an easy task. They have been labeled as civil wars, rebellions, insurrections, invasions, mutinies, ethnic wars, international wars, resource wars, acts of self-defense etc. Jason Stearns comments in *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters* that “from the outside, the war seems to

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<sup>24</sup> Several journalists have written important articles on the main characteristics of the Congo armed conflicts. These following articles deserve particular attention: Owen Jones criticizes the indifference and irresponsibility of the international community in *Let's Be Honest. We Ignore Congo's Atrocities Because It's in Africa* (The Guardian 6 March 2015), Vava Tampa examines the same issue in *Why the World is Ignoring Congo War* (CNN 27 November 2012), and Jeffrey Gettleman discusses the consequences of sexual violence in *Rape Epidemic Raises Trauma of Congo War* (The New York Times 7 October 2007). Among Congolese journalists, the work of Chouchou Namegabe deserves special examination. In 2011, she analyzed the nature of sexual violence in the Congo in *In Congo, No Words to Describe the Atrocities* (PBS 13 September 2011).



possess no overarching narrative or ideology to explain it, no easy tribal conflict or socialist revolution to use as a peg in a news piece... It is a war of the ordinary person, with many combatants unknown and unnamed, who fight for complex reasons that are difficult to distill in a few sentences.” Stearns adds that “the conflict is a conceptual mess that eludes simple definition, with many interlocking narrative strands” (Stearns 2011, 5).

Since the beginning of the second war for example, the Congo government has always refused to refer to these conflicts as a civil war; preferring to describe them as “invasion wars” to highlight their external causes. Many political scientists define “civil war” as an internal war or a domestic armed conflict between at least two groups (Levy and Thompson 2010, 5) and for many analysts, labeling the Congo armed conflicts as civil wars does not help one fully realize the local, regional and international dimensions of hostilities.

The complexity of the causes of these conflicts is also an important aspect that has been of great interest to scholars and analysts. They all recognize that a single reason cannot provide a valid explanation of wars in the Congo. Nest, Grignon and Kisangani observes in *The Democratic Republic of Congo: Economic Dimensions of War and Peace* that, the causes of the Congo wars include regime survival, “ethnicized” political violence, the weakness of the DRC state, disputes over citizenship and various actors’ economic interests. (Nest, Grignon and Kisangani 2006, 12-13). As for John F. Clark, he identifies in *The African Stakes of the Congo War* three reasons that account for the occurrence of the Congo wars. Conflicts in the Congo, he comments, are first “an issue of state collapse, succeeded by a scramble of unscrupulous neighbors for the lush spoils left unguarded and unclaimed.” (Clark 2002, 2) The second reason Clark brings up as an additional cause of

Congo wars is related to globalization or the recent changes in international policies. Globalization, Clark explains, has made it easy for corporations of the developed world to conduct business in Sub-Saharan Africa with nonstate actors (including warlords) and consequently, new forms of warmaking have accelerated the collapse of state. The last reason concerns external interventions as most armed groups in the Congo, especially rebel factions, are the creation of outside interveners (Clark 2002, 3-4).

Another striking aspect of the Congo armed conflicts is concerned with the nature of violence. Hostilities are accompanied by severe forms of Human Rights violations such as the use of cannibalism, forced labor and the enlistment of child soldiers. The various armed groups involved in the conflicts use forced labor to achieve commercial plans as they turn local population into slave workers to undertake the illegal exploitation of Congo's mineral resources. Ituri, a region in Northeastern Congo, has been the symbol of this pillage of the Congo. The war in the region has centered not only on the ethnic conflict between Hema and Lendu, but also on the control of diamond, gold and coltan.

Combatant forces engaged in the hostilities also use rape, sexual slavery, genital mutilations, and forced incest as weapons of war. In March 2010, Human Rights Watch released a report on the atrocities in the Congo entitled "*Trail of Death: LRA Atrocities in Northeastern Congo.*" The report revealed that "in a well-planned operation, the LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) killed more than 321 civilians and abducted more than 250 others, including at least 80 children. The vast majority of those killed were adult men who were first tied up before LRA combatants hacked them to death with machetes or crushed their skulls with axes or heavy wooden sticks. Family members and local authorities later found battered bodies tied to trees; other bodies were found in the forest or brush land all

along the 105-kilometer round journey made by the LRA group during the operation...” (HRW 2010). Most of these atrocities are rooted not only in hatred and mistrust that now characterize the relationships between various ethnic groups but also in some traditional practices. Vital organs, for example, are often cut off and used as magic charms and children are boiled alive and eaten so as to presumably increase fighters’ supernatural powers.

Scholars and analysts, interested in Congo armed conflicts, have also examined the striking paradox between the size of the United Nations peacekeeping mission to the Congo (or MONUSCO---formerly known as MONUC) and its failure to protect the population and keep peace at certain dramatic moments.<sup>25</sup> Established by the United Nations Security Council in resolutions 1279 (1999) and 1291 (2000), the UN mission in the Congo has grown to be the largest and most expensive peacekeeping operation in the world. However, despite its size and its means, this UN mission has failed to build and secure a sustainable peace. Séverine Autesserre, in *The Trouble with the Congo*, attempts to identify some reasons of this failure and she points her finger at the flawed peacebuilding culture and poor strategies on the part of the international community that approaches the violence in the Congo from its regional, national and international dimensions, neglecting to address local causes of hostilities. Instead of helping resolve conflicts and end organized violence, the UN mission in the Congo has rather more often exacerbated the fighting. (Autesserre 2010, 8-10)

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<sup>25</sup> Several articles have been written about the failures of the UN mission in the Congo. See for example Jessica Hatcher, Goma and Alex Perry, *Defining Peacekeeping Downward: The UN Debacle in Eastern Congo* (New York Times 26 November 2012); Mvemba Phezo Dizolele, *The UN in Congo: The Failure of a Peacekeeping Mission* (International Herald Tribune 10 May 2004); and Jason Stearns, *The Delusional Peace: How has the UN Failed in the Congo?* (Congosiasa 27 December 2012).

Another striking aspect of the Congo armed conflicts that scholars and analysts discuss is the limited coverage of the hostilities by international news media. As Emily Paddon argues in *Beyond Creed, Greed and Booty*, “the war in the DRC surprisingly remains under-reported, under-researched and, when remembered, largely misunderstood” (Paddon 2010, 322). Despite the severity of atrocities and a death toll outstripping that in other armed conflicts around the world, the major international news institutions, especially North American news corporations, have failed to give to the Congo conflicts the attention that it deserves, causing some observers to describe the violent war in the Congo as a “forgotten conflict” or “the world’s hidden tragedy” (Autesserre 2012, 3). Ngwarsungu Chiwengo, in *When Wounds and Corpses Fail to Speak: Narratives of Violence and Rape in Congo*, comments that “CNN’s Anderson Cooper was puzzled how a war that had killed so many people could go unnoticed. But when he fortunately covered the rape and violence committed against Congolese women, viewers’ outrage was contained behind the camera on the Anderson Cooper 360 degree Web site and channeled through their contributions to the Red Cross” (Chiwengo 82).

Several reasons have been proposed to account for the international news media’s relative disinterestedness in the Congo tragedies. *Time Magazine*’s Simon Robinson and Vivienne Walt, complaining that “Congo’s troubles rarely make daily news headlines, and the country is often low on international donors’ list of places to help,” have remarked that “perhaps the attention and outrage directed toward another African tragedy, the genocide in Darfur, have left the world too exhausted to take on Congo’s” (*Time* May 28, 2006). On a similar note, *the Chicago Tribune*’s Paul Salopek, in “Congo: Anguish Far Exceeds Aid”, has suggested that “the long shadow of Darfur, and its billion-dollar aid effort, has

obscured other, equally dire calamities emerging across Africa” (*Tribune* December 17, 2007). Advancing a different reason, Anneke Van Woudenberg, Senior Researcher at Human Rights Watch, in her response to John Emerson’s graphic and comparative analysis of US media coverage of the war in Darfur and Congo, commented: “In my ten years of working on Congo I have often wondered why it gets so much less press attention...I fear that the Congo conflict receives less coverage because many outsiders have bought into the preconception that Congo is the ‘heart of darkness’ as characterized by Joseph Conrad’s book by the same title...as if the country is somehow predisposed to dark atrocities and violence, and hence there is nothing new to report...” (*Social Design* February 26, 2009).

Some observers have, however, explained the media minimal coverage of the Congo war by pointing at the complexity of U.S. political interests in central Africa. They have argued that Congo, in contrast with Somalia or Darfur for example, does not fit into the U.S. administration’s “war on terror” narrative, causing U.S. media and public to devote much less attention to war stories from eastern Congo. Some other people have simply presented more practical reasons, suggesting for example that the remote location of hostilities in eastern Congo poses a challenge to most news reporters who often have to spend several days before being able to send their reports to their main offices. The danger that news reporters face in eastern Congo has also been advanced as a possible reason. Many have pointed out that media agencies are reluctant to send their news reporters to Congo war zones since their lives are put in serious danger once they enter the territories under armed forces. Reporters Without Borders, one of the major international organizations that monitor the work of journalists in eastern Congo, have often condemned the dangerous climate of fear prevailing in Congo war-torn regions for journalists and have

several times requested local authorities and rebel leaders to end the threats and attacks that are perpetrated against news reporters. Despite these condemnations and requests, every year, local and international journalists are killed, imprisoned or forced to leave the country.<sup>26</sup>

Despite all the problems that news reporters have to face whenever they attempt to collect information about Congo conflicts from war zones, some media outlets, especially from Europe and Africa, relying on the work of local journalists, have been instrumental in reporting stories about the war. Most of these media institutions use not only the services of local journalists but also those of other professionals who, living or working in war zones, have the advantage of being close to the population and knowing about the atrocities perpetrated.

The last aspect of the Congo armed conflicts discussed here deals with the overwhelming and confusing number of armed groups that operate in eastern Congo. Over the past twenty years, more than twenty-five different groups have been identified. Some of them have been operational for a short period of time. However, as they disintegrate, these groups transform themselves into a new entity with a different name. In 2012, Oxfam released a report entitled “Commodities of War: Communities Speak Out on the True Cost of Conflict in Eastern DRC” (Oxfam 2012). A map showing the approximate areas controlled by the armed groups and the national army accompanies this report.

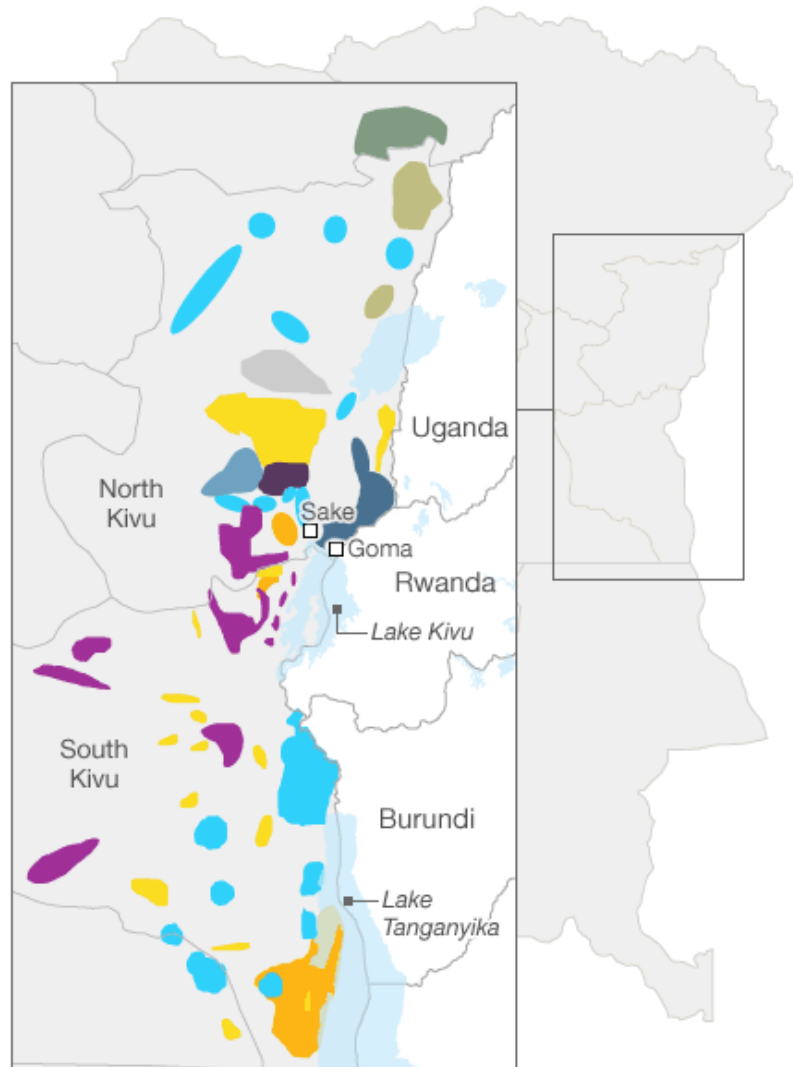
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<sup>26</sup> Since the beginning of the armed conflicts, about 14 journalists have been killed. Among them, we need to mention Serge Maheshe who was killed on June 13, 2007; Patient Chebeya was killed on April 15, 2010; Germain Mumbere Muliwavyo on February 16, 2014 in Oicha and Soleil Balanga on April 16, 2015 in Monkoto. For the list of the names of all journalists killed in the Congo, visit the webpage of the Committee to Protect Journalists <https://cpj.org/killed/africa/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>

### REBEL GROUPS

UN forces and the Congolese army are present in large towns

- ADF-NALU**  
Ugandan-led Islamists
- APCLS**  
Mai Mai group
- FDLR**  
Mostly Hutu Rwandan rebels
- FRPI**  
Based in gold-rich Ituri region
- M23**  
Mostly Tutsi, said to be Rwandan-backed
- Rai Mutomboki**  
Anti-FDLR group
- Sheka**  
Mai Mai group
- UPCP**  
Loose coalition of smaller nationalist groups
- Mai Mai groups**  
Local forces claiming to act in self-defence
- Other armed groups**



Source: Oxfam (November 2012)

The Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda or FDLR are probably the group that controls the biggest area in eastern Congo. This armed group was founded by some of the perpetrators of the Rwanda genocide and since their arrival in Congo territory, they have been involved in serious human rights violations. As a consequence, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has indicted many of the leaders of this group for war crimes. Today, the FDLR are mainly active in parts of Masisi and Walikale territories.

The M23 is also an important rebel group that pursues an agenda that is almost similar to that of the FDLR. The name M23 comes from the March 23, 2009 peace treaty that the Congo government signed with the former Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple or CNDP, led by General Bosco Ntaganda. The CNDP came into existence after hundreds of Tutsi soldiers of the Congo army mutinied over their low wages. After the disintegration of the CNDP, several members of this group founded the M23 in April 2012 so as to continue the armed struggle. Fighting between this rebel group and the national army has displaced tens of thousands of civilians, forcing them to seek refuge in Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and Tanzania.



## CHAPTER II

### REMEMBERING OUR NIGHTMARES: PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE TRAUMA IN PIUS NGANDU NKASHAMA'S *EN SUIVANT LE SENTIER SOUS LES PALMIERS* AND MASHINGAIDZE GOMO'S *A FINE MADNESS*

Armed conflicts affect both the individual and their local community by destroying the sense not only of self but also brotherhood and sisterhood. The pain of an individual is often what people see first while the trauma that the community experiences are more challenging to describe. This challenge comes from the fact that the lines between personal and collective trauma are not always clear. The agony of an individual and his or her community can often be so blended together that a distinction cannot be easily made between the two.

After providing the historical and political context for the Congo armed conflicts in the first chapter, my dissertation explores in this chapter how Pius Ngandu Nkashama's *En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmiers* and Mashingaidze Gomo's *A Fine Madness* represent the complex and multi-faceted effects of the violence in the Congo armed conflicts on individuals and their communities. I specifically analyze the narrative techniques these writers deploy in their novels to represent the blurred lines between personal and collective trauma and consequently demonstrate how violence is deeply crippling not only individuals but also their communities. The armed conflicts, as my analysis shows, impact more than individual human lives. Traditional, social and family structures and values are also being destroyed as violence tears towns and villages apart.

Ngandu Luabantu, known as Pius Ngandu Nkashama, was born on September 4, 1946 in Mbujimayi, the largest city of Kasai Oriental, one of the Congo provinces. In *Les*

*Étoiles Ecrasées* and *La Malédiction*, Ngandu Nkashama recounts stories about his childhood in Mbujimayi, his grandfather's village where he was instructed on ancestral customs and traditions. In 1970, he graduated from the University Lovanium of Léopoldville (now Kinshasa) with a B.A. in Philosophy and the Arts. After completing his PhD in Strasbourg in 1975, Ngandu Nkashama returned to the Congo to resume his career as a university professor in Lubumbashi, the major city of Katanga. During this time, the university and all academic institutions were under the political control of the dictatorial regime of former President Mobutu Sese Seko.

This period of intellectual and political excesses is evoked in *Les Étoiles Ecrasées* and *Le Pacte de Sang*. After denouncing Mobutu's excesses in a conference in 1978, the writer was arrested, tortured and sent back to his village. Ngandu Nkashama broke away from the oppressive regime of President Mobutu in 1980 by returning to Strasbourg to defend a second dissertation while working in France as a consultant. He presents his life and experiences in France in *Vie et Moeurs d'un Primitif en Essonne Quatre-vingt-onze*. Seeking a better situation, Ngandu Nkashama went to Algeria in 1982 and taught at the University of Annaba until 1990. His time in Algeria is evoked in *Des Mangroves en Terre Haute* and *Pour les Siècles des Siècles* (published later as *Un Jour de Grand Soleil sur les Montagnes de L'Éthiopie*). Because of political ties between Algeria and the Congo during this period, Algerian authorities arrested and imprisoned Ngandu Nkashama for a few days. The writer was then bound to leave Algeria and he chose to continue his career as a professor in France at the Universities of Limoges and Sorbonne Paris III until 2000 when he moved to the United States where he was offered a position

as professor of French and Francophone Language and Literature at Louisiana State University.<sup>27</sup>

***En Suivant Le Sentier Sous Les Palmiers***

The story centers on the life of a child who, after being tortured and forced to witness the horrible killing of his father, mother and brother, becomes amnesic and flees toward an unknown village where he experiences the same horrors again by finding himself in the middle of a conflict between an ambitious warmongering traditional healer and a pacifist chief. Psychologically disturbed, this child does not know where he is coming from or who he is or where he is going. Throughout the text, his life and thoughts are presented to the reader in a series of hallucinations, nightmares and flashbacks. Soon after arriving at the unknown village, some mysterious events occur: a newborn baby and the village chief die suddenly without any apparent cause. Accused as the instigator of these tragedies, the main character (the child) is attacked by the people of the village who tie him up to a tree and decide to kill him. As they are about to kill the child, a man comes from a neighboring village with some revelations that allow the villagers to identify the real culprit: the traditional healer of the village. After killing their traditional healer, people flee away from the village as an armed group approaches to attack them. It is at this moment that the amnesic child recovers his memory and remembers his name “Munanga” and the horrible events that precipitated him into a world of hallucinations and nightmares. He also flees the village with a young girl, Mwadi, with whom he finds comfort and interior peace.

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<sup>27</sup> Pius Ngandu Nkashama has published more than fifty books in French and Cilubà. In 2004, for his prolific literary work and his promotion of humanistic and democratic values, Nkashama received the Fonlon-Nichols Prize.

The fictional text in itself is divided into three parts that correspond to the three days during which the main events of the novel occur:

1. The first day: the arrival of the train (Munanga takes a train to flee his oppressors, he does not know where he is coming from and where is going).
2. The second day: the arrival of Mwadi (Munanga arrives at a village where a traditional healer is in conflict with the chief, he meets a young girl, Mwadi).
3. The third day: the arrival of the day (Munanga is accused of causing all the tragic and mysterious deaths in the village, a man brings some revelations about the warmongering ambitions of the traditional healer, Munanga is spared but still has to flee because the village is soon to be attacked by some militias).

In addition to the fictional story of Munanga's painful experiences, the novel also presents heartbreaking news reports about violence that have actually occurred in eastern Congo. While the fictional story covers a period of three days, the excerpts of news reports and documentaries deal with events of more than a decade. They approximately cover a period that goes from the flight of former president Mobutu in 1997 and the recent attacks in eastern Congo by the troops of General Laurent Nkunda.

The novel starts with a song in which the narrator intimates that it is necessary for a suffering person to voice their pain.

Vous devez écouter ma chanson de totale souffrance  
Je n'éprouvais aucune envie pour la fredonner  
Mais la douleur me l'a fait entonner  
Pour que les larmes intérieures douces lentes  
Descendent et me remplissent mon ventre (7)

You must listen to my song of total pain  
I felt no urge to hum it out  
But pain made me sing it  
So that the inner sweet slow tears

Could come down and fill my belly

As this poetic song suggests, the author's project consists in making unspeakable trauma accessible to the reader. Its reference to "souffrance," "douleur," "les larmes intérieures," and "ventre" evokes both psychological pain and the relief that comes from testifying about it. Although pain triggers the act of singing, the lyrics of the song cause the alleviation of distress and discomfort. *En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmiers* examines the agony individuals experience in eastern Congo and reflects on the effects of their suffering within local communities. The song also clearly highlights the paradox that characterizes traumatic experiences since it refers to the victim's opposing need of both keeping silent and voicing its trauma.<sup>28</sup> As the narrator suggests, to be relieved from their pain, it is essential for victims to express their emotions and feelings verbally; although, the pain they experience imposes silence on them.

Ngandu Nkashama makes the purpose of his project even clearer through the article that follows the song. Francis Van Woestyne, a Belgian journalist, has written the article, published in *La Libre Belgique* in June 2008. In this article, Van Woestyne blends his own report about atrocities committed in eastern Congo with excerpts from letters he exchanged with 'Denise,' a Congolese woman victim of sexual violence ('Denise' is an assumed name that the Journalist has used in his report to protect her

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<sup>28</sup> This paradox is at the center of the problematic relationship between traumatic experiences and their representation. Trauma resists representation because it is characterized by loss and absence. The tragic event or accident occurs and ends at a specific moment in the past but its effects continue in the future. And, because of the traumatic nature of the event, the victim fails to understand fully what happened to them. Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996, 6) describes this as a "missed encounter." This "missed" experience causes a type of absence and a loss that continue to affect the memory of the victim. Since the event was not fully grasped, the memory struggles to recall and revive it. As a consequence, the victim ends up in a situation in which they cannot remember nor forget their trauma. This situation opens way to repetitions. The victim will relive their trauma again and again as if it was still happening in the present.

privacy). The journalist starts by presenting the main victims of violence in Eastern Congo---women, young girls and children---describing this violence as “the horror of horror.” It is important to note here that Ngandu Nkashama’s story centers around the same type of characters that one can find in most novels about armed conflicts in Africa. The focus of these texts is mostly on the painful experiences of children and young women. In Congo-Brazzaville for example, Emmanuel Dongala’s *Johnny Chien Méchant* recounts the experiences of child soldiers while Alain Mabanckou’s *Les Petits Fils Nègres de Vercingétorix* presents the diary of a young woman, Hortense Eloki, a war victim. Ngandu Nkashama’s novel is also dominated by the voice of two similar characters: a traumatized child and a young girl who helps him heal from his trauma.

The journalist’s presentation of victims is followed by Denise’s request that the stories of Congo’s atrocities be told. “Dis-le dans ton pays. Ecris-le. Raconte-le. Il le faut”<sup>29</sup> (7). Denise represents here all the voiceless victims of violence in the Congo whose trauma stories will remain unknown if journalists or writers do not document and tell them. Although Denise’s request points to the necessity of using stories to raise public awareness about the violence in the Congo, it also raises interesting questions about how writers tell stories to portray the trauma of the armed conflicts. To be more specific, how can writers represent the traumatic experience of a child who has witnessed the torturing and killing of his entire family? How can they depict the profound consequences violence is having for both individuals and their wider communities?

One of the important questions that readers face throughout Nkashama’s novel is to know who is affected by war. To represent the complexity of the effects of armed

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<sup>29</sup> “Say it in your country. Write about it. Talk about it. You have to.”

conflicts, the author constantly switches from one personal pronoun to another, from “he” to “we” or from “I” to “they.” The text highlights the difficulty of describing the impact war is having on an individual and/or their community. To create a distinction and help readers understand the difference between Munanga’s experience and that of his community, the text uses two different fonts. One font (non-italicized) tells the story of the boy and exposes his thoughts while the other italicized font focuses on the collective thoughts and experiences of families and communities. The first font uses the personal pronoun “he” while the second one relies on the pronoun “we” or “they” to discuss collective experiences. From time to time, the italicized text flips from “we/they” to “he/she,” creating a sense of total confusion since it is not clear whether the narrator is still recounting the story of a group of people or that of an individual within the group. At that point, the novel highlights the blurred lines that separate individual and collective trauma. To help us understand better these complex lines, the following sections examine the nebulous boundary between the agony of Munanga and the trauma his community is experiencing.

### **A Child’s Traumatic Memory**

The use of a child as the main character in Ngandu Nkashama’s novel is deliberately strategic. A child symbolizes innocence. To represent the absurdity and horror of armed conflicts, many African authors choose to portray children as protagonists in their stories. Several of these works focus on the lives of child soldiers who lose their innocence as they get involved in war. For example, in Ahmadou Kourouma’s *Allah n’est pas Obligé* (2000), a child soldier undertakes and survives a

difficult journey across war-torn Liberia and Sierra Leone. The author uses the voice of Birahima to reveal the terrible situations in which children find themselves in war:

...des bandits de grand chemin se sont partagé le pays. Ils se sont partagé la richesse; ils se sont partagé le territoire; ils se sont partagé les hommes... Tout le monde les laisse tuer librement les innocents, les enfants et les femmes (53).

...some highwaymen have divided the country. They shared the wealth; they divided the territory; they divided the men... Everyone lets them kill freely innocent people, children and women.

The child in Ishmael Beah's autobiography *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007) goes through an experience that is similar to that of Birahima. At the age of twelve, Beah is separated from his family after rebels attacked his village. He flees from town to town and he is eventually recruited by government forces that initiate him in the use of guns and drugs. Emmanuel Dongala recounts a similar story of children's innocence and depravity in *Johnny Chien Méchant* (2002). His story contrasts the lives of two children who experience war in the Congo Republic. On one side, Dongala portrays Johnny, a child soldier who naively kills, loots and perpetrates all kinds of atrocities in the hope of becoming a war leader. On the other side, the novel presents Laokolé, a brave girl who helps her younger brother and legless mother escape the violence of war. Although these works tell different stories, all the children-protagonists that the authors portray have one thing in common: their lives are terribly affected and changed by the violence and horrors of war.

In *En Suivant les Sentiers Sous les Palmiers*, the life of the main character experiences a similar change after he witnesses a horrible event. The child loses his memory and flees his war-torn village by boarding a train that goes to an unknown



destination. To represent the chaos that the child experiences as a result of the attack of armed soldiers, Ngandu Nkashama has constructed *En Suivant les Sentiers Sous les Palmiers* with a complex and intricate narrative. The use of multiple and polyphonic narrative voices allows the author to explore different aspects of unspeakable trauma that individuals and their communities are experiencing.<sup>30</sup> From the beginning of the novel, the reader hears the voice of an omniscient narrator who assumes the thoughts, emotions and feelings of the central character of the novel. At the beginning of the story, the main character is nameless. After witnessing the killing of his entire family, he was struck by amnesia and forgot everything about his true identity.

Il se rend alors compte qu'il ne peut plus dissocier les noms qui s'embrouillent dans la tête. Une part de lui-même est restée accrochée au loin. Où exactement? Sous les palmiers? Derrière les ombres de la nuit? Pourquoi ne parvient-il pas à se rappeler des souvenirs diffus...? (32-33)

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<sup>30</sup> Several writers use this technique to recreate symptoms of trauma. As Chris Van der Merwe and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela say in *Narrating our Healing: Perspectives on Working Through Trauma* (2007), many (trauma) novels incorporate “a polyphony of voices” (60). Characters are granted unique voices, “differentiating them from one another, and all of them from the narrator.” Novelists use this technique because they “shy away from authoritarian narrators dictating the run of events and explicating the appropriate reaction to the story” (60). This technique has been extensively used in Toni Morrison’s works. Through the use of polyphonic voices, Morrison’s novels (*Beloved* constitutes a good example of it) explore a wide range of traumatic experiences. It also allows the writer to represent a collective identity that trauma reveals. In *The Site of Memory*, Morrison elaborates on the purpose of her use of polyphonic narrative voices. She says: “I like the feeling of a *told* story, where you hear a voice but you can’t identify it, and you think it’s your own voice. It’s a comfortable voice, and it’s a guiding voice, and it’s alarmed by the same things that the reader is alarmed by, and it doesn’t know what’s going to happen next either. So you have this sort of guide. But that guide can’t have a personality; it can only have a sound, and you have to feel comfortable with this voice, and then this voice can easily abandon itself and reveal the interior dialogue of a character. So it’s a combination of using the point of view of various characters but still retaining the power to slide in and out, provided that when I’m ‘out,’ the reader doesn’t see little fingers point to what’s in the text” (121).

He then realizes that he can no longer separate the names that get mixed in the head. A part of him remained hanging far away. Where exactly? Under the palm trees? Behind the shadows of the night? Why can't he manage to recall diffuse memories...?

Because of his loss of memory, the main character is catapulted into a world of both silences and multiplicity of fragmented voices. Silences are depicted in the text by the inclusion of a great number of unanswered questions. Hélène Tissières indicates in *Écritures en Transhumance entre Maghreb et Afrique Subsaharienne* (2007) that African writers incorporate silences in their texts to evoke the terrible political situation in which they live and illustrate its psychological effects on individuals. In these texts, the political instability in African nations and people's precarious existence are represented by a constant shift from language to silence, from meaningfulness to absurdity and from madness to sanity (Tissières 53-56). In Ngandu Nkashama's novel, the main character remains in a similar state of unpredictability for an important part of the story, causing a feeling of frustration to the reader who does not know the name of the protagonist. Although, towards the end of the story, the main character manages to remember his name, Munanga; the narrator and other characters, throughout the text, refer to him as "il" or "lui" (He/Him). Moreover, no explicit description of his physical and mental state is provided. His thoughts are presented to the reader in the form of short sentences. Several lines have words without any verbs. Throughout the text, the narration is dominated by repetitions, fragmentations and incongruous images that suggest that the main character is trapped in a totally traumatic memory:

Le train. Il ahane. Il barrit. Il continue. Il serpente. Des buissons se balancent.  
Vers le ciel, hardis. La conquête des nuages. Le geste tragique. Des massacreurs.  
Le long voyage vers la fin se prolonge. Interminable (13).

The train. It is panting. It is bellowing. It keeps on. It is coiling. Bushes are swaying. Towards heaven, daring. The conquest of the clouds. The tragic gesture. Murderers. The long journey to the end continues. Endless.

The narrator's choice and placement of words here evoke a journey to hell. The verb "ahaner" refers to the panting of someone who experience intense pain while "barrir" points to the painful cry of an elephant or a rhinoceros. The pain is described as increasing and endless.

Munanga's memory troubles in Ngandu Nkashama's novel resemble those of Abdenouar, the main character in Nabile Farès' *Mémoire de l'Absent* (1974), a text that Hélène Tissieres studies in *Écritures en Transhumance entre Maghreb et Afrique Subsaharienne* (2007). Interestingly, both Ngandu Nkashama and Nabile Farès employ the same techniques to reveal the struggles of characters that are battling with a painful past. In *Mémoire de l'Absent*, the father of Abdenouar has been kidnapped and tortured. The main character does not also know anything about his brother who has been living in exile for many years. Similar to the narration in Ngandu Nkashama's novel, Abdenouar's thoughts are also presented in short sentences; many of them are incomplete. In several passages, there are no punctuations and the texts are written with different fonts. The name of Abdenouar is also not revealed for the most part of the text. The reader has to hear the voice of a "je" who does not have a total control over his self-identity. Although they construct two different stories, both Nabile Farès and Ngandu Nkashama depict through their narrative techniques two similar worlds in which loss and madness characterize people's lives. In *Mémoire de l'Absent*, Abdenouar makes this confession:

...en enlevant le père on m'avait ôté toute possibilité de comprendre mon nom, les syllables ou sons c'est ainsi, je dus vivre au-dessus de mon délire, dans cette incomprehension de moi-même, années multiples où je dus être et grandir (30).

...by removing the father they deprived me of any possibility of understanding my name, syllables or sounds, that is why, I had to live above my madness, in this misunderstanding of myself, multiple years when I had to be and grow.

Unlike Abdenouar who can vividly remember his father's kidnapping, Munanga has no clear memory of the loss of his family. Instead of depicting the actual tragic event in a linear and explicit way, the narrator presents it to the reader in the form of hallucinations and intrusive flashbacks that keep haunting the child. Although he is suffering from amnesia, Munanga simply cannot help reliving the atrocious killing of his family through death images:

La mort: des cadavres figés, des figures crispées. La potence. Le sang qui coule. Lent et entêté, Les mâchoires restent entrouvertes. Des gencives. Du sang. Encore du sang. Coagulé aux commissures des lèvres pendants. Des lèvres gercées. Et des talons joints. La mort! (28)

Death: frozen corpses, clenched faces. The gallow. Blood that flows. Slow and stubborn. Jaws remain ajar. Gums. Some blood. More blood. Coagulated at the corners of hanging lips. Chapped lips. And joined heels. Death!

The narrator uses the same image of blood repeatedly to reinforce the idea of death and destruction. This blood is running and coagulates at the same time, meaning that life is completely taken away and destroyed. The narrator also uses some adjectives that represent pain and agony: "figés," "crispées," "pendants" and "gercées." These words

reveal that the corpses did not experience a normal death. Before dying, they suffered atrocities that left scars on their bodies.

It is interesting here to note that hallucinations and flashbacks are used in a multitude of African fictional narratives about violence and war as devices that allow both the progressive revisitation of the past and the reconstruction of a disintegrated memory. Novels about the Rwandan genocide provide a good illustration. For example, Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi, le Livre des Ossements* (2000) presents not only Cornelius' story---told in the third person---but also eight fictional first-person flashbacks that allow the reader to hear about the genocide from multiple points of view. Tierno Monénembo's *L'Ainé des Orphelins* (2000) also uses a similar technique. The novel tells the story of a child, Faustin Nsenghimana, who witnesses the killing of his parents and consequently becomes amnesic. Although he survives the atrocities, Faustin suffers from hallucinations that cause him to experience "des sommeils involontaires, des comas momentanés et les monticules de cuisses de poulet et de bananes cuites qui lui venaient en rêve"<sup>31</sup> (36). These hallucinations eventually allow the reader to realize the impact of the genocide on the child's mind.

In *En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmiers*, Ngandu Nkashama uses not only a series of flashbacks and hallucinations but also repetitive images of blood and death to allow the reader to feel Munanga's state. Moreover, all the uncontrollable visual intrusions are affecting not only Munanga's memory but his whole body as well. As the narrator describes it: "Il (Munanga) essaie de lever un avant-bras pour monter les vitres. Replonger pour matter le cauchemar. Membres engourdis... Une anxiété tenace le

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<sup>31</sup>"involuntary sleep, momentary comas and mounds of chicken thighs and cooked bananas that came to him in a dream."

submerge. Elle paralyse les énergies...”<sup>32</sup> (16). Ngandu Nkashama manages to portray here a character who is helplessly at the mercy of a painful past that he cannot both fully remember and fully forget.

The narrator’s use of a word like “membres engourdis” points to both physical and mental paralysis. Munanga is having difficulties to remember, function and act actively simply because his mind is numb with mental pain. In turn, this mental inactivity is impacting his whole body in such a way that the child is struggling with physical movements. As his body cannot reach out to the mind, no energy is being supplied for normal physical activities.

Laurie Vickroy argues in *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, “trauma writers attempt to guide readers through a re-created process of traumatic memory in order that this experience be understood more widely...” (Vickroy 10). Traumatic events, Vickroy explains, not only cause an “emotional paralysis” but they are also “repeatedly relived rather than remembered, with the survivors often lacking a language with which to narrativize it in an accessible way” (170). In Ngandu Nkashama’s novel, Munanga is portrayed as suffering from both this emotional paralysis and a lack of adequate language. When asked about his name, Munanga has difficulties saying who he is: “Je m’appelle...Ils me désignent souvent...Ils m’ont prénommé...Je suis...J’étais...Mon nom? J’ai parfois été appelé...Je m’appelle Munanga”<sup>33</sup> (73). And when he is asked to give an account of the traumatic event he has experienced, Munanga cannot articulate it in a coherent way:

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<sup>32</sup> “He ( Munanga ) tries to lift a forearm to raise the windows. Dive again to overcome the nightmare. Numb members...A persistent anxiety overwhelms him. It paralyzes his energies...”

<sup>33</sup> “My name is...They often call me...They nicknamed me...I am...I was...My name ? I have sometimes been called...My name is Munanga.”

-Dis-moi, interroge encore le Chef, là d'où tu viens, tu as assisté à ces boucheries? Y aurait-il beaucoup de sang répandu à travers les sentiers sous les palmiers?

-Le sang! répète-t-il en frissonnant. Il échappe à ma volonté. Les marécages lointains! En suivant le sentier sous les palmiers? Oh, le sang de ma mere! (85)

-Tell me, the Chief asked again, where you come from, have you witnessed these butcheries? Is there a lot of blood spilled through the trails under the palm trees?

-Blood! He repeated with a shudder. It escapes my will. The distant swamps! Following the path under palm trees? Oh, the blood of my mother!

As this conversation reveals, Munanga's past disrupts his present mind's experience. This disruption is represented in the text by the description of a confusing setting that reinforces Munanga's feelings of uncertainty. The narrator says: "Il (Munanga) se rappelle. Des souvenirs vagues. Il n'avait fait que vagabonder depuis longtemps; depuis tout le temps. Depuis qu'il existe au monde, il ne fait que marcher. Errer à l'infini...(39)...Le siècle de l'exaltation passe si vite, car le temps se déroule à l'envers"<sup>34</sup> (41).

The use of the words "vagabonder," "marcher," "errer" evokes the idea of both physical and mental errancy; a theme that is so recurrent in narratives about violence, war and genocide in Africa. For example, in Tierno Monénembo's *l'Ainé des Orphélins*, Faustin wanders around the country, seeking protection and peace. In the story, he is not actually the only child who is forced to travel without any specific destination. Other

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<sup>34</sup> "He (Munanga) remembers. Vague memories. He had done nothing but wander for a long time; since all the time. Since he exists in the world, he has been doing nothing but walk. Wander endlessly... (39)... The century of exaltation passes so quickly, because time runs backwards" (41).

children---survivors of the violence of the genocide---are also wandering “parmi les chats sauvages et les singes quand un prêtre les recueillit.”<sup>35</sup> (66).

In Ngandu Nkashama’s novel, Munanga’s errancy is also both physical and mental. His conversation with the village chief highlights this errancy and reveals how some words trigger mental pain and forcefully bring the main character’s memory back to his traumatic past. Whenever these trauma triggers manifest in the story, Munanga’s thoughts or speeches become the most incoherent and disorienting. And, at these moments, he expresses words that all conjure up images of death, violence and destruction. Some of the important trauma triggers in the text are: the train that Munanga boards to escape violence, dead plants, pale colors, blood, smoke, the night and loud noises.

The train, for example, fulfills an important function in the text. It allows Munanga to flee from the war zone where he has witnessed acts of violence to a territory where he hopes to find safety and peace. No violence takes place in the train but, unfortunately, everything about the locomotive evokes painful past memories. The movements of the train remind him of the violent actions of the perpetrators he has witnessed; its great speed causes him to hallucinate and see dead bodies and its noises are perceived as cries of pain. The narrator uses the image of this train to take the reader on a difficult journey to hell.

Le Train...Il continue. Il serpente...Vers le ciel, hardis. La conquête des nuages.  
Le geste tragique. Des massacreurs. Le long voyage vers la fin se prolonge...(13)  
...quand la machine reprend son allure vertigineuse, des corps et des membres  
tordus sortent en dessous des bancs. Des individus entortillés, à moitié médusés

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<sup>35</sup> “among wild cats and monkeys until a priest took them in”



de fièvre. Des soliloques. Ils poussent toujours des soupirs de soulagement. Puis, ils explosent et ils laissent retentir des craquements. De la stupeur mal réprimée. Il recueille des bribes au milieu des cliquetis de chaînes. Tous les passagers se trouvaient donc en danger de mort (27)...Par phases successives, le train s'enfonce sous la terre. Il fait surgir des personnages irréels. Eux aussi, ils sont ébouillantés...(28)

Le train aurait actionné l'avertisseur sonore: pohoom...pohoom...pohoom...Il déchire le silence...Un cri de souffrance. La locomotive lâche un hoquet...(33)

The train...It keeps on. It is coiling... Towards heaven, daring. The conquest of the clouds. The tragic gesture. Murderers. The long journey to the end continues.... (13)

... When the machine resumes its breakneck pace, bodies and twisted limbs come out from below the benches. Twisted people, half stunned with fever. The soliloquies. They always give sighs of relief. Then they explode and release crackling sounds. Not well-repressed stupor. He collects scraps amid rattling chains. All passengers were thus in danger of death (27)...By successive phases, the train plunges underground. It brings out unreal characters. They too are scalded...(28)

The train would have released the horn: pohoom...pohoom...pohoom...It breaks the silence...A cry of pain. The locomotive releases a hiccup...(33)

The words “vertigineuse,” “entortillés,” “soliloques,” “craquements,” “s'enfonce” and “ébouillantés” evoke a world of gradual destruction, total helplessness and painful loneliness in which Munanga is navigating. To him, the train becomes not only a source of relief and distress but also a means of salvation and a tool of death. However, unlike this trauma trigger that reminds Munanga of past tragic moments, the name and voice of Mwadi, one of the village girls, has a powerful restorative effect on the memory of the main character. The narrator describes this effect: “Mwadi. Cette voix lointaine résonne

en lui. Elle l'arrache de l'assoupissement. Elle vibre. Elle se répercute à tous les coins. Elle secoue son cerveau engourdi...Mwadi a fait éclater une étincelle soudaine du fond de la mémoire..."<sup>36</sup>(56-57). After hearing the voice of the girl, Munanga is able to remember his own name and throughout the rest of the story, the presence of Mwadi continues to help relieve Munanga of his painful memories.

The recovery of Munanga's fragmented memory is an important moment in the text. The central character remembers the horrible killing of his entire family when he experiences another traumatizing event. After accusing Munanga of being the murderer of a newborn baby, the villagers tie him down on the ground, determined to kill him too, Munanga tells Mwadi what happened in his mind at that very moment:

J'ai récupéré mon nom...Les images macabres se poursuivent. Depuis l'instant où je me suis retrouvé ligoté par terre, j'ai recouvré la mémoire, lambeau par lambeau. La mémoire suppliciée...Oui, je me souviens. Tout s'est passé aussi à la lueur d'un incendie. Les grésillements de la brousse avaient brouillé les vrombissements. Des brouhahas de rage, identiques aux craquements des cigales à l'orée des boisements. Comme en cette minute. Je refusais de faire éclater la vérité en moi. Ils 'les' ont massacrés! ...Mes parents! Mon père, ma mère... (229-30).

I got my name back...The macabre images continue. From the moment I found myself tied down, I recovered memory, bit by bit. The tortured memory...Yes, I remember. Everything happened at the glow of a fire. The crackling bush had blurred the roar. Loud noises of rage, identical to the songs of cicadas on the edge of the forest. At this minute. I refused to bring out the truth in me. They massacred 'them'!...My parents! My father, my mother...

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<sup>36</sup> "Mwadi. This distant voice echoes in him. It snatches him from slumber. It vibrates. It bounces back from all corners. It shakes her numb brain... Mwadi has shattered a sudden spark from the bottom of memory..."

Munanga describes his own memory as being “suppliciée” or tortured. The choice of this word is interesting since it points to an act of torture. And, the disintegration that results from this “torture” leads Munanga to a mental and emotional paralysis. He mentally refuses to acknowledge the “truth” of the horror: “ils les ont massacrés!”<sup>37</sup> But as the truth sinks in his mind, he responds with the desire of ending his existence. And, the questions that he asks next are challenging since they deal with the relationship between war atrocities, history and memory: why should the victims of war atrocities remember? Why cannot they simply forget the physical destructions they experienced or witnessed? Although the novel does not provide definitive answers to these questions, it still clearly suggests that the remembering of war atrocities is unavoidable. All the violence that is occurring in Congo is leaving long lasting marks on victims’ subconscious.

Munanga’s attitude towards these damages---or his “cauchemars”---evokes the “crisis of truth” that Cathy Caruth describes in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* as she explains that extremely disturbing experiences are accompanied by “the inability fully [sic] to witness the event as it occurs, or the ability to witness the event fully at the cost of witnessing oneself” (7). Munanga witnesses a tragic event that is so overwhelming that his mind cannot manage to fully and immediately register it in a normal way. The hallucinations and flashbacks that Munanga experiences throughout the novel could be considered as repetitive attempts to process and understand what his brain cannot record. Therefore, the various manifestations of trauma are then several ways by which the central character’s mind tries and retells the story of an unspeakable and unimaginable horror.

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<sup>37</sup> “They massacred them!”

What I have discussed so far is the representation of the effects of violence on a single character, Munanga. His struggle is mainly a struggle with his “tortured” memory. Witnessing the killing of his family has dealt a blow to his memory and plunged him in a state of total loss, the type of loss that Chris van der Merwe and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela describe in *Narrating our Healing* (2007), a “loss of control, loss of one’s identity, loss of the ability to remember, and loss of language to describe the horrific events” (vii). Although he gradually remembers the tragedy in his past, Munanga remains for the most part powerless, unable to control the flow of these intrusive traumatic memories.

In his novel, Puis Ngandu Nkashama also represents the effects of violence on the community. Besides the third-person omniscient narrator who presents Munanga’s thoughts, emotions and actions to the reader, the novel also features a first-person narrator who, through an interior monologue, voices the memories, desires, feelings, hopes and fears of an unidentified group of people. The second narrator mainly uses the pronoun “we” or “they” and to make a distinction between his/her speech and that of the first narrator, the words of the second narrator are italicized. However, from time to time, the first-person narration switches from a plural to a singular point of view and vice-versa; and his words are characterized by total incoherence and incongruity:

Nous avons couru. Couru. Les jambes ne suffisaient plus pour nous porter. Il nous poussait des ailes. Des ailes, étendues pour survoler les collines. Les cris des Mères. Ils transperçaient les tympanes. “Revenez, ne nous abandonnez pas, vous les Fils que nous avons portés en notre sein” (13).

We ran. Ran. The legs were no longer strong enough to carry us. Wings grew on us. Wings, open wide to fly over the hills. The cries of Mothers. They pierced the

eardrums. "Come back, do not abandon us, you Son that we carried in our womb."

To make sense of what the first-person narrator is saying, I argue, we must approach his speeches from the standpoint of collective, insidious, and structural trauma since, unlike the third-person narrator who introduces the reader to trauma that is triggered by a singular event in Munanga's life, the first-person narrator mimics the symptoms of collective trauma as a chronic occurrence.

In *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), Dominique LaCapra distinguishes between "historical" and "structural" trauma. The first one refers to a single horrific event that can happen to one individual (for example, a car accident) or a community (for instance, an earthquake) and the latter refers to a pattern of continuing oppressive experiences. For LaCapra, historical trauma is specific but "everyone is subject to structural trauma" (79). In other words, everyone is potentially a victim or a survivor. He defines structural trauma as "related to (even correlated with) transhistorical absence (absence of/at the origin) and appears in different ways in all societies and all lives" (77). Structural trauma is then necessarily collective.

I personally see a close relationship between structural trauma and the concept of "insidious trauma" that Maria P. P. Root has developed and Laura Brown presents in *Not Outside the Range* (1995). Brown argues, insidious trauma refers to "traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit" (107). The concept of insidious trauma allows Maria Root to broaden the limited concept of trauma as an individual event to include collective experiences of children, women, and minority

groups. In *Reconstructing the Impact of Trauma on Personality*, Root notes, insidious trauma is “usually associated with the social status of an individual being devalued because a characteristic intrinsic to their identity is different from what is valued by those in power” (240-41). Like structural trauma, insidious trauma is characterized by repetitive, continuous, chronic, and cumulative oppressing experiences.

Because collective, insidious, and structural traumas are not always self-evident, they are often not identified as traumatic. They remain so subtle within a society that the dominant group often remains unaware of their effects. In Ngandu Nkashama, the first-person narrator evokes several forms of discrimination, poverty and oppression that are so common in Congolese society. People’s lives are impacted by these oppressive experiences that, for the most part, remain unaddressed. In the novel, despite being incoherent, the first-person narrator’s speech reveals those “invisible” forms of violence that Laura Brown labels as “private, secret, insidious traumas” (Brown 102). Using a poetic language, this narrator is able to speak against several types of oppressive situations that permeate for the most part the lives of Congolese women and children.

The silent oppression of women is described in various forms. For example, the narrator reveals the pain of women who have to powerlessly see their children flee the country for fear of persecutions. The narrator declares that, as they flee, these children can hear the crying of their mothers; yet the former just cannot return to a country that has been destroyed.

Les cris des Mères. Ils transpercaient les tympan. “Revenez, ne nous abandonnez pas, vous les Fils que nous avons portés en notre sein”. Et je lui répondais: “Mais Mère à moi, je ne peux pas rester paralysé par la crainte. Pouvoir nous battre. Lutter contre les monstres qui ont devasté le pays” (13).

The cries of Mothers. They pierced the eardrums. "Come back, do not abandon us, you Son that we carried in our womb." And I answered her: "But my Mother, I cannot remain paralyzed by fear. Being able to fight. Fight against the monsters that have destroyed the country."

Here, Ngandu Nkashama touches on the issue of exile. Interestingly, the pain of mothers that the narrator describes in *En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmiers* resembles that of Abdenouar's mother in Nabile Farès' *Mémoire de l'Absent* that Héléne Tissieres cites in *Écritures en Transhumance entre Maghreb et Afrique Subsaharienne* (2007). Both texts depict mothers who are crying because their sons, unable to fight against "les monstres qui ont devasté le pays," are going in exile. In both texts, men are tortured and eliminated, leaving their wives behind with children who cannot confront the forces of destruction. As a consequence, the structure of the entire family is torn apart; causing survivors of this disintegration to experience a silent but enduring trauma.

As Laura Brown points out, psychological traumas include more than those catastrophic situations that overtly threaten the well-being of people's bodies. Everyday experiences or events such as exile, extreme poverty, spousal abuse or political oppression are also traumatic since they violently affect people's "soul and spirit" (Brown 107). In *En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmiers*, women cry over their everyday deprivations and poverty in a country that the author describes as "une épine dans les clavicules"<sup>38</sup> (14). The narrator can only stand powerless and look at the pain of mothers:

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<sup>38</sup> "a thorn in the collarbones"

Pleurer! Mère, te contempler ainsi chaque jour. Tu conçois la souffrance qui déchire nos ventres au dedans. Tu as connu la parturition? Imagine, nous éprouvons des douleurs similaires aux entrailles. ...” (14).

Crying! Mother, looking at you every day. You realize the pain that tears the inside of our bellies. You have experienced the parturition? Imagine, we feel pain that is similar to that of the womb...”

The narrator uses the image of a stomach in pain to highlight the intensity of pain and the destruction of social foundations. Both lives and societies are affected from their core, torn apart from their roots. The agony is so deep that it resembles the pain of a woman who is giving birth. To reinforce this idea, the narrator uses the word “parturition”, a word that evokes labor and child delivery.

Although *En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmiers* focuses on the story of a traumatized child, it speaks strongly about collective pain; the pain of people who feel oppressed as a result of chronic and abusive interactions between political leaders and their populations, men and women, parents and their children, soldiers and civilians. As a direct consequence of these oppressive interactions, long lasting conflicts characterize relationships between these various groups. The first-person narrator admits, “les conditions sociales s’étaient dégradées au point que le pays semblait littéralement dans la hantise des guerres interminables. Les despotismes successifs avaient conduit le Peuple à des reflexes de terreurs. Les femmes agitaient des palmes et leurs épines, convaincues qu’elles allaient conjurer la malfaisance.”<sup>39</sup> (63). These “reflexes de terreurs” are clearly

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<sup>39</sup> “social conditions had deteriorated to the point that the country was literally sinking in the fear of endless wars. The successive despotisms had led the people to the reflexes of terrors. Women waved their palm leaves and thorns, convinced that they would ward off evil”



illustrated within the fictional story of Munanga who finds refuge in a village that is being torn apart by years of interpersonal conflicts, fears and terrors. Almost all the dialogues between the villagers are characterized by antipathy and animosity. The conversation between the traditional healer and one of the villagers illustrates this point:

-Mon heure de vengeance viendra bientôt, fulmine le predicateur. Ton opinion m'importe peu: des ragots. J'ai humé l'odeur de ton sang en travers des narines. Je finirai par t'avoir. Je t'attraperai. Tu ne m'échapperas.

-Chef, tu entends les menaces? Il ne nous insulte meme pas, il veut nous terroriser. Si un peril déferle sur nous, vous saurez de quel côté aura soufflé le vent destructeur... (78).

-My time for revenge will come soon, the preacher thundered. Your opinion matters little: gossip. I smelled the scent of your blood through the nostrils. I will eventually get you. I'll catch you. You will not escape me.

-Chief, you hear his threats? He does not even insult us, he wants to terrorize us. If a peril comes down on us, you will know the side from which the destructive wind has blown...

The text implies that destruction has an origin and there are people who cause conflicts. In eastern Congo, there is a widespread hostility not only between Ugandan, Rwandan and Congolese ethnic groups but also among Congolese communities that continually see each other as the source of all troubles and they blame each other for the destruction of resources. Rwandan civilians and soldiers are probably among those who attract the greatest hostility. The first-person narrator in Ngandu Nkashama's novel, in a long monologue, offers a possible explanation about the continuing negative feelings Congolese communities express towards Rwandan people:

Ils s'imaginent qu'ils sont les maîtres des voies lactées. Ils disent qu'ils vont envahir les péninsules des grands Lacs, et qu'ils vont asservir tous les Peuples du continent. Ils entassent les dépouilles. Un tas de viandes inutiles. Ils les décortiquent à la machete. Vertèbres et iliaques. Ils accumulent les ossements. Ils nous forcent à nous accroupir... (71-2)

They think they are the masters of the Milky Way. They say they will invade the peninsulas of the Great Lakes, and they will enslave all peoples of the continent. They pile up the spoils. A bunch of useless meat. They dissect them to the machete. Vertebras and iliac. They accumulate the bones. They force us to crouch...

The narrator clearly makes references to two important issues. First, the text deals with the notion of ethnic supremacy of the Tutsi over the Hutu and the Twa in Rwanda. As Litofe Sloj Silika explains in *Model for the Eradication of Terrorism*, the colonialists have promoted the idea that “the Tutsi were born to rule, the Hutu to farm and perform and/or do heavy duties jobs, and the Twa to serve both the Tutsi and the Hutu.” Today, Tutsi extremists still believe in this notion and strive to “extend their hegemony and dominion, not only over the Hutu and Twa; but also over other ethnic groups in the Great Lakes Region” (Sloj Silika 106). Secondly, the narrator refers to some of the images of the tragic events of the Rwandan genocide. Several images about the genocide show the killing of people with machetes and the piling up of their bodies inside buildings or in the middle of the streets. The Rwandan government has preserved several of these bone-filled mass-graves that tourists can visit today. Although the narrator also refers specifically to the Rwandan Patriotic Army, it is clear that the atrocities described in the text are committed by all the armed forces that operate in Eastern Congo.

The psychological effects of the violence between different ethnic groups will unfortunately be long lasting and devastating. This is suggested by Ngandu Nkashama's novel as the story starts with a conflict and ends with the threat of another violent attack. The central character also experiences violence and faces death twice. The story portrays people who are caught up in a tragic circle of violence simply because conflicts between people or clans are not properly resolved. The effects of trauma that each military attack brings become then so repetitive that people seem to be battling with the same never-ending nightmares.

Collective trauma is also depicted in *En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmiers* by the representation of the destruction of the environment. On several occasions, the narrator describes human destruction in relation to the ecological damages that wars are causing, suggesting that the violation of the habitat of plants and animals is affecting the well-being of people. Local communities depend on the environment to survive. To understand Ngandu Nkashama's description of the ecological disaster in his novel, one needs to remember that Eastern Congo is a region that has always been known for its exceptional biodiversity. The region hosts four of the five country's national parks: the Okapi Wildlife Reserve (home of the Okapis), the Garumba (home of the white rhinos), Kahuzi-Biega (home of the gorillas) and the Virunga (home of the elephants, the giraffes and the African buffaloes). All these parks contain more animal species than any other protected area in Africa and they are justifiably listed as world heritage sites. Eastern Congo is also famous for its large areas of forest wilderness with a great number of plant species. The fertile lands all over the region are used for cattle ranching and the planting of coffee, tea, potatoes, beans, etc.

Unfortunately, the long Congo's armed conflicts have taken a heavy toll on this remarkable ecology. As the narrator says in *En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmiers*: "Le feu a tout dévasté...les fantassins détruisent tout. Ce qu'ils ne peuvent pas emporter, ils le déracinent. Ils piétinent les jeunes plantes et les fougères. Ils incendient les lieux de labours. Ils ont tout ravagé..."<sup>40</sup> (70). Ngandu Nkashama refers here to the devastation that militias and rebels cause when they invade the parks, using these protected sites as safe locations. And, after occupying the parks, most of them kill rangers and start committing illegal poaching so as to fund the war. But, besides the actions of soldiers, the movement of millions of displaced people also causes a similar decimation of wildlife. As a consequence, as the narrator complains, "les champs exhibent des squelettes de bananiers. Débâcles. Indécences..."<sup>41</sup> (70). Lands that used to flourish with rich agriculture, now feature dead trees and plants. Ngandu Nkashama describes this as "la défaite de tout un peuple. Notre souffrance commune"<sup>42</sup> (70). Here, the author points to an important principle of ecology: the interconnectedness of the environment. Since the effects of the negative impact of war in one region always spread into other areas, the whole country is suffering from the ecological destruction that armed conflicts are causing in Eastern Congo.

In Ngandu Nkashama's description of the endangered nature, one can note the parallel that the narrator draws between ecological and human destructions. Plants, animals and people are indeed affected by the same violence. As the narrator reveals:

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<sup>40</sup> "Fire devastated everything... the infantrymen destroy everything. What they can not carry away, they uproot it. They trample down on young plants and ferns. They set fire to the fields. They destroyed everything..."

<sup>41</sup> "Fields show off skeleton of banana trees. Total failure. Indecency..."

<sup>42</sup> "The failure of a people. Our communal pain"

“...des autochtones ont été dépouillés de leur cheptel de chèvres. Des recalcitrants enterrés vivants. Voilà ton peuple amputé. Fouetté, affamé, privé de tendresse. Estropié. Eborgné”<sup>43</sup> (70). The adjectives---“amputee,” “fouetté,” “privé de tendresse” or “estropié”---that the narrator uses to describe the fate of people evoke powerful images of both human desolation and environmental damages. Another important word to which readers should pay attention here is “autochtones.” Through the use of this word, the text depicts the indigenous inhabitants as actual victims of the violent destruction of the social, ecological and economic system of the region. These people helplessly see foreign groups invade their lands and destroy their means of subsistence.

*En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmiers* tackles another important issue in relation to the human desolation that the armed conflicts are causing in the Congo: the displacement of people. Ngandu Nkashama represents the trauma of displacement and its effects by depicting a child that is forced to leave both his home and his family to go and find refuge in a different location that provides to him even less comfort and safety. Munanga’s loss and separation from his family members intensifies his feelings of isolation and loneliness. Throughout the story, he is portrayed as being an alienated and vulnerable outcast. His displacement has caused not only the loss of his family but also the loss of a possible normal life.

At the end of the novel, a mass displacement occurs as villagers flee their homes to escape an imminent war. Their flight is described as a moment of panic, fear and desolation that results in heartbreaking family disintegrations: “...ils arrivent. Ils sont là.

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<sup>43</sup> “...Indigenous persons have been stripped of their goat herds. Recalcitrant people buried alive. Behold your amputated people. Whipped, starved, deprived of affection. Crippled. Left with one eye”

Fuyez! La panique générale à son comble. Ravage et désastre. Les vieilles mères s'invectivent dans le désordre. Sans pouvoir contrôler l'agitation. Les maladies éclopées et les paralytiques interpellant les fugitifs..."<sup>44</sup> (219). The narrator employs powerful words to represent a sense of helplessness among the various groups of people. Old women are described as hurling violent words at the younger ones, seeking to restore some order but to no avail. The sick are said to be lame, suggesting that their bodies have already suffered from some types of violence. Both the sick and the handicapped people call the healthy ones for help but no one listens to them, since each person is busy saving their own lives. As people flee and take refuge in the forest, their whole village is burned down, together with all the villagers who could not run. The narrator describes the resulting scene of desolation:

Les papayers et les orangers calcinés sont secoués par un vent brusque. Le souffle irrespirable de l'incendie. Des chairs carbonisées. Du sang coagulé, noirci par la suie. La désolation s'est abattue sur le monde. Malheur! (223).

Burned papayas and oranges are shaken by a sudden wind. The stifling breath of fire. Charred flesh. Coagulated blood, blackened by soot. Desolation has befallen the world. Misfortune!

In this apocalyptic description of the destruction, the narrator brings once again the attention of the reader to the ecological damages that armed conflicts are causing. The fire of the attack destroyed trees as much as it burned people who could not run away.

The narrator portrays the scene of desolation with words that conjure up images of total

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<sup>44</sup> "...they arrive. They are here. Run away! The panic at its height. Havoc and disaster. Older mothers rail in the chaos. Without being able to control the agitation. The lame and paralyzed sick people calling out to the fugitives..."

devastation, despair, death and hopelessness. Moreover, the carbonization of bodies suggests the level of brutality that leaves the narrator in shock.

The same type of brutality and unimaginable chaos is depicted in the killing of the traditional healer towards the end of the story. As the traditional healer confesses his wrongdoings and evil plans, the text says, all the people of the village lay their hands on him and murder him. Even when he is dead, the villagers still attack his corpse to dismember it:

...Les hommes, les mères, ils se lancent sur le cadavre. Ils se le disputent, chacun essayant d'en arracher un membre, un doigt, un orteil. Ils écorchent la peau des cuisses. Ils arrachent les ongles. Ils brisent les coudes. La cohue est saisie d'une véritable folie. Elle est sous le poids d'une violence inattendue... (218).

...Men, mothers, they jump onto the corpse. They fight for it, each person trying to tear a limb, a finger, a toe. They pull off the skin of the thighs. They rip the nails. They break elbows. The crowd is seized with true madness. They are under the weight of an unexpected violence...

As the narrator describes it, the villagers behave so horribly simply because they are suffering from true madness. People have totally lost their minds to be able to kill an important figure of their community, cut off the limbs of his dead body while trampling down on their own children. To understand this madness, it is important to remember the role and position traditional healers hold in African traditions. Traditional healers are responsible for not only the health care of the community but also the counseling and the performance of all the rituals. In most villages, their houses are built close to that of the chief because they are among the main advisors to the village authority. Communities hold them in high regard since they can provide protection against witchcraft, predict

future events or ensure that the harvest is abundant. Traditional healers are expected to use their knowledge and power for the benefit of the whole village. That is not what is happening in Ngandu Nkashama's novel. The narrator labels the traditional healer as a "nganga-ndoki" ----or "healer-witch"---which is an oxymoron in Lingala, one of the four national Congolese languages. Throughout the years, this "healer-witch" has used his spiritual powers to control the whole village, imposing terror and fear on anyone who attempted to threaten his position. Because of his selfish ambitions, he remains throughout the text the main source of conflicts. And, instead of being the agent of protection against witchcraft, the traditional healer uses his powers to cause death. Eventually, People have harbored deep feelings of hatred and resentment towards him.

The dismemberment of the traditional healer's dead body is a powerful metaphor in the text since it evokes the fragmentation of the country's national territory. The Congo territory, especially the eastern region, remains divided by the presence of militias, government forces, rebels and troops from Rwanda and Uganda. The dismemberment also points to cannibalism, which is a recurrent theme in discussions about the atrocities of Congo armed conflicts.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Since the beginning of the Congo armed conflicts, cases of cannibalism have often been reported. For example, on April 26, 2012, Max Fisher presented in *A Congo Mother Survives Cannibalism to Save Her Children*, stories of women who have lost parts of their bodies because rebel soldiers attacked them, cut off their arms or legs, cooked the flesh and ate it while the victims were still looking (The Atlantic). On November 2, 2014, The New Observer reported in *Cannibalism Still Stalks African "Conflicts"*, the stoning, burning and eating of a man who was accused of being part of a Ugandan-based Islamist rebel group, ADF-NAUL. The man was burned and eaten in a town in the Oriental Province because he could not speak Swahili and had a machete in his possessions (The New Observer online). Human Rights Watch has also reported several cases of cannibalism perpetrated by various rebel groups in the Congo. In the 2003 report entitled *Ituri: Covered in Blood*, Human Rights Watch suggested, "cannibalism [in the Congo] is sometimes linked to the belief that those who consume the flesh of a person acquire his strength. The appearance of this practice at this time in Ituri may indicate that peoples subjected to constant threat over a period of years have become cannibals as a way of strengthening themselves and



The killing of the traditional healer in the novel also evokes the collapse of President Mobutu's person and regime. As the healer in the text, the former head of state of the Congo enjoyed great power and used it to advance his own agenda. However, President Mobutu's regime of terror ended up experiencing a similar conclusion when rebel groups attacked him from different fronts, forcing him to flee the country, take refuge in Morocco where he eventually died of cancer.

In Nkashama's text, while the villagers express their anger and hatred by killing the traditional healer, Munanga gives vent to his repressed feelings in a different way. His bottled-up emotions are released as he decides to tell Mwadi the story of the atrocious killing of his family. Munanga reveals to the girl that his whole village was destroyed on the day of the attack, a horrible attack that devastatingly affected the mind of the boy.

Ils ont pris tout ce qu'il y avait de vivant. Les hommes, les femmes, les jeunes, les vieillards. Je les entends encore, les vociférations, les plaintes, les bruits des blessés. Les implorations des fuyards, les supplications des victimes. Ils avaient organisé des bûchers, où ils jetaient les cadavres de ceux qu'ils avaient déjà mutilés... (236)

They took everything that was alive. Men, women, young, old. I still hear them, the shouts, the complaints, the noise of the injured. The pleas of the fugitives, the begging of victims. They had organized bonfires, where they threw the bodies of those they had already mutilated...

The narrator uses a series of powerful words to bring the reader's attention to people's cry of pain and helplessness: "vociférations", "plaintes", "implorations" and

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assuring their survival. It may also mean that perpetrators have found that fear of cannibalism terrorizes victims more effectively into compliance with their orders than does the simple fear of death, so frequently faced in daily life" (42).

“supplications”. These words suggest that people are not being killed in total silence. The victims beg for mercy and they complain but the “monsters” that perpetrate the atrocities do not hear their cries. Although this horrific event stands way back in his past, Munanga can remember and relive it as if it was still happening in the present. Still caught up in the trauma of the attack, he can still hear the voices of those who cried for help. He himself describes how he experienced helplessness as everybody abandoned him and how the sight of death kept “haunting” his mind: “A l’heure de la ruée générale, les adultes ne se sont plus occupés des autres, et chacun a cherché le salut de son côté. Nous nous sommes retrouvés abandonnés à nous-mêmes...”<sup>46</sup> (237). Munanga’s experiences have been so horrific and disturbing that, being a child, his brain suppressed all the bad memories for a while. He fled the scene of the horror with a total loss of memory about space, time and his identity: “J’ai subi le spectacle du sang, et il s’est figé, à jamais. Là, à l’intérieur de la tête”<sup>47</sup> (245). At the end of the novel, when he confronts his nightmares, his brain cannot still fully understand the unimaginable attack against his family. He declares: “Ce que nous avons éprouvé cette nuit-là dépasse tout ce qui peut être envisagé!”<sup>48</sup> (239). As Munanga recounts the tragic story about the attack to Mwadi, the third person omniscient narrator steps into the conversation and comments on the boy’s sad words: “Quelle monstruosité que la guerre! Ils ne peuvent pas s’interdire d’infliger des images aussi tristes aux enfants?”<sup>49</sup> (242). The narrator’s use of the word “monstruosité” here is very interesting to me because it reinforces one of the important themes of the novel:

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<sup>46</sup> “At the time of the stampede, adults did not take care of others any longer, and each of them sought salvation on their side. We ended up abandoned to ourselves...”

<sup>47</sup> “I experienced the spectacle of blood, and it froze on me, forever. There, inside my head”

<sup>48</sup> “What we experienced that night goes beyond what anyone can imagine”

<sup>49</sup> “What monstrosity this war! They can not refrain from inflicting such sad images to children?”

monstrosity. On several occasions, the narrator describes the perpetrators of violence--- those that expose children to images of extreme violence---as “monsters”. The war itself is said to be monstrous. The victims of violence are also depicted as monsters since they too replicate the same type of violence on others.

On the day of the attack, some unidentified soldiers caught Munanga and his parents as they were fleeing from their village. Munanga’s mother was carrying a baby boy on her back. These soldiers brought their captives to their military camp and one of them decided to take Munanga’s mother away to rape her. The chief of the troop intervened to stop his soldier to fulfill his sexual desire since the evil act would profane their rituals and cause the whole troop to lose all future battles. Munanga says to Mwadi that what happened next “s’est passé comme dans un cauchemar éveillé”<sup>50</sup> (246). Upset with his chief, the soldier decided to unleash his anger on Munanga’s mother by brutally striking her several times with a machete. As her husband attempted to come to her rescue, all the other soldiers jumped at Munanga, his little brother and their parents. In the minutes that followed, all of them except Munanga were murdered with machetes. The soldiers then carried the corpses of Munanga’s parents and tried to burn them. At the sight of this act and as he was also about to be killed with a machete, Munanga fainted and appeared dead. His life was saved simply because, when he was about to be murdered, another army with more powerful weapons attacked the camp and made Munanga’s attackers flee for their lives.

One can note here the techniques the author uses to mimic the symptoms of traumatic memory. First, Munanga tells the story of the attack with many interruptions in

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<sup>50</sup> “happened as in a daylight nightmare”

his speech and these interruptions are represented in the text by quotations marks. Several times, when the pain of his emotions overwhelms him, Munanga stops speaking and hears Mwadi's words of comfort and encouragement. The reader easily realizes that the story of the horror that Munanga has witnessed cannot simply be told from its beginning to the end like a bedtime story. Secondly, the events of Munanga's story are not presented chronologically. The reader can understand that the character's disorganized speech simply reflects the chaotic nature of his memory. Events are presented, not in the order of their actual occurrence but rather as they appear in Munanga's brain. For example, at some point, Munanga goes from the description of his attackers' action at the military camp to the depiction of his action and thoughts in the train that he boarded later on.

...Ils allument un feu de bois. Ensuite, ils se mettent tous à danser. C'est alors que je les observe bien distinctement, à la lueur des flames. De ces flames de terreur..."(248)

...They light a fire. Then they all begin to dance. It was then that I distinctly observe them in the glow of flames. These flames of terror...

There is no doubt that the atrocious killings that Munanga witnesses are overwhelmingly distressing to him; so distressing that he says that "j'avais cru que je me trouvais déjà derrière le voile de l'enfer. J'étais propulsé vers des territoires de l'extrême. Comme d'avoir grimpé tout en haut des falaises d'une montagne tellement haute, tellement rude..."<sup>51</sup> (249). Munanga uses here the word "hell" several times, suggesting that what he is experiencing is beyond the scope of the ordinary or the imaginable. The horrible

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<sup>51</sup> "I thought that I was already behind the veil of hell. I was propelled to the territories of the extreme. As if I had climbed on top of the cliffs of a mountain so high, so rude..."

spectacle is simply unimaginable to Munanga's mind. He confesses: "J'étais loin de m'imaginer qu'il était probable de regarder des choses pareilles avec des yeux de vivants..."<sup>52</sup> (249).

The impact of Munanga's tragic experience is so traumatic that he also expresses feelings of guilt. The character feels guilty of being the only survivor of the attack. Munanga keeps asking himself why he was not killed and why the attackers let him live and experience the pain of the horrible memories: "...Pourquoi ne m'ont-ils pas tué en premier? Pourquoi m'ont-ils laissé endurer dans ma mémoire des scènes aussi affreuses?"<sup>53</sup> (249). Through these words, Ngandu Nkashama describes the "survivor guilt" that characterizes most survivors of extreme violence, especially those who have witnessed the death of close relatives. As Judith Herman explains in *Trauma and Recovery*, this self-reproach feeling is expressed in the aftermath of traumatic events when "survivors review and judge their own conduct... To be spared oneself, in the knowledge that others have met a worse fate, creates a severe burden of conscience" (Herman 53-54).

On the night of the attack, after fainting, Munanga regained consciousness in the morning and saw close to him the bodies of his family members burning in a fire. He describes the horrific scene as "le spectacle le plus horrible qui ne soit jamais offert à un enfant"<sup>54</sup> (250). From that moment, Munanga admits that he ran in the forest like "un dérangé mental" until he found himself in a train station where he boarded the first locomotive that pulled in (251). As he tells Mwadi, Munanga takes the train to run away

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<sup>52</sup> "I never thought that it was possible to look at such things with the eyes of a living being..."

<sup>53</sup> "Why did they not kill me first? Why did they let me endure in my memory such terrible scenes?"

<sup>54</sup> "The most horrible spectacle that a child has ever seen"

from not only the physical location of danger but also the images of the atrocities in his mind. He says: “ Je me persuadais: fuir, fuir coûte que coûte. Échapper à la captivité des images démentes.”<sup>55</sup> He successfully travels far away from the camp of the horror but completely fails to escape the clutches of the “images of madness”. On the day after the attack, Munanga says that he was still having “des cauchemars identiques et les hallucinations...”<sup>56</sup> (251).

Ngandu Nkashama’s novel suggests that it is difficult for victims of war atrocities to run away from their painful memories. Displacement in itself might provide relief from physical dangers but not necessarily from psychological troubles. As a consequence, traumatized victims of war atrocities may have to carry their traumas with them wherever they go since space and time are powerless to provide total healing.

*En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmiers* also illustrates the necessity of confronting traumatic memories. It is only when Munanga confronts his horrible past that he is able to come to terms with his traumatic experience. Here, Mwadi plays an important role in helping Munanga remember and tell his story. She is actually the only character in the story who lends empathetic ears to Munanga and does not blame, accuse or judge him. All the other members of the village, using threats, fail to help the boy remember his past. However, Mwadi’s presence is so comforting to Munanga that the latter, after recovering his memory, manages to express his feelings and tell his unimaginable story. Throughout the whole process of Munanga’s facing his nightmares and hallucinations, Mwadi’s words remain encouraging and supporting:

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<sup>55</sup> “I convinced myself: to flee, to flee at any costs. To escape the captivity of images of madness”

<sup>56</sup> “Similar nightmares and hallucinations...”

-Tranquillise-toi. Tu vois: tu as retrouvé ton nom!...Ils vont passer, ces souvenirs. Sois certain...Ne te martyrise plus! Nous sommes toujours là, et la vie ne s'est pas encore arrêtée en nous. Non! Tant qu'il existe un souffle de vie, on ne peut pas, nous ne devons surtout pas nous décourager... (243, 251)

Do not worry. You see, you have found your name! ... These memories will go away! Be sure ... Do not torture yourself anymore! We are still here and life has not left us yet. No! As long as there is a breath of life, we can not, we must not discourage ourselves...

Pius Ngandu Nkashama chooses to end his novel with words of hope. The ending urges survivors of atrocities not to discourage themselves because traumatic memories “will go away” and life brings a sense of hope. Although the positive tone of this ending contrasts with the sad mood of the whole story, it still implies that the writer believes that trauma can be worked through. Munanga undergoes overwhelming circumstances but he still survives and finds new hope in a girl who listens to his story.

Through an analysis of Pius Ngandu Nkashama's representation of personal and collective trauma in *En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmiers*, this section demonstrates the importance of considering war trauma as an experience that affects, not only an individual but also their community. Building on the same theoretical framework, the following section draws a parallel between Ngandu Nkashama's novel and Mashingaidze Gomo's *A Fine Madness* and examines how the writer portrays a soldier's re-visitation of war trauma that he witnessed and experienced in the Congo.

### **Witnessing Madness and Loneliness From the Air: War Trauma in Mashingaidze Gomo's *A Fine Madness***

Mashingaidze Gomo's *A Fine Madness* is a novel that presents the thoughts of a former Zimbabwean pilot who fought war in the Congo. This poetic text reads as a memoir that mixes verse and prose narratives to reflect on the nature of armed conflicts and their effects on African populations. A warrior-narrator who was part of the Zimbabwean forces that came to the rescue of President Laurent-Desiré Kabila's regime when Ugandan and Rwandan invaded the eastern and northern regions of the Congo shares not only his stories and memories but also his anger and revolt at the effects of war.

*A Fine Madness* passionately takes the reader to the heart of the Congo war.<sup>57</sup> The book brings to life stories of thousands and thousands of civilians and soldiers who experienced the traumatic effects of the violence of armed conflicts in the Congo. In the novel, the poet-narrator expresses his feeling of revulsion against the role neocolonial forces play in perpetuating the cycle of violence in Africa; and using powerful images, he reveals both the toll that armed conflicts are taking upon civilians but also the nature of the pain that combatants experience as a result of their participation in battles.

The writer, born in 1964 in colonial Rhodesia---now Zimbabwe---grew up in the armed liberation struggle for Zimbabwe. He joined the Airforce of Zimbabwe as an aircraft engines apprentice in 1984 and later on, he became an Alouette III helicopter technician and gunner. When the Mozambican civil war broke out, Gomo joined the

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<sup>57</sup> "A Fine Madness" is also the title of a popular 1964 novel and a 1966 movie by Elliott Baker, an American screenwriter and novelist. The writer, born Elliot Joseph Cohen in Buffalo, New York, adapted his own novel into the movie that starred two famous actors, Sean Connery and Joanne Woodward. Both the novel and the movie tell the story of Samson Shillitoe, a depressed poet who cannot finish a large work he is writing. To solve his problem, Shillitoe agrees to receive a psychiatric surgery that, unfortunately, fails to bring about the relief he is seeking. Despite the differences between Gomo and Baker's novels, one can still see a relationship between Samson Shillitoe and the narrator in Gomo's novel. Both rely on poetry to express their feelings, ideas and emotions. Both are also battling with a form of "madness" that they are having trouble overcoming.



Zimbabwe National Army contingent that was sent to assist the Mozambican armed forces. When war started in the Congo in 1998 and armed forces from nine African countries---with Namibia, Angola, Chad, Sudan, Zimbabwe being the largest armed forces---came to protect President Laurent Desiré Kabila’s fragile government, Mashingaidze Gomo was part of the Zimbabwean contingent that served on the eastern and northern fronts from 1998 to 2002. After President Mugabe’s troops left the Congo, the author of *A Fine Madness* returned home and completed a B.A. in English and Communication Studies from the Zimbabwe Open University. In 2007, he retired from the Airforce to totally dedicate himself to the arts.

Gomo admits that his army experiences shaped the content and the structure of his novel. He says that he “wanted people to know the truth about what really transpires in a war situation and who is responsible. The book (*A Fine Madness*) is about a documentation of the human side of the war in that when people talk about war they think of soldiers and weapons but usually forget to consider its impact on the society” (Marcia Gore, 2012). Gomo believes that Africans will not engage in armed conflicts and kill their own people if they simply understand the real effects of war. For the writer, *A Fine Madness* functions like a mirror that allows Africans to see themselves, know where they come from and realize where they are going if they decide to abandon the path of war.

Although Mashingaidze Gomo wrote *A Fine Madness* from the diary entries he made as he fought war in the Congo, he has chosen to give the narrator of his text a different and common name. The thoughts, memories, images and stories within the novel are shared by Warrant Officer Class Two Takawira Muchineripi, alias Changamire. The text explains that the name Takawira Muchineripi is actually an allegory. “Takawira”

means colonial bondage and “Muchineripi” is a word that one says to challenge their defeated enemy if the latter still wants to fight. Changamire is a popular title that one uses to address a superior or an elder (*A Fine Madness*, 8). By giving common Zimbabwean names to his narrator and thus depersonalizing the text, the writer has opened the way for readers to hear in the text the voices of the multitude of soldiers who fought alongside him. The novel presents itself, not so much as the thoughts of a single individual, but rather as a poetic narrative of a group of people who attempt to make sense of a painful experience they went through. Praising the novel, Jasper Marangwanda, the Director General of Operations and Plans of the Zimbabwe Defense Forces, says, *A Fine Madness* “reflects what was going on in the minds of many a soldier involved in the DRC campaign” (Jasper Marangwanda, *A Fine Madness*, v).

And prefacing the novel, Ngugi wa Thiong’o states that the themes of death and loneliness of war recur throughout the whole text (Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *A Fine Madness*, 2). Another important theme should be added to those that Ngugi wa Thiong’o has pointed out: “madness”. This word is repeated more than ten times in the novel. It first appears in the title of the novel as a paradox. The narrator uses the word “madness” in two opposite ways. Madness is first portrayed as a positive emotional response to neocolonial entities that cause the chaos of war so as to exploit the resources of Africa. Gomo’s novel can then be seen as a rallying call to “madness” that leads Africans to develop their resistance to destructive forces. In this respect, praising also the book, Memory Chirere, an academic from the University of Zimbabwe says: "A Fine Madness is a charmed, mad and maddening prose poetry in which an armed man snoops into Africa’s history of deprivation and strife to do the painful arithmetic” (*A Fine Madness*, v). In the novel, the

narrator strives to communicate this “fine madness” to the reader. Indeed, from the first to the last lines of the text, readers hear the voice of a mad airman who takes advantage of the capacity of prose and poetic narratives to engage people and make them think about the causes of war and violence in Africa. Secondly, the narrator uses the word “madness” to describe the traumatic effects of armed conflicts on both soldiers and civilians. In the novel, the horror and loneliness of war drive both soldiers and civilians “mad,” causing them to display abnormal behaviors. Here, the narrator strategically presents compelling images to make readers plunge into the “madness” of various characters and consequently realize the impact armed conflicts can have on both combatants and civilians. In the following paragraphs, focusing on the main themes of the novel---loneliness and madness--- I discuss the harrowing effects of armed conflicts in the Congo.<sup>58</sup> Through a series of close readings, I also examine the relationship between the prose-poetry blending in the text and the literary representation of war trauma. I argue that the fragmented and disruptive structure of the novel reflects the traumatic nature of the narrator’s memory.

### **Loneliness of War**

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<sup>58</sup> It is important to realize that Gomo’s novel also explores the nature and the impact of Western neo-colonialism on African populations. However, because of the writer’s career in the military and his relationship with the Zimbabwean government, many have criticized his representation of the consequences of Western imperialism and his interpretation of the causes of economic problems in Africa. *A Fine Madness*, for these critics, simply functions as the sounding board of President Mugabe’s regime. Oliver Nyambi, for example, argues in *Some Notes on Ways to Read Zimbabwean Literature of the ‘Crisis’* that Gomo’s novel “invokes the aesthetic and expressive dimensions of narrative to configure African problems as mostly Western constructs and by implication spares the postcolonial establishment from blame” (3-4). For Nyambi, a thematic reading of *A Fine Madness* reveals a close connection between the concept of social justice that the novel promotes and the radical anti-western nationalist discourse of the Zimbabwean state (4). Despite its political and propagandistic nature, I still believe that *A Fine Madness* offers great insights into how war causes unspeakable devastations.

As Ben Lazare Mijuskovic observes in *Loneliness in Philosophy, Psychology, and Literature* (2012), loneliness has always been an important concern of mankind.<sup>59</sup> The concept can be traced back to Greek myths and dramas, the dialogues of Plato, and the treatises of Aristotle. Mijuskovic argues, “loneliness is a prism through which we see the entire spectrum of human life reflected in its multiform attempts to transcend that very feeling of isolation by communication” (Mijuskovic iii). Discussing the theme of loneliness in the works of Descartes, Kant, Husserl, Sartre, Defoe, Dostoyevsky, Freud, Lang, and Conrad, the author notes that man is “intrinsically alone and irredeemably lost” and because of that, he has to struggle continually to “escape the solipsistic prison of his frightening solitude” (Mijuskovic 1). For Mijuskovic, loneliness is not an illness that needs to be cured but rather it is a frequent and unavoidable human condition that men have to confront. Each individual action that men perform, he suggests, is an attempt to flee from the experience of loneliness (Mijuskovic 148).

The experience of loneliness is present throughout Gomo’s novel and all characters struggle to deal with it. As the text reveals, the participation of African forces in the Congo war has had an impact on soldiers’ minds. For many of these warriors, the level of violence they witnessed in Eastern and Northern Congo was unprecedented. Although many Zimbabwean soldiers lost their lives in the Congo, the actual number of deaths remains unknown since President Mugabe’s regime, in an attempt to prevent anti-war demonstrations in the streets of Harare, has kept secret all information about dead soldiers and the true financial cost of war. In the capital, for example, private and

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<sup>59</sup> Ben Lazare Mijuskovic is Associate Professor of Philosophy at California State University at Dominguez Hills. He has studied the concept of loneliness extensively, mainly from an interdisciplinary approach. For more discussion on his conceptualization of loneliness, see Ben Mijuskovic, *Loneliness: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (1977) and *The Phenomenology and Dynamics of Loneliness* (1996).

international news agencies were unable to collect and verify important information about the casualties because all the dead and the wounded were flown back at night to an Airforce base in remote central Zimbabwe (The Economist 11/5/1998).

In their informative article entitled *Between Remorse and Nostalgia: Haunting Memories of War and the Search for Healing Among Former Zimbabwean Soldiers in Exile in South Africa*, Maringira, Richters and Nunez deliver the results of research they conducted among a group of deserted and resigned Zimbabwean soldiers who migrated to South Africa after fighting in Mozambique (1986-1992) and the Congo (1998-2002). When they returned home from their deployment in eastern and northern Congo, these soldiers quickly realized that their country was no longer the same. Zimbabweans were experiencing such a severe economic crisis that most soldiers and civil servants were paid the equivalent of US\$10. Unable to cope with this new reality, a significant number of combatants resigned or simply deserted and sought asylum in South Africa where they are also confronted with many social, economic and psychological problems (80). Maringira, Richters and Nunez found that all these former soldiers suffer from various forms of war traumas. They all admitted that they are “tormented by bad dreams” in which they “see themselves in combat uniform and fighting war. They dream about the war they were fighting, about killing and seeing dead people in war, about being persecuted in the barracks and about the violence they perpetrated against civilians” (89). The soldiers also complained about the disturbing dreams they have about the women they raped in war. In their dreams, they are being attacked and tormented by these women. The authors of the article eventually conclude that these traumatic memories are having a continuing and serious impact on the lives of these former combatants (90).

Mashingaidze Gomo has also admitted to going through traumatic experiences during his time as a war combatant. As Fiona Machugh points out, Gomo wrote *A Fine Madness* “as a way of averting madness in the face of the pressures of war and military service”; and because of this, the novel should be “read as an exorcism of the writer’s thoughts and frustrations about life, conflict and Africa” (Machugh 2013). In the novel, Mashingaidze Gomo portrays a narrator who is battling with painful memories. From the first lines of the novel, the narrator, warrant officer class two Takawira Muchineripi, expresses one of his greatest pains. Because he is away from home, the narrator misses his fiancée Tinyarei and suffers from loneliness. The narrator admits:

...at Boende, I missed her with a nostalgia that was like madness  
In the solitude of war, in which men marched in  
battalions and flew in helicopters, gigantic aircraft and  
other quick birds of war...sometimes in combat  
formations and sometimes solo, I wandered in the  
loneliness of memory...missing her (6)

In this stanza, the words nostalgia, madness, solitude and loneliness are important because they all evoke an absence. More interesting is the use of both “solitude” and “loneliness”. The narrator introduces an important paradox here. Although both words are often used as synonyms, they carry different meanings. Loneliness is considered as a negative state characterized by a painful sense of isolation. A great number of soldiers feel lonely while being in a large group of other combatants. On the contrary, solitude is viewed as a positive state in which an individual can be alone without feeling lonely. Solitude is often encouraged because it allows an individual to think, read or write. It is constructive while loneliness is seen as destructive. The narrator suggests that war causes both loneliness and solitude. While he attaches solitude with war, the narrator ties

loneliness with memory; implying that the act of remembering creates in him a sense of aloneness in which he “wanders” as he thinks about his fiancée, Tinyarei.

The narrator describes his love for his fiancée as “a deep and powerful thing/As deep and powerful as a bottomless sea/A raging, turning and twisting passion, as inexorable as it is real” (5). It is clear that the woman that the narrator misses represents not only all African women but also Zimbabwe and the whole continent. In his loneliness, the narrator exploits his thoughts about Tinyarei to reflect on the history of Africa. The beauty of the narrator’s fiancée stands for the beauty of Mother Africa. Tinyarei, like Africa, is sitting on money. But, the narrator challenges those who think that her beauty “should be scattered around or shared...globalized if you like” (4). The use of the word “scatter” makes a clear reference to the manner in which the resources of the continent have been uncontrollably exploited and irresponsibly consumed by Western powers that insist that “Tinyarei should be walking the streets of London and Paris, signing contracts that shackle her to European commerce...” (4-5).

In *A Fine Madness*, both people and places are described as being lonely. In the text, Boende, an important town in Northern Congo, functions as a place of rest and refueling for the Zimbabwean soldiers. But, despite the large presence of combatants, Boende is still for the narrator “a lonely place/Alone...watched by the bloodstained glare of the jungle/unguarded by the bloodied presence of the gigantic gunships” (7). Several times, the narrator ties loneliness with blood, which is symbolic of death. There is also an important paradox that the narrator introduces with the use of the adjective “unguarded” and the description of gunships. Although gunships in Boende are “gigantic”, the town is still defenseless, unprotected and “alone”.

To neutralize the effects of the loneliness of war, the narrator reveals that the Zimbabwean soldiers played a type of music called *mbira*. As for the narrator, *mbira* will always be associated with war. He admits that “it took the violence of war (for him) to really appreciate *mbira*” (28). *Mbira* music is a type of music played on a popular traditional instrument of the Shona people in Zimbabwe called “mbira”. One can actually find the same instrument throughout black Africa where it has many regional names such as “sanzhi, likembe or kalimba” (Berliner 7).

In the eighteenth section of the novel entitled “kufa kunesu machewe” (translated as “death is with us for real”), the narrator recounts that two soldiers, one day, played their mbiras so as to engage in a type of musical battle. One of the soldiers is described as “the man in transit” while the second one is said to be the “tall commando” (101). The man in transit, the narrator comments, played a “wistful” tune while the tall commando “stalked him...with evil intentions...And in the valley of conflict, he sprung a rhythmic ambush” (101). As these two men fought with their mbiras, the narrator says:

...there was a commotion and fierce rhythmic strife  
And the sound of falling mountains  
And the tentative tune was resilient and would not fall  
And it put up a surprisingly tough fight  
And it became a lone guerilla drawing strength from  
Solitude...(101)

This musical battle appears as a metaphor for the nature of conflict in Africa. Violence is triggered by those who harbor “evil intentions” and seek any opportunities “to pounce” (101). For the narrator, the resulting conflict constitutes “a lone guerilla” characterized by “solitude” (101). This guerilla is described as “lone” because, the narrator explains later, the most vulnerable people in the conflict lack the support of others. When they make “a



wistful appeal” to “the outside world to intervene and stop the bully”, they cannot receive any help because “the outside world is ruled by the bully” (101). Metaphorically, the narrator criticizes the role neo-imperial powers play in the perpetuation of armed conflicts in Africa. In their relationship with Western powers, the narrator portrays African nations as isolated entities, lacking any support and having no real companions.

Later in the text, the narrator uses another story of a lonely Zimbabwean soldier to illustrate Africa’s loneliness. The twenty-fifth section of the novel entitled “cruel mercy” tells the story of a Zimbabwean soldier who could not fight anymore because he had become too addicted to *Lotoko*, the most popular liquor in the Congo. Because of his “habitual drunkenness”, the army decided to repatriate him to Zimbabwe where he would face the court martial and a possible loss of rank. One day, the narrator and his friends met this drunken soldier and a moment later, two women approached them so as to sell some *Lotoko* to the combatants. Recognizing their habitual customer, these women offered him to taste a free measure but the soldier rejected the offer. Because of his determination to “fight his addiction”, the narrator says that “everybody commended him...and encouraged him saying, ‘You should religiously stick to your recovery plan and not give in to any pressure’ ....” (129). The women went away and the narrator left the drunken soldier. Later, after a journey to the Catholic mission, the narrator came across the same drunken soldier who was drinking some *Lotoko* in company of the two women. The narrator says that he saw the man “looking wretched, sicker and more helpless than before/And the women were no longer there” (129). Despite his willingness to overcome his addiction, the soldier could not resist the temptation of drinking one

more cup of *Lotoko*. His life was now characterized by wretchedness, sickness, helplessness and loneliness:

And he was standing alone...  
Alone, at a crossroads that was both physical and  
spiritual  
Not knowing what to do  
His spirit willing...but his flesh weak  
And I saw in him an Africa alone, at its own crossroads  
of self-determination and suicidal dependence (129)

The narrator's words evoke two types of loneliness that affected the life of the soldier: He was physically lonely. After selling their *lotoko* to the combatant, the two women left him alone, still struggling with his addiction. While the contingent went to war, the drunken soldier stayed behind, walling in his sickness. The soldier was also "spiritually" lonely. The use of the adjective "spiritual" suggests that his loneliness affected not only his body but also his inner being. His body, mind and soul were so affected that he did "not know what to do".

The narrator then draws a parallel between the soldier's state and Africa's loneliness. Like the drunken Zimbabwean soldier, the narrator argues, the African continent finds itself in a position of "suicidal dependence" as it always asks for help from people who have no interest in its development. The texts then describes African people as "drug addicts" who continuously take the "drug dealer's cruel mercy" that allow them to live "one hour at a time" (129-30).

This is a clear condemnation of the hypocrisy of the policies of Western powers in Africa. The narrator suggests that development and international aid given to Africa has a negative effect since it keeps the continent dependent on Western donors while it does

not provide long-term solutions. These donors, like “drug dealers”, are aware of the side effects of the assistance they provide, but, because of the profit they make, they continue to offer their help; help that the narrator equates to “cruel mercy” (130).

### **The Madness of War**

In addition to the depiction of the loneliness of war, *A Fine Madness* also speaks about madness. Like loneliness, madness has always been a dominant theme in literature.<sup>60</sup> One can see symptoms of mental illness being represented in ancient Greek drama, Shakespeare’s plays or many African novels. In *Madness in Literature* (1980), Lillian Feder argues that the representation of madness in literature “reflects human ambivalence toward the mind itself; madness, comprising its strangest manifestations, is also familiar, a fascinating and repellent exposure of the structures of dream and fantasy, of irrational fears and bizarre desires ordinarily hidden from the world and the conscious self (Feder 4). For the author, the incorporation of madness into literature allows writers to explore the nature and limits of the functioning of their own mind. Literature, Feder adds,

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<sup>60</sup>The relationship between madness and literature has been the center of a lot of attention. Shoshana Felman, in *Writing and Madness* (2003), sees literature as an important meeting space between madness and reason. Examining madness through literature, philosophy, and psychoanalysis, Felman suggests that literature allows madness to be “heard” and to survive “as a speaking subject” (Felman, *Writing* 15). Allen Thiher, in *Revels in Madness* (2004), unlike Foucault who perceived some discontinuities in the historical interpretation of madness, notes that there is a historical continuity in the literary representation of madness, from ancient Greece to modern times, despite the differences in cultural assumptions of the concept (Thiher 6). *Dionysus in Literature: Essays on Literary Madness* (1994), edited by Branimir M. Rieger, provides important analyses on the relationship between literature and mental disorders. Rieger argues that literary madness has been used as a critical device in three ways: 1) the “mad” writer--sees creative writers as mad and driven by irrational forces---; 2) the “mad” characters of the writers---they either become mad, show signs of madness or are rejected by society because they show some anomalies---; and 3) the critical method by which psychological terms from the field of medical madness are applied to literary madness---psychological terms are borrowed from Freud, Jung, Lacan and others to represent personality and behavior disorders---(Rieger 5-9). As for the study of madness in African Literature, see Flora Veit-Wild, *Writing Madness: Bordelines of the Body in African Literature* (2006) and in Anglophone Caribbean Literature, see Kelly Baker Josephs, *Disturbers of the Peace* (2013).

constitutes a sort of echo of contemporary medical and philosophical theories on mental diseases (Feder 151).

Throughout *A Fine Madness*, the narrator uses the word “madness” to describe the nature of his feelings. For example, he admits that he misses his fiancée “with a nostalgia...a wretchedness that was like madness/A very fine and enjoyable madness...” (6-8). The narrator’s madness points to a state of insanity but it is also characterized by nostalgia, anger and rage. He confesses for example that he is “mad at the whole world” (8).

In *A Fine Madness*, nature is also described as being “beautifully” mad. The madness of nature, the narrator declares, “Surpasses all the madness of mankind rolled into one” and it is characterized by love, hatred, restlessness and conflict (12). This madness of nature evokes the effects of the destruction of the environment. As a pilot, the narrator is able to witness this ecological destruction from the air and he discusses it in parallel with what is happening to people.

Madness is represented in *A Fine Madness* at two different levels. First, within the text, the narrator explicitly refers to his madness on several occasions. Secondly, the text itself is constructed in such a way that madness is depicted and evoked. First, the text transgresses the boundaries of literary genres. It appears both as a collection of poem and a novel. Ngugi wa Thiong’o describes it in his preface as “a collage of verse and prose narratives, memories, images, thoughts and characters...” (1). Reviewing *A Fine Madness*, Whittaker asserts that “it is difficult to categorize this work; technically a novel, it is a kaleidoscope of notes and fragmentary diary entries, poetry and prose, factual descriptions and phantasmagorical flights of fancy (Whittaker 44). Secondly, the

text does not seem to follow any rules regarding the structure of a poem or a novel. *A Fine Madness* is filled with irregular stanzas and lines. And when stories are told, there is often no indication of time or the names of characters. Finally, the text is not built around a single story. The narrator moves from one topic to another and from one story to another without any apparent connection. Descriptions of landscape are for example followed by images of war technology. And since readers have to follow the narrator's stream of consciousness throughout the text, they end up being transported in the narrator's mind from Boende in the Congo to Zimbabwe and back and forth.

As Sylvia Huot explains, madness is generally characterized by deviation from the norm, transgressions and a "crisis of boundaries and borderlines" since the madperson "blurs the distinctions on which our concept of the subject is founded: the boundaries separating human and beast, waking and sleep, life and death" (Huot 9-10). Madness appears by its very nature an un-representable entity because it challenges language. Words seem to fail to adequately express the realities that a madperson experiences. Despite this apparent difficulty, literary works such as *A Fine Madness*, through the use of images, metaphors and specific narrative devices, attempt to recreate the symptoms of madness so as to make them accessible to the reader.

To help the reader understand what is causing feelings of madness in the text, the narrator presents several images of desolation, wretchedness, poverty, helplessness and immorality. He describes for example a place called *Club Fulangenge* where Congolese civilians and Zimbabwean soldiers meet for listening to music, dancing and having a drink. Fulangenge (literally means "to release mystical power") is a popular expression in Congolese popular culture that people use to describe a person's ability to communicate

mystical power, give away money or distribute wealth. Although the club is called *Fulangenge* and people gather there to sing and dance, it is still described in the text as a place of desolation, distress and deprivation, creating a paradox that brings attention to the negative effects of war. At this club, the narrator says that he was able to see:

“A little girl in a white dress  
A white dress that looked filthy even in the dark  
And she reminded me of a piglet I had seen at Kamina  
A filthy piglet that had foraged in the murk  
And I had felt ashamed for some secret reason I could not understand” (31)

The image of “a white dress that looks filthy even in the dark” evokes an extreme level of hardship and destitution. Moreover, the narrator presents another paradox here with the juxtaposition of the words “white” and “filthy”. This implies that war causes people to experience impurity and disorder. More powerful is the image of the “filthy piglet that had foraged in the murk”, an image that emphasizes the narrator’s message about the girl’s desolation. Being filthy as a piglet suggests an extreme form of poverty.

The narrator reveals that there were “more such children around” (31). This means that war had affected the lives of more than one family. Another disturbing piece of information that the narrator provides is that these children who were present at the *Club Fulangenge* were “watching their mothers catching men...their bottoms being pinched and slapped randomly by armed men” (31). The narrator paints a tragic situation in which Congolese women, because of the level of their hardship and their determination to feed their children, are willing to prostitute themselves before the eyes of their children.

As one reads the narrator's description of the activities taking place at *Club Fulangenge*, an important question comes to mind: where are the women's husbands or the children's fathers? The narrator purposefully leaves husbands and fathers out of the picture to highlight the social consequences of war. The armed conflicts affect not only soldiers but also families. In most cases, men are generally the first to be killed whenever a village or a town is attacked. Moreover, many of these men have to go to war and leave their wives and children behind at the mercy of their enemies.

In a certain way, *the Club Fulangenge* constitutes a powerful metaphor for the tragedy that the whole country is experiencing because of armed conflicts. It is a place of wealth but also of poverty, a place where armed men use the bodies of distressed women to find relief from the loneliness and madness of war. Indeed, Mashingaidze Gomo, in *A Fine Madness*, has managed to use his experiences of war to reflect on the condition of not only individuals who are trapped in the midst of hostilities but also the whole country and African continent.

In Conclusion, this chapter has examined how Pius Ngandu Nkashama and Mashingaidze Gomo represent personal and collective trauma in their respective novels. Both writers present the same realities, but from two different perspectives. Pius Ngandu Nkashama looks at the devastations of war through the mind of a traumatized child while weaving together fictional and journalistic texts. Mashingaidze Gomo examines the horrors of war from the eyes of an army pilot who uses his diary notes, songs, poems, and dreams to express his anger at the pain armed conflicts are causing. Despite the stylistic differences between *En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmiers* and *A Fine Madness*, both

texts successfully create a platform for reflection, for thinking about the effects of armed conflicts on individuals and their local communities.



### CHAPTER III

#### DANCE LIKE IT'S THE ENDING OF WAR: INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE TRAUMA IN LYNN NOTTAGE'S *RUINED* AND HONORE KABEYA MUKAMBA'S *ANIFA OU MÊME EN ENFER*

After studying two novels in the preceding chapter, I analyze here two plays and examine how the authors portray various symptoms of trauma in the lives of characters who are victims of sexual violence. By focusing on the representation of individual and collective trauma, I explore how each character manages to remember, voice and work through their painful past. I start with an analysis of *Ruined* by the American writer Lynn Nottage, a play that reflects on the consequences of sexual violence on Congolese women. The chapter continues and ends with the examination of war trauma in *Anifa ou Mème en Enfer*, a play written by a Congolese playwright, Fabien Honoré Kabeya Mukamba.

##### **Lynn Nottage's *Ruined***

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is often described in Western media as “the world capital of war rape” because of the brutal and endemic nature of the sexual violence perpetrated on girls and women in Eastern Congo. Although high levels of sexual attacks have accompanied the hostilities, the exact number of cases is not known. However, it is estimated that tens of thousands of women have been systematically raped by members of the different armed groups (HHI & Oxfam 2010:1). These women are so brutally attacked that most of them suffer multiple medical traumas including fistulas and sexually transmitted illnesses like HIV/AIDS. In addition to these medical problems,

victims also face serious psychological and social issues as local communities and families reject them.

Armed groups use sexual violence systematically and strategically as an effective weapon of war. Through the physical and psychological destruction of women, soldiers seek not only the disintegration of entire community structures but also the control of lands and natural resources. As Pratt and Werchick have found in their three-week assessment on sexual “terrorism” in the Congo, “the majority of attacks appear to have been motivated by the desire of armed groups to completely and utterly humiliate and dominate local populations” (Pratt 9). To cause these profound feelings of guilt, shame and humiliation, soldiers often rape women in front of their husbands and children or sometimes, they force men to rape their own daughters, sisters or mothers.

Several organizations and individuals have raised their voices to denounce the systematic use of rape as a weapon of war in the Congo. Among these individuals, Dr. Denis Mukwege is regarded as one of the most respected spokespersons for female rape victims whose internal physical parts have been damaged following violent sexual attacks. The doctor, a Congolese gynecologist, works at Panzi Hospital in Bukavu where his team and he undertake exhaustive and complex reparative surgeries to repair women’s injuries from rape. To raise awareness about the plight of these Congolese women, Dr. Mukwege travels regularly abroad and speaks at several international conferences. On October 25 2012, one month after making a speech at the United Nations in which he criticized the Congo government and several neighboring countries for perpetuating violence and impunity in eastern Congo, Dr. Mukwege was a victim of an assassination attempt in his residence. The doctor went into exile in Europe but several months later, at

the request of local populations, he returned to Panzi Hospital. For his medical and advocacy work, Dr. Mukwege has received several international awards and prizes, including the European Union's Sakharov Prize. The importance of his work has also been the topic of two documentaries: *Congo, Un médecin pour sauver les femmes* (Congo, A Doctor to Save Women) and *L'Homme qui répare les femmes---La Colère d'Hippocrate* (The Man who Repairs Women---Hippocrates' Anger).

*Congo, Un médecin pour sauver les femmes* has been produced and directed in 2014 by Angèle Diabang, a Senegalese filmmaker who accompanied Dr. Mukwege when he returned to the Congo from his exile in Europe.<sup>61</sup> The documentary shows how thousands of people came to welcome and applaud the gynecologist at the airport of Bujumbura in Burundi and along the way from the airport to Panzi hospital in Goma. At the hospital, the documentary shows how hundreds and hundreds of patients expressed their joy and happiness at the return of a man that many consider as their savior. In addition to revealing Dr. Mukwege's popularity and the crucial role he plays in eastern Congo, Diabang's documentary details the pain of victims of sexual violence. The power of *Congo, Un médecin pour sauver les femmes* actually lies in its depiction of women's pain, humanity and hope. The documentary tells the stories of women who, after being raped, have become pregnant; contracted AIDS and other STDs; and have been rejected by their husbands and family. However, despite the destruction of their bodies and the psychological pain they experience, women in *Congo, Un médecin pour sauver les femmes* still believe in the restoration of their lives and they hope for a better future.

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<sup>61</sup> For more details about Diabang's production of the documentary, see <http://www.rfi.fr/hebdo/20141121-cinema-senegal-angele-diabang-rdc-congo-violences-sexuelles-femmes-viols-mukwege/>

*L'Homme qui Répare les Femmes: La Colère d'Hippocrate* has been produced and directed in 2015 by Thierry Michel and Colette Braeckman.<sup>62</sup> Like Diabang's film, this documentary gives voice to Dr. Mukwege and follows him in several cities around the world where he testifies about the scale of the tragedy. In this film, victims of sexual violence voice their pain, anger and disappointment at the inability of the Congo justice of prosecuting the perpetrators. Although Braeckman and Michel's work has been shown in several nations and received several awards and prizes, the government banned its distribution and screening in the Congo. The local government has accused the documentary of portraying a false image of the Congo national army. Commenting on the decision of the Congo government, Thierry Michel declared that the image of the Congo national army that his documentary exposes constitutes the reality and the banning of the film in the Congo is simply an attempt to muzzle the whole country in general and the victims of war atrocities in particular. As for Dr. Mukwege, the censorship denies the Congo people their "history and their right to collective memory and truth."<sup>63</sup>

Besides Dr. Mukwege, several other intellectuals have raised awareness about sexual violence in the Congo by strategically including Congolese women's personal stories of war rape in their discourse. This section examines how Lynn Nottage, in order to denounce the consequences of sexual violence against Congolese women, has treated and transformed the trauma of victims into *Ruined*, a play that reflects on the physical, psychological, social and economic impact of sexual violence on Congolese women, their families and their communities. I specifically analyze the language and the narratives

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<sup>62</sup> [www.mukwege-lefilm.com](http://www.mukwege-lefilm.com)

<sup>63</sup> <http://information.tv5monde.com/terriennes/apres-l-interdiction-en-rdc-de-l-homme-qui-repare-les-femmes-colere-du-realisateur>

techniques that Nottage uses in her play to shed light on various types of individual and collective trauma and bring about empathy among her audience. I argue that Lynn Nottage is using in *Ruined* the model of a soap opera that follows the lives of a group of characters who struggle to respond, redefine and work through their individual and collective traumatic experiences. The use of the soap opera format allows *Ruined* to engage its audiences in the narrative and open up for public discussion important emotional topics, which are often kept secret. A close examination of the way the author constructed each character of her “soap” play provides two benefits. First, it offers a glimpse into the complexity of the psychological suffering and healing processes of victims of war atrocities. Second, it reveals the important role literature can play in not only raising awareness about the destructive nature of sexual violence perpetrated during specific armed conflicts but also causing its readers to empathize with a particular group of victims.

In *The Soap Opera: Literature to be Seen and Not Read*, Margherite LaPota and Bruce LaPota describe the soap opera as a tool for social and political change and assert that the serial drama has been “a demythizer and breaker of subject matter taboo on TV” (559). Soap operas facilitate the exploration and discussion of “hush-hush topics” such as cancer, alcoholism, homosexuality, drug abuses, rape or sterility. Most of these topics have first been the themes of soap operas before making their way into talk shows and nighttime programs (559).

Because of their similarities, soap operas and literature have often been compared. Important novels and plays with intertwined subplots and large casts of characters have been adapted into soap operas that explore current social, cultural and political issues.

Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*, for example, has been adapted in 2005 into a BBC fifteen-part soap opera. Both the "soap" *Bleak House* and its book version have served as vehicles for social criticism. As Lewis Coser comments in *Sociology through Literature* (1972), a work that introduces sociology through a collection of fictional texts, "there is no impression of life, no manner of seeing it and feeling it, to which the plan of the novelist may not offer a place... (writers of fiction) provide their readers with an immense variety of richly textured commentaries on man's life in society, on his involvement with his fellow-men (Coser: xv-xvi)." Lewis Coser considered literature as an important form of social testimony, which is the main characteristic of soap operas.

Lynn Nottage's text constitutes an alternative narrative that offers unique insights and a different perspective about the Congo armed conflicts. The author is an American playwright who uses theater as an instrument to criticize violence against women.

*Intimate Apparel* is her best-known play that she wrote in 2003. Her other popular plays are *Poof* (1993), *Crumbs from the Table of Joy* (1995), *Mud, River, Stone* (1998), *Las Meninas* (2002) and *Fabulation, or the Re-Education of Undine* (2004). All these plays center on the lives of strong African-American women who manage to overcome some tribulations and reshape their lives. For her work, Nottage has received many grants and awards including the Guggenheim Grant (2005), the MacArthur Foundation Genius Grant (2007) and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama (2009).

Lynn Nottage admitted that she started writing her plays to denounce domestic violence after seeing terrible pictures of battered women while she worked with Amnesty International for four years (Ozieblo and Hernando-Real, 33). Her plays seek to speak for silent victims and voice their pain. Introducing *Ruined* to the reader, director Kate

Whorisky recounts that, after collaborating on Nottage's plays *Intimate Apparel* and *Fabulation*, she and the playwright discussed the idea of a modern adaption of *Mother Courage*, an adaptation that would be set in Congo. Several months later, in 2004, both Women travelled to Uganda to interview Congolese women and research the brutalities they suffered in their country's armed conflicts. As they conducted their interviews, Nottage shared the story of *Mother Courage*, trying to understand how the play would resonate with Congolese women. However, as they interviewed more and more women, Nottage lost her interest in the adaptation of Brecht's play and became more anxious about "portraying the lives of Central Africans as accurately as she could" (*Ruined*, xi). *Mother Courage*, in her opinion, provided the wrong structure for such a play. She rather wanted to use a frame that would allow her audience to identify themselves with the fate of her characters and develop empathetic feelings toward them.<sup>64</sup>

*Ruined* has been the subject of voluminous critical analysis from various intellectuals. For example, in *Performative Body Language*, Christopher Olsen argues that Nottage's play draws from African story-telling techniques. Characters sing, dance

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<sup>64</sup> The frame that Nottage uses in *Ruined* resembles the theatrical forms that the Brazilian theatre director, Augusto Boal, has developed in *Theater of the Oppressed* (1993). Boal created his theatrical frame based on the ideas of the Brazilian writer, Paulo Freire. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), Paulo Freire criticizes what he labels as "the banking concept of education," a concept in which students are treated as empty containers that teachers have to fill with knowledge (Freire 1). For Freire, the banking approach opens way to the dehumanization of both the teachers and their students but a more positive pedagogy model (that Freire describes as "problem-posing education") treats students as co-creator of knowledge and leads to freedom because students develop freely their "power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves" (Freire 5-8). Building on Freire's philosophy, Augusto Boal developed a theatrical form in which the audience is not treated as a passive group of individuals but rather as total participants in the play they are watching. Boal's technique seeks to promote social and political change by allowing the audience to actively analyse and transform the reality to which they are being exposed. For Boal, man has the ability to be an actor and a spectator simultaneously. They can take action while observing themselves taking that action. This approach then allows theatre to become a place where "spectator-actors" can reflect on their actions, change them and affect the world they live in (Boal 126-30).

and tell stories. These dances and songs, Olsen adds, allow the audience “to participate as they would in a religious festival where an ongoing conversation takes place between spiritual leaders and their congregations,” causing the play to become “a referendum on gender violence in times of war” (85). In *Battles on the Body*, Ann M. Fox comments that the representation of disability in Nottage’s play is “part of its political project” (2). For Fox, the title itself “Ruined” refers to emotional, sexual and physical disability and reading the play through the lens of disability studies allows a more nuanced understanding of its apparent “romanticized conclusion” (1). Carolina Sanchez-Palencia and Eva Gil Cuder argue in *She’d Make a Splendid Freak: Female Bodies on the American Stage* that *Ruined* “challenges the romanticized view on women’s role in war as dictated by predominantly patriarchal standards” (149). In the play, the two authors comment that women characters are not caring mothers who are locked in their houses while men fight war. Instead, characters in *Ruined* strive to “resist victimization” by fighting “patriarchal power and violence” (149). In *Staging Gender Violence in the Congo*, Phyllisa Smith Deroze reads *Ruined* as a documentary drama.<sup>65</sup> For Deroze, important components of documentary dramas are all present in Nottage’s work. The playwright located an issue (war in the Congo), did field research and gathered information at a refugee camp in Uganda and used these real-life information “to tell the story from a non-journalistic approach” (173).

Although *Ruined* has received, for the most part, positive reviews and critique

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<sup>65</sup> A documentary drama (sometimes called docudrama) is defined as a genre of radio and television programming, feature film, and staging theatre which “uses an invented sequence of events and fictional protagonists to illustrate the salient features of real historical occurrences or situations” (Derek Paget 206). Documentary Drama (sometimes called docudrama) is opposed to Drama-documentary which “uses the sequence of events from a real historical occurrence or situation and the identities of the protagonists to underpin a film script intended to provoke debate about the significance of the events/occurrence (Derek Paget 206).



among Western intellectuals, it has been negatively criticized among Congolese. Sabrina Moella, a Congolese writer, producer and filmmaker based in Toronto, describes the plot and scenes in *Ruined* as being condescending and stereotypical. In her review entitled “Ten Reasons Why the Play *Ruined* Perpetuates Racist Stereotypes about Congo and Africa,” Moella complains that the writing of Nottage’s play is problematic because it does not provide any historical, cultural, political, or economic context to the audience. In the play, Moella adds, the real reasons for the Congo armed conflicts are overlooked.<sup>66</sup> For Moella and several other Congolese, *Ruined* appears mainly as an act of liberal voyeurism. All these critics argue that Lynn Nottage did not write about war in the Congo because, on her way to Africa, she cared about the fate of the victims. The author simply stumbled across the topic in Uganda as she was looking for a way of adapting *Mother Courage*. The Congolese women Lynn Nottage interviewed intensively are seen as objects of the playwright’s curiosity, a curiosity that led her to abandon the idea of adapting *Mother Courage* and create *Ruined* instead. Other Congolese have pointed out that, because of its language, *Ruined* has been written and produced for a Western audience. Congolese comment that the language and dialogues in the play are more reflective of Western types of conversations and speeches. After seeing the play, Moella, for example, felt that *Ruined* “sounded so not African, so not Congolese, quite insulting for (her) country and at times racist and ignorant.”<sup>67</sup> However, despite these apparent weaknesses that Congolese intellectuals mention, I still believe that Lynn Nottage’s work

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<sup>66</sup> Sabrina Moella., *Ten Reasons Why the Play Ruined Perpetuates Racist Stereotypes about Congo and Africa*, available at <http://www.madeincongo-raisedinparis.com/representations-of-the-congo-in-ruined.html> (Accessed November 2015).

<sup>67</sup> Sabrina Moella, *Ten Reasons Why the Play Ruined Perpetuates Racist Stereotypes about Congo and Africa*.

is important because it addresses some issues that are often ignored or misunderstood in Western countries and it raises awareness about the fate of women who have no voice in international meetings and discussions.

To make her play a tool of global and social awareness, I argue in my work that Lynn Nottage uses in *Ruined* a frame that resembles that of a soap opera. The play constructs a woman-centered narrative motivated by female emotions and needs. In “It’s Time for My Story: Soap Opera Sources, Structure, and Response,” Carol Traynor Williams analyzes what she identifies as “The Soap Opera Formula” (Williams, 1992). According to Williams, in a soap opera, characters are interrelated and live as a family, lovers or friends (165). Creating a bond between these characters is important in a soap opera because it allows the audience to identify with the actors. A soap opera story might feature a caring father and his unkind daughter, two siblings who hate each other, an ambitious wife and her abusive husband, etc. As Williams comments, soap operas are mostly “about family, love, and violence; they are more psychological than social in meaning” (165). As the story evolves, characters strive to create a sense of community and togetherness but they often fail to achieve it because of the conflicting interests of age, gender and class. As a consequence, viewers are invited to identify more with a group of characters than a specific central figure. Among these characters, some are more likable than others or they might appear stronger or weaker than their family members.

In a soap opera, as Williams adds, plot turns are very dramatic. The story moves forward slowly more by talk than action (166). Moreover, stories never reach a total resolution in a soap opera. Plots are built around unresolved narrative puzzles that viewers have to constantly attempt to decipher. Actually, the power and value of a soap

opera does not lie in the resolution of its plot but rather in the establishment of changing and unpredictable story lines.

*Ruined* reflects all the major characteristics of a soap opera. The main characters are women who are brought together because they all share a common painful past. The whole play is constructed strategically to cause readers or the audience to engage emotionally with this community of wounded women. Nottage admits that her purpose in creating the play was to stimulate the emotions of her audience in such a way that they take action in favor of ending gender violence in eastern Congo. To Celia McGee from the New York Times, she revealed her unwillingness to use in her play Brecht's technique of distancing, a technique that would make her audience engage more intellectually than emotionally with her drama. Instead, Nottage commented: "I believe in engaging people emotionally, because I think they react more out of emotion" than when they are "preached to, told how to feel. It was important that this not become a documentary, or agitprop. And that Mama Nadi is morally ambiguous, that you're constantly shifting in your response to her" (Mcgee, 2009).

The story in Nottage's *Ruined*, taking place in the Congo, centers around Mama Nadi, a business woman who owns and runs a bar with the help of few raped women who have fled war zones. Mama Nadi offers these women a place of refuge while using them for her business. Her bar also offers refuge to government soldiers and rebels who come to her for drink, food, music and sex. However, Mama Nadi's bar often runs out of necessary supplies like soap, liquor, cigarettes and condoms. Christian, the main supplier of these items often fails to deliver them because soldiers and rebels regularly rob him. At the beginning of the play, Christian negotiates with Mama Nadi to receive and employ

two young women that he brought along with his routine deliveries. Sophia and Salima, the two women that Christian “delivers” to the bar, have been rejected by their families after they were victims of sexual violence. Mama Nadi agrees to take them in and soon gives them the responsibility of entertaining her customers who come from all walks of life. The bar is indeed visited by all kinds of people: government soldiers, rebel militias, miners, peacekeepers, humanitarian agents, foreign businessmen, etc. As the play progresses, fights between rebels and government soldiers come closer to Mama Nadi’s door. She finds herself in a difficult situation in which she needs to decide about saving her life and that of the women who work for her. To help one of these women, Sophie, escape war and its consequences, Mama Nadi requests the assistance of Mr. Harari, a foreign businessman, to whom she gives a piece of diamond, asking him to sell it so that Sophie could have enough resources to start a new life elsewhere. Fearing for their lives, Mr. Harari and an aid worker drive away from the war zone, taking with them Mama Nadi’s diamond but leaving behind Sophie.

Through the story of Mama Nadi and her protégée Sophie, Lynn Nottage explores principally the issue of rape and its consequences. Readers quickly learn about the pain that raped women experience and the destruction that occurs to their social lives. Despite the brutal nature of violence inflicted on them, these raped women manage to survive war tragedies and keep their hopes up for a better future. The story also focuses on the interior lives of these raped women in such a way that the reader can perceive more clearly the contradictions that raped women have to experience. Mama Nadi for example, selfishly exploits these women who come and seek refuge at her place but she also expresses an incredible selflessness toward Sophie by giving away her piece of diamond---

representing in the text all her wealth---so that Sophie can receive medical surgery.

Through these contradictions, Nottage highlights the humanity of these women despite the traumatic experiences they are enduring.

Lynn Nottage effectively rethinks the dominant discourses of rape as a weapon of war. She clearly dispels the notion of raped women's total hopelessness by featuring willful female characters who actively choose sex work as a strategy for economic freedom. The importance of Nottage's text is also created by the multiplicity of languages, genres and voices that the author incorporates in her story to bring a sense of realism in her story. In the text, characters sing, recite poems, use proverbs and speak English and Swahili.

The title of the play, *Ruined*, refers to the state of being not only physically destroyed but also socially incapacitated. This is precisely how local communities describe and label women who have been raped. But, for these communities, the damage of the rape extends beyond the physical. Victims of sexual violence are also socially, psychologically and economically harmed. In the eyes of their families, they become useless and shameful individuals. That is why raped women are doubly victimized and shunned by their husbands and their communities.

Lynn Nottage's narrative and her aesthetic choices provide a way for the reader to understand the trauma of the victims (women and girls in general). Although there is no clear depiction of the violent events within the text, the reader can still realize the psychological impact that sexual violence has had on those involved. Female characters, for example, are portrayed in physical pain while battling with anger, grief and guilt.

All female characters in the text are "ruined." But the impact of their personal

devastation extends beyond their lives. The victims, their entire families and communities all struggle with loss and shame. Sophie is the first one to be presented as “ruined,” “damaged,” and “broken” (12-17). She is still physically affected by the violence she endured since she “walks with some pain and effort” (12) and her vaginal odor smells “like the rot of meat” (17). Christian explains to Mama Nadi that she was hurt by a bayonet and left for dead (13). Salima, the woman who comes with Sophie, is also described as a “damaged good” (17). She was kidnapped by rebel soldiers and made into a sex slave for five months. One of these soldiers killed Salima’s baby girl because she was crying while her mother was gang raped. After escaping the rebel group, Salima faced rejection from her village and her husband who refused to have her back (17).

Lynn Nottage’s choice of words to describe the state of Sophie and Salima points to the ideas of disability, loss and uselessness. These women’s lives become useless because they are physically, socially and psychologically disabled. They are considered “ruined” because they lost their honor and their privileged position within their communities. Now, to survive economically, they have to find employment in a bar-whorehouse. This presents an ironic complication since they now have to prostitute themselves in a place that is traditionally seen as unsafe. Finding refuge in the whorehouse highlights the reversal of norms that these women find themselves in. Their villages are no longer safe, especially for “ruined” women.

It is important to note that these victims of sexual violence do not describe themselves as “ruined” or “broken.” These are terms that other people use to describe how they see the victims. The identity of these women is then shaped by both the traumatic experiences they endured and the way society interprets their ordeals. Labeling

the victims as “ruined” or “damaged” appears as a permanent judgment that society makes to refer to the stigma that raped women are thought to carry forever.

Although they are seen as “ruined” and “broken,” each Mama Nadi’s worker presents specific talents. Sophie, for example, cannot engage in sexual acts with the bar’s regular customers but instead she uses her musical abilities. Through her music, she expresses her pain and tries to make sense of war experiences. The act of singing becomes therapeutic for Sophie since it provides comfort and relief to her.

In one of her songs, Sophie reflects on the invisible emotional pain that soldiers and rebels feel as they come to relax at the bar:

The liquid night slowly pours in  
Languor peels away like a curtain  
Spirits rise and tongues loosen  
And the weary ask to be forgiven.  
You come here to forget,  
You say drive away all regret  
And dance like it’s the ending  
The ending of the war....  
But can the music be all forgiving  
Purge the wear and tear of the living?  
Will the sound drown out your sorrow,  
So you’ll remember nothing tomorrow? (21)

The song describes the state and feelings of soldiers and rebels at the end of a busy day.

The “liquid night” suggests a moment when they come for a drink. Although the soldiers are physically exhausted, drinking renews their strength and makes them want to express their emotions. They desire to be forgiven, to forget, and cast aside feelings of regret.

They also hope that music will liberate them from their guilt so that they can start the following day without the memories of what happened the day before.

Sophie's song makes several important suggestions. First, soldiers and rebels who come for a drink at Mama Nadi's bar feel guilty of having done something wrong. They want to be forgiven from possible evil acts that they have committed. Secondly, the song implies that soldiers and rebels are haunted by painful memories that they want to forget. Finally, they consider music as medicine that can help them heal from feelings of guilt.<sup>68</sup>

It is also important to note that music fulfills in *Ruined* the same roles that it generally plays in soap operas. In *Watching Daytime Soap Operas: The Power of Pleasure*, Louise Spence observes that, in soap operas, music "reinforces the performances, heightening the emotions and guiding our attention and interpretation. (The name "soap opera" is itself fundamentally linked to the use of music.) Background music is used to introduce characters, to mark their moods, to set an emotional tone, and to highlight climatic moments (128-29). In *Ruined*, Sophie's music brings the audience attention to her true mood and emotions. She turns to music because it is a powerful vehicle for the expression of her repressed feelings and inner pain.

The soldiers' feeling of guilt that Sophie's song highlights is also clearly illustrated in a conversation that Salima and Sophie have about one of their customers who broke out into tears after telling the story of an atrocity he committed. The soldier recounted that his armed group, one day, shot dead and buried fifteen miners in their own muddy mining pit so as to rob them of the coltan, the precious minerals. As they were

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<sup>68</sup> Several studies in sociology and psychology have examined how soldiers cope with feelings of guilt after war. Professor Nancy Sherman comments in *The Untold War: Inside the Hearts, Minds, and Souls of our Soldiers* (2010) that "guilt is a part of the battlefield that often goes unrecognized" (106). Moreover, Sherman adds, guilt brings along a variety of other emotions and moral issues that often create an "inner war" and affect the lives of soldiers (88-95). For more discussion on the effects of guilt on soldiers, see Fritz Schutze, *Pressure and Guilt: War Experiences of a Young German Soldier and their Biographical Implications* (1992) and Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists, 1914-1994* (2010).



killing them, one miner swallowed the mineral to prevent his attackers from stealing the fruit of his hard work. To get hold of the piece of the mineral, the group of soldiers “split his belly open with a machete.” After telling this horrible story, the soldier had sex with Salima and then “sat on the floor and wept” (31).

Incorporating this soldier’s story in the text, Lynn Nottage challenges the popular representation of male combatants as guiltless individuals who perpetrate atrocities without being psychologically affected by their acts. Salima’s customer is struggling with the memory of the evil act he committed. The shedding of his tears can be seen as the result of feelings of guilt and regret; feelings that Sophie highlights in her songs. It is ironic that the soldier expresses his guilt while he is in the hands of Salima who represents here all the female victims of sexual violence.

Moreover, the verb “to weep” that Nottage uses to describe the action of the soldier is an important one because it provides a powerful impetus for readers to think about how the combatant is being affected by his evil acts. “Weeping” evokes mental and emotional distress. When a person weeps, not only do they shed tears but also they express an overwhelming emotion such as grief and guilt. The perpetration of the atrocity has impacted the life of the soldier in such a way that he weeps and expresses his guilt after sharing a story of violence and death.

In another song that Sophie sings to entertain Mama Nadi’s customers, she urges the soldiers to drink beer, get drunk and forget their guilt:

Have another beer, my friend,  
Douse the fire of your fears, my friend,  
Get drunk and foolish on the moment,  
Brush aside the day’s heavy judgment...

...Wipe away the angry tears, my friend...

...Cuz you come here to forget... (25).

As this song suggests, Mama Nadi's bar functions as a place of relief for both the raped women and their customers. Soldiers come to the whorehouse not only to drink, dance and have sex but also more importantly to seek a type of relief from their guilt. Sophie's song points to three sorts of emotions that harass the minds of these combatants. They are coping with fear, guilt and anger. These soldiers are so angry that Salima, later on, comments that "their hands are so full of rage that it hurts to be touched" by them (32). Despite their anger and rage, they break into tears and seek a possible erasure of guilt; which suggests that the psychological effects of the atrocities they perpetrate strongly affect them.

Sophie's music works in two ways. On one side, it entertains and brings emotional relief to the listeners, the soldiers. On the other side; it serves as a therapeutic tool for the singer herself, Sophie. As she sings, Sophie seems "almost happy like a sunbird that can fly away if you reach out to touch it" (33). In one of her performances, she defines her song as a "sweet sweet call, a sound that haunts the forest, a cry that tells a story, harmonious, but time forgotten... And yet the bird still cries out to be heard..." (39). Her singing provides to her a moment of freedom and safety. Figuratively, no soldier can capture her and defile her body when she sings. The power of her songs apparently extends beyond the limits of her current workplace. She sings because she has a story to tell and to be heard. However, despite the great influence of music in her life, Sophie admits that her trauma is too painful for music to provide total relief. She says:

...While I'm singing, I'm praying the pain will be gone, but what those men did to me lives inside of my body. Every step I take I feel them in me. Punishing me. And it will be that way for the rest of my life (33).

When Sophie sings, she gives the impression of being happy on the outside. But, in reality, she is hurting in her inner being. She describes her trauma as a living organism that continually affects her body from the inside. Sophie also believes that, everywhere she goes, she carries with her the memory of the perpetrators of her rape.

Her friend, Salima, is also battling with similar trauma. After being a sex slave for several months, she was rejected by her family and her husband, Fortuna, who put the blame on her for her ordeal.<sup>69</sup> For Fortuna, Salima was a “wash rag”, a “filthy dog” that tempted her attackers and offered them her body for five months in the bush, becoming a “poison” that her “dishonored” husband could no longer take in (67). At Mama Nadi's whorehouse, Salima admits to Sophie that she misses her family, her husband and her baby child. The memories of her family are both painful and sweet. When she remembers how she used to feed her baby, her desire to go back home intensifies but Sophie reminds her of the past and its meaning. To both women, home still means rejection, dishonor,

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<sup>69</sup> The blaming of victims of sexual violence has always accompanied the use of rape as a war weapon in the Congo. After being raped or used as sexual slaves, women are often blamed by their husbands, families and their communities, deepening their feelings of rejection and creating long-term trauma. Many women, for fear of being stigmatized, often do not report the attacks to their families or local authorities or they simply report parts of the incidents. This ultimately allows impunity to continue. The Harvard Humanitarian Initiative conducted in 2009 an important study on the shaming of raped women in the Congo and the final report, titled “Characterizing Sexual Violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” reveals that Women's stigmatization in the community “is often expressed as gossip or “finger pointing” (kushota kidole in Swahili) which intensifies their feelings of shame (personal feelings of disgrace or inadequacy) and humiliation (the act of being degraded by others) (The Harvard Humanitarian Initiative 2009, 17). This type of blaming of victims of sexual violence has also been reported in other parts of Africa. See for example Neela Debnath, *Rape Victims Still Blamed for Sexual Violence in Somalia* (May 2015).

shame and unkindness.<sup>70</sup> As Salima expresses her desire to return home, Sophie asks her: “What? Be thrown back out there? Where will you go? Huh? Your husband? Your village? How much goodness did they show you?” (33).

Through Salima’s story, Lynn Nottage highlights the trauma of raped women who are victimized and blamed for the atrocities perpetrated on them. These women get hurt twice.<sup>71</sup> They are first attacked and sexually used by combatants from all sides of the conflict. Then, those who survive have to endure another experience that is as traumatic as the first one: rejection by their husband and their family who feel dishonored. Like Salima, these women eventually face terrible feelings of loneliness, guilt, distress and hopelessness.

Surprisingly, after rejecting his wife, Fortuna, later on, comes to Mama Nadi’s bar to see her wife again and ask her to return home. This creates a confusing situation among the women. For several days, Salima’s husband stays outside the bar in the rain because his wife refuses to see him. Salima’s refusal to see her husband suggests that she is reluctant to confront her repressed memories. Interestingly, Sophie and Mama Nadi present two different interpretation of the situation to Salima. For Sophie, Fortuna still

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<sup>70</sup> The rejection of women has led many of them to create a network of solidarity among the victims. Over the past years, these groups of solidarity have increased in number and size. Most of them are based in large towns in Eastern Congo but they have satellite branches in war zone areas and villages. SOFEPADI is for example known as one of the largest women solidarity groups in the Congo. It is actually a coalition of over forty women’s organizations that fight to end sexual violence and help restore the social life of victims. For more on the work of women’s solidarity groups, see Tricia Taormina, *In Congo, Women Seek Justice for Rape in Mobile Courts*, November 23, 2015.

<sup>71</sup> Several news and humanitarian reports have commented on the notion of “double jeopardy” that women face in eastern Congo. After being raped, they run the risk of being ostracized by their husbands and families. This opens way to a variety of other social, economic, and psychological issues. Double jeopardy is often described as double pain or double agony. For more on the “double jeopardy” of women, see the report by Human Rights Watch, *The War Within the War: Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in Eastern Congo* (June 20, 2002).

loves his wife and the latter should go out and talk with him. She says: "...C'mon, he's been out there for two nights. If he doesn't love you, why would he still be there" (66). For Mama Nadi, Fortuna will have his wife back for a while until he starts asking "ugly questions" about her horrible experiences in the bush. Despite all the answers that Salima can provide to all those questions, Mama Nadi argues, her husband "won't be able to hear" them and "he won't be satisfied" (66). Then, Mama Nadi asks Salima a challenging question: "will you be able to tell him the truth?" (66).

This section of the play raises several important questions about the work couples that survive sexual atrocities have to do for the restoration of their marriage and their family. As Mama Nadi's words suggest, husbands are tempted to re-visit the traumatic past and pose questions to their wives. This places the female victims in a challenging situation because the act of telling the whole truth is as painful to the husbands as the act of remaining silent. Mama Nadi, later on, presents to Salima an even more puzzling dilemma:

But if you want to go back out there, go. But they, your village, your people, they won't understand. Oh, they'll say they will, but they won't. Because, you know, underneath everything, they will be thinking she's damaged. She's been had by too many men...She's a whore. And Salima, are you strong enough to stomach their hate? It will be worse than anything you've felt yet (66).

For Mama Nadi, Salima's facing the pain and rejection of her husband is nothing compared to what she will have to deal with when she hears the judgment and accusations of the whole community. For the village, Salima's identity is permanently marked by her "dishonorable" past. Because of that, it would take a high level of inner strength for the raped woman to confront people's negative feelings towards her.

Trying to convince Salima not to return to her husband and her people, Mama Nadi's adds another comment that emphasizes the dramatic change that occurs when a woman experiences sexual violence. Mama Nadi simply tells Salima: "the woman he (Salima's husband) loved is dead" (66). It is interesting to note that these words come from a character who is portrayed in the text as the voice of wisdom. Mama Nadi is the one who says most of the proverbs that *Ruined* features. Whenever a fight is about to break out in the bar, she is the one who calms people down and brings peace back.

Despite her wisdom, Mama Nadi appears as a character whose personality and life are filled with contradictions and conflicts. Although she greets her customers with joy and tries to keep a sense of happiness in her bar, Mama Nadi is also haunted by a painful past. When she was a child, her mother was a prostitute. Mama Nadi grew up witnessing how men attempted to abuse both her mother and herself. She admits, "since I was young, people have found reasons to push me out of my home, men have laid claim to my possessions" (91).

Mama Nadi constitutes the central character of the "soap opera" play that Lynn Nottage has constructed. Like in a soap opera, this character is built in such a way that some members of the audience might like her while others would simply hate her. Mama Nadi is both arrogant and meek; cynical and optimistic; mean and kind; self-absorbed and selfless. Throughout the whole text, she behaves selfishly towards her employees, always seeking her own interests even when that involves hurting the feelings of one of the women who work for her. But at the end of the story, Mama Nadi, in an unselfish manner, gives away her most precious possession to help Sophie receive medical care.

It is Mama Nadi's empathetic feelings towards her "ruined" employees that reinforce the sense of togetherness that the play conveys---a sense of togetherness that is often disrupted by conflicting personal interests. Like in a soap opera, these women fight and support each other, they hurt and comfort each other, they share both their past suffering and their hopes for the future. The suffering of each female character in *Ruined* cannot actually be understood without consideration of the pain of the whole group. One needs to examine the social and psychological damage among this group of women to realize the hopelessness and despair that manifest in the lives of each individual character. In the play, individual and collective suffering are interwoven in such a way that each of them expose itself within the limits of the other.

In addition to featuring a community of wounded women who try and survive as a family, *Ruined*, as in a typical soap opera, does not end with any resolution. All female characters are as broken in the end of the story as they are at the beginning. Mama gives away her piece of diamond but Sophie stays at the bar and does not receive any medical care. The love story between Mama Nadi and Christian does not end happily. In a very dramatic moment, Mama Nadi reveals to her admirer that she cannot surrender to love because she is also "ruined." This is an important moment of the text because it creates the type of disruption that characterizes most soap operas. Up to this point, the central character is portrayed as the only one who has never been a victim of sexual violence. Throughout the story, she appears so tough and hard-hearted that the audience might think that there is no brokenness in her life. But once she reveals that she has also been raped, the perception that readers have developed about her changes completely. She also becomes an object of compassion as much as her other "ruined" employees are.

The lack of resolution at the end of *Ruined* suggests several things. First, it highlights the fact that the end of the war does not necessarily mean the end of traumatic experiences. The social and psychological consequences of war can extend way beyond any political resolution of the conflict. Secondly, it suggests that the aim of the play is more about raising awareness about women's tragic situations than pleasing readers or the audience with a happy-ending story. Ending *Ruined* with a happy resolution would actually send the wrong message to the public. Congolese women who survive atrocities still find themselves in terrible situations because their families and communities have often been destroyed. Stories of rapes that these women share do not end with a happy conclusion. Some of them survive rape but lose their husbands or children after the attack. Some escape sexual slavery but as they return to their villages, they find that their whole family has been massacred. Finally, the lack of resolution at the end of *Ruined* points to the complexity of the central topic that the play tackles. Sexual violence during armed conflicts and its various consequences are so multi-layered that they lead to discussions filled with open-ended questions: how can one justify the use of rape as a weapon of war? Why should husbands or families reject victims of rapes? How can survivors continue to live after experiencing horrible atrocities? How can a family or a village be restored in their lost dignity? These questions that *Ruined* raises have absolutely no easy answers.

Since *Ruined* is constructed in a format that stimulates the emotions of the audience, it succeeds in revealing the psychological and physical pain sexual victims experience, but at the same time, it fails to unmask the historical, political and social context of the conflicts in Eastern Congo. The language of *Ruined* is often problematic



because it both facilitates and complicates the understanding of social and political realities in which Congolese women live. Throughout the text, characters (especially women) sometimes use a foul and vulgar language that does not necessarily reflect the social and cultural context in which they live. I personally cannot find the equivalent in Swahili of several words that some characters say: “fucking thief,” “fucking scavengers,” “muthafucka,” “dirty fucking lies,” “big fucking mouth”...

The inclusion of this type of vulgar language in the text suggests that Lynn Nottage has written her play mainly for a western audience. For example, through the vulgarity of language, Americans who watch this play might realize the absurdity and corruptive nature of war. Besides the corruption of war, the audience might also understand the “ruined” state of the country itself since the title of Nottage’s play refers to not only the fate of women but also to the destruction of the Congo. Because of the repeated armed conflicts, the institutions of the country have collapsed and people find themselves in situations so extreme that they often lose a sense of personal dignity and respect.

In any case, a Congolese audience would have some trouble identifying with some characters because the latter use words that are foreign to local languages and cultures. This does not necessarily mean that Congolese languages are devoid of foul words. What it means is that Congolese would not express the same type of vulgarity in some of the situations that *Ruined* is describing. For example, when Mama Nadi is informed that unknown soldiers have assassinated a white missionary, she describes him as a white preacher that had a “big fucking mouth.” In reality, the use of “fucking” in this phrase has no equivalent in any languages spoken in eastern Congo simply because, when

they express their anger or disappointment, local populations do not use vulgar words with sexual connotations. In Swahili for example, people would describe the same white preacher as having “kinwa munene ya kunuka” which means “big stinking mouth.”

Vulgar words in Nottage’s text ultimately point to the soap opera nature of the play. Like in a soap opera, the personalities of most characters are known more by their words than their actions. Through the use of foul language for example, soldiers who visit Mama Nadi’s bar are portrayed as vicious and savage individuals. None of them is shown killing or committing horrible acts. But their profane and obscene use of language reveals the barbaric and uncivilized nature of their minds and hearts.

### **Beer and Blood in Hell: Understanding The Horrific Nature of War in Fabien Honoré Kabeya Mukamba’s *Anifa ou Même en Enfer***

After examining how Lynn Nottage, through the use of a soap opera format, represents the trauma of the victims of sexual violence, this chapter discusses the portrayal of the effects of war in *Anifa ou Même en Enfer*, a play written by a Congolese writer. The author of the play, Fabien Honoré Kabeya Mukamba, is a Professor at the University of Lubumbashi in the Congo and Director of the “Ecole de Théâtre de Lubumbashi” (ETL). He is also the artistic director of the Festival “Le Temps du Théâtre” as well as a playwright. Fabien Mukamba received his Ph.D. in Theatre Studies in 2009 from the University of Sorbonne, Nouvelle-Paris 3, where he defended a dissertation entitled *From “The Princess Maleine” to “The Mothers’ Miracle”: the Religious Impregnation in the Maeterlinck’s Theater*. He has written two books: *Anifa ou Même en Enfer* (a play) and *Le Théâtre Maeterlinckien: De l’Aliénation à la Libération*.

*Une Lecture Symbolique et Thématique*, published in 2010 by Universitaires Européennes in Saarbrücken.

Published in 2001 by les Editions Cathel, the play *Anifa ou Même en Enfer* tells the story of a newly married woman, Anifa, who decides to enlist in the military so as to fight alongside her husband. At the beginning of the play, an unknown foreign army invades the eastern part of Anifa's country and, as soldiers are recruited to go to the front lines, Anifa expresses to her husband, Mose, her desire to join the army as well. However, Mose does not agree with his wife's opinions and categorically forbids her from enlisting. Disobeying Mose's instruction, Anifa still enlists and goes to fight but, very soon, the enemies capture her and her husband. At the end of the story, through some courageous and heroic acts, Anifa manages to defeat her captors and consequently, offer to her army the opportunity of winning the war.

*Anifa ou Même en Enfer* seems to have two important shortcomings. The play suffers first from an oversimplification of the issues of the Congo armed conflicts. For example, the members of the national army are presented as the nationalist good guys who are willing to sacrifice their lives so as to protect the population and the integrity of the territory. And, the foreign invading army is portrayed as a merciless group of individuals who have absolutely no regard for human lives. The reality is far from being so simple. Indeed, at any given point in time, more than four armed groups have been involved in the hostilities in eastern Congo. As many reports have revealed, all these groups, including the Congo national army, have been guilty of barbaric atrocities on local populations.

Secondly, in several sections of the play, Fabien Mukamba does not succeed in hiding his personal voice. This shortcoming makes his play sound at times more like a religious and political pamphlet.<sup>72</sup> For example, when Mose urges Anifa not to enlist in the military, he tells her that the best thing she could do is to keep their house and above all “de prier pour moi, d’invoker JEHOVAH ZABAHOT” (16). The inclusion of one of the Hebrew names of God does seem out of place here. The verb “prier” itself would be powerful enough to convey Mose’s message to his wife. And after Anifa performs one of her heroic acts, the lieutenant of the army praises her with words that seem to belong to a political science textbook:

Cette femme est patriote. Elle est le symbole de la prise de conscience féminine... Quand la femme est libérée de craintes et d’autres prisons mentales c’est la nation entière qui est affranchie. C’est une vérité catégorique... (33)

This woman is a patriot. She is the symbol of women’s awareness... When the woman is freed from fears and other mental prisons, it is the whole nation that is freed. This is a categorical truth...

Unfortunately, understanding what Anifa symbolizes in the text is so crucial to the author that he does not seem to let readers figure that out by themselves. Fabien Mukamba simply uses one of his characters to verbally state the meaning of an important symbol in the text and consequently, he reduces the artistic quality of his work.

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<sup>72</sup> One can compare Mukamba’s play with *La Bataille de Kamanyola* (1976), a patriotic play written by Mobyem Mikanza in honor of the former President Mobutu. In Mikanza’s play, rebels attack eastern Congo and almost defeat the national army at the battle of Kamanyola. The fate of the national army is changed when the chief of the army, Mobutu, arrives at the battle zone and lead his soldiers to victory. Both plays are built with a similar plot. In Mukamba’s play, Anifa functions as a “Mobutu-like” figure who “saves the army” and brings victory.

By oversimplifying the contexts of the Congo armed conflicts and incorporating many political and religious jargons, *Anifa ou Môme en Enfer* presents itself as the type of work that Nicholas Ridout criticizes in *Theatre and Ethics* because “something about what the work says or does matches our own sense of what we would like it to say or do, corresponds with our own sense of how we would like the world to be” (Ridout 66). However, despite these shortcomings, I still believe that Fabien Mukamba’s play deserves some consideration for these following reasons. First, the text approaches the issue of war in the Congo from a totally different perspective than that of Western writers such as Lynn Nottage. Instead of looking at the impact of war from the standpoint of civilians, *Anifa ou Môme en Enfer* presents the mind of soldiers, revealing their feelings and attitudes toward the hostilities. The play, written by an individual who lives close to war zones, offers a mine of information about the true sentiments of Congolese, sentiments that many texts written by foreigners fail to uncover.

Professor Nyunda Ya Rubango, describing “le sentiment du Congolais moyen” that transpires within *Anifa ou Môme en Enfer*, sees in the play the invasion of Congo territory by Rwanda with the help of a disguised political group called RCD (Rubango 690-91). For Rubango, it is the voice of Rwandan President Paul Kagame (or any Rwandan political leader) that readers can hear when the commandant of the invading army declares his love of war and details the atrocities he perpetrates during the hostilities:

La guerre! La guerre c’est beau! Rien sur cette terre ne me procure tant de bonheur que la guerre. Pendant la guerre tout est gratuit. C’est le moment des orgies et des libertés...Je suis un dieu...je déplace les bornes des frontières...J’enterre vivantes des femmes enceintes... (35)

War! War is beautiful! Nothing on this earth gives me so much happiness as war. During war everything is free. This is the time of orgies and freedoms... I am a god... I remove the landmarks of borders... I bury alive pregnant women...

Anifa, Professor Rubango argues, responds to this declaration with “le sentiment de révolte commun des Congolais”<sup>73</sup> when she describes these invaders as “des vulgaires envahisseurs, des assoiffés de sang! Des êtres cupides attirés par les richesses de notre pays...”<sup>74</sup> (38).

Besides analyzing texts that examine the issues of Congo armed conflicts through Western eyes for a Western audience, as Nottage’s *Ruined* does, it is crucial to study and understand those that address and present these wars to a Congolese audience. Indeed, the story in *Anifa ou Même en Enfer* would resonate with more Congolese than the one that Nottage’s *Ruined* presents. It does not mean that Congolese are not concerned with the impact of sexual violence. It simply reveals that, before anything else, the “Congolais moyen” is revolted by the invasion of foreign troops in their national territory.

Secondly, *Anifa ou Même en Enfer* is worth studying because the story in the play exposes the psychological effects of armed conflicts by functioning as a metaphor for trauma. Indeed, in Mukamba’s play, war repeats itself. Anifa’s country happens to be invaded by the very same foreign army that attacked it before. While in a preceding battle (la guerre de Shamwami), the national army was able to fight and push their enemies away, the latter are once again returning with the hope of conquering a territory that they failed to take control of. Trauma also operates through repetition. As Cathy Caruth

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<sup>73</sup> “The common feeling of revolt of Congolese people”

<sup>74</sup> “vulgar invaders, blood thirsty! Greedy beings attracted by the riches of our country...”

describes it in her introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), the traumatizing event is experienced belatedly through repeated memory-mediated flashbacks (Caruth 4). This event cannot be left behind because it is not fully assimilated the first time it occurs. The survivor then has to experience the memory of his trauma again and again, unconsciously and unwillingly. In *Anifa ou Même en Enfer*, the first attack of the foreign army is not fully resolved. The attack has to happen again. One of the soldiers complains:

Nous étions décidés de le poursuivre jusque sur son territoire, mais hélas! Un ordre venu de la capitale nous empêcha de traverser nos frontières. C'était une erreur!...Il fallait le poursuivre, le détruire, l'anéantir! Je suis sûr que ce sont les mêmes envahisseurs qui nous font la guerre aujourd'hui. (10)

We were determined to chase after him as far as his territory, but alas! An order from the capital prevented us from crossing our borders. It was a mistake!... We had to pursue them, destroy them, annihilate them ! I'm sure that these are the same invaders who make war on us today.

The second battle in the play can then be seen as an attempt to reconquer an unresolved experience with an invading army that, like a ghost, keep haunting its victim. Fabien Mukamba's inclusion of the repeated attack in the text is deliberately strategic because it points to all the wars and crises that regularly occur in the Congo in a cyclical fashion: the Katanga and South Kasai secessions in July 1960 followed by the Kwilu and Simba rebellions; President Mobutu's coup in November 1965 and his exile in May 1998; the assassination of the Prime Minister Patrice Emery Lumumba on January 17<sup>t</sup>, 1961 and that of President Laurent Desiré Kabila on January 16<sup>t</sup>, 2001; and all the armed conflicts that eastern Congo has experienced since 1996.

One could argue that *Anifa ou Même en Enfer* points to a successful resolution of trauma since its author foresees an end to the repeated nightmares that Congo experiences. In his play, the enemy capitulates and the national army achieves a complete victory. Despite the unrealistic manner by which Anifa offers the victory to her army, the play is still remarkable because it is the only text (among all the selected works) that ends with an end of the armed conflicts. Although this has not happened (yet) in reality, it is nevertheless the hope of Congolese that one day, all rebel and militia groups will lay down their guns and hostilities will cease throughout the whole territory of the country.

Fabien Mukamba reflects on the psychological impact of war, not only by building his play as a metaphor for trauma but also by incorporating three specific images that characterize many trauma stories: hell, beer and blood. To realize the way the author uses these images, I first think it important to understand the various themes that *Anifa ou Même en Enfer* explores. The play is about an inexplicable love. Anifa is determined to go to war and to expose herself to death simply for the sake of being close to her husband. Her love seems sometimes irrational but she holds on to it until the end of the play. She boldly declares: “Jamais je ne vivrai longtemps dans la solitude, dans la passivité alors que mon mari et ma patrie sont en danger. Non! Je te suivrai malgré toi et je combattrai à tes côtés...”<sup>75</sup> (18). Through Anifa’s passion and decision, Fabien Mukamba addresses an issue that the perpetuation of Congo armed conflicts has caused: the prolonged loneliness and deprivation that spouses of soldiers experience when their husbands are sent to the front lines. Because of the lack of any support systems in the country, many of these spouses find themselves in despicable situations that they have

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<sup>75</sup> “I will never live long in solitude, in passivity while my husband and my country are in danger. No! I will follow you in spite of you and will fight by your side”



often criticized. On May 3<sup>r</sup>, 2012, for example, in the town of Butembo in eastern Congo, spouses and mothers of Congolese soldiers took to the streets to demonstrate against the poor and shocking treatment they receive from the national government. These women, many of them have lost their husbands and children, walked in the streets half-naked to express their revolt at the terrible scale of their poverty and hardship.

The play secondly deals with the brutality and destructiveness of armed conflicts in the Congo. This is best represented at the beginning of the play when one of Mose's friends, sergeant Waro, has difficulty informing him about the invasion of the country. It takes him a long moment to reveal to his friend the terrible news about the attack. In their conversation, Waro repeats "que c'est effroyable"<sup>76</sup> twice, trying to show to Mose how serious the threat is (8). Then, he tells his friend that a group of soldiers was rushed to the front lines to fight the invaders but none of them came back. Both men reach the conclusion that these soldiers have probably all been captured or massacred. This sad possibility makes Mose's face and attitude gloomy as he reflects on the meaninglessness of war saying: "La guerre! Pourquoi la guerre?"<sup>77</sup> (9).

Thirdly, *Anifa ou Même en Enfer* discusses the role and fate of women in times of war. Most texts about the Congo armed conflicts depict women as defenseless victims of sexual violence. In Lynn Nottage's *Ruined* for example, there is a clear contrast in the depiction of men and women. In the text, all the women have been raped at some point in their lives and none of them is a member of the army or any rebel groups. Fabien Mukamba proposes a different representation of women by introducing a female character who refuses to be confined to her home while her husband is fighting enemies.

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<sup>76</sup> "It is so terrible" or "How frightening this is"

<sup>77</sup> "War! Why war?"

When Mose declares that “la guerre est une affaire d’hommes,”<sup>78</sup> Anifa expresses her emancipation: “Certes, je suis une femme, mais une femme émancipée, une patriote. La nation est en danger, je dois la défendre”<sup>79</sup> (16). By portraying Anifa as a courageous warrior, the author addresses a serious problem related to the passive role Congolese women often play during the armed conflicts. As several studies have shown, these women have historically been denied a strong presence on the battlefield and any military policy-making roles. For example, after comparing women’s social, political and military mobilization in both Liberia and the Congo in times of war, Colonel Cindy Jebb, Major Jessica Grasseti and Major Riley Post have found that, unlike the situation in Liberia, the level of participation of Congolese women has been significantly low.<sup>80</sup> For these authors, there are several reasons that explain the alarming situation in the Congo. Jebb, Grasseti and Post first argue that, even before the beginning of the Congo armed conflicts, Congolese women suffered from more serious economic and political discrimination (23). War has done nothing but exacerbate negative stereotypes that already existed. The authors also note that, before and during the conflicts, the number of girls in schools has been much lower than that of boys (23). In eastern Congo in particular, during hostilities, most parents refused to send their daughters to school so that they would not become victims of sexual attacks. As a result, a large portion of the female population has been denied access to education, an essential element in social,

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<sup>78</sup> “War is men’s business”

<sup>79</sup> “Indeed, I am a woman, but an emancipated woman, a patriot. The nation is in danger, I have to defend it”

<sup>80</sup> Colonel Cindy R. Jebb, Major Jessica D. Grasseti and Major Riley J. Post. “Sudden Rain: The Effect of Conflict on Women’s Mobilization” in *Air and Space Power Journal---Afrique and Francophonie*, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter, 2015, pp. 4-29. Accessed at [http://www.au.af.mil/au/afri/aspj/apjinternational/aspj\\_f/digital/pdf/articles/2015\\_1/jebbgrassettipost\\_e.pdf](http://www.au.af.mil/au/afri/aspj/apjinternational/aspj_f/digital/pdf/articles/2015_1/jebbgrassettipost_e.pdf).

economic and political participation. News about the atrocities perpetrated on women has also dissuaded many of them from getting directly involved in conflicts or occupying public positions. As a consequence, in almost all the towns in eastern Congo, women's activities have been limited to the private sphere. By joining the military and fighting alongside her husband, Anifa represents then a liberated Congolese woman who is not afraid of challenging the established gender order, practice and ideology.

It is interesting to note that her name means "true" or "truth" in Swahili. She actually functions in the text as the voice of truth, a voice that is constantly in opposition to the voice of the patriarchal order. In Arabic, Anifa means "true believer." In Fabien Mukamba's text, Anifa is portrayed as a beacon of hope and faith, a woman who does not doubt about her ability of providing help and support to both her husband and her invaded country. To highlight this important role Anifa is playing in the text, the author creates an ironic contrast between her name and that of her husband. The name "Mose" is the Swahili version of the biblical name Moses, the Israelite who delivered his people from slavery in Egypt. In Fabien Mukamba's text, the deliverance of the army does not come from Mose, but rather from the person whose role he resolutely opposes: his wife who symbolizes the "truth."

Fourthly, *Anifa ou Môme en Enfer* challenges the selfish economic motives that fuel the perpetuation of hostilities in eastern Congo. The most recurrent question in the text is "pourquoi sommes-nous en guerre?"<sup>81</sup> Fabien Mukamba answers this question through the mouth of several of his characters. One of them, the lieutenant of the army,

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<sup>81</sup> "Why are in war?"

points his finger at the Congo's resource curse as the reason why foreign armies and armed groups periodically invade the country:

...Dieu nous a donné un pays scandaleusement riche. Notre sous-sol regorge des pierres précieuses dont l'éclat et la magnificence attire la jalousie et la cupidité non seulement des États voisins mais aussi des puissances lointaines...(27)

...God gave us a scandalously rich country. Our land is full of gems whose brilliance and magnificence attracts jealousy and greed not only from neighboring countries but also distant powers...

Here, Fabien Mukamba is deploying the same argument that several organizations have offered in relation to the cause of the perpetuation of violence in the Congo. It is believed that hostilities are prolonged simply because various armed groups are attracted to mining zones and they fight to take direct control of them. And, once a specific group occupies a mineral-rich region, their combatants force local populations to extract minerals for their benefit while they fight any other groups that attempt to dislodge them. For example, In *The Curse of Gold*, Human Rights Watch documented and exposed the barbaric activities of Ugandan militias that controlled two important mining areas in northeastern Congo for a long period of time.<sup>82</sup> From 1998 until 2003, the report reveals, these Ugandan rebel soldiers collected "an estimated one ton of Congolese gold valued at over \$9 million" (Human Rights Watch June 2005, 1).

The words that the lieutenant uses to explain the resource curse to Mose deserve some attention. Fabien Mukamba creates a powerful contrast between two opposing sets of words: éclat-magnificence and jalousie-cupidité (27). The beauty of the Congo wealth

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<sup>82</sup> Human Rights Watch. *The Democratic Republic of Congo: The Curse of Gold*. June 2005. Accessed at <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/drc0505/>

is opposed to the ugliness of the motives of neighboring nations and Western powers. As the lieutenant goes on to explain, attracted by the presence of minerals, these invaders “ont violé délibérément l’intégrité territoriale”<sup>83</sup> (27). Through the use of the verb “violer”, Fabien Mukamba draws a parallel between the physical rape of women and the illegal exploitation of mineral resources. In both cases, armed groups commit crimes by unlawfully and forcibly abusing civilians.

Finally, *Anifa ou Même en Enfer* explores the meaning of patriotism and heroism during wartime. In the text, Anifa argues that she has to go to war because she is a patriot and she has to defend her country. However, her husband also thinks that he is a true patriot by forbidding his wife from enlisting in the army. Fabien Mukamba represents here one of the troubling issues regarding the true identity of army combatants, warlords and their collaborators. Since the beginning of armed conflicts in eastern Congo, patriotism has been a divisive concept that has raised several questions: who is the patriot? Is it the person who fights for the national army or the one who joins a rebel group? Are men who fight in the national army more patriotic than women who stay at home?

Throughout the past years, in the name of patriotism, several important political personalities have joined or collaborated with foreign rebel groups. For example, fighting the government of Président Laurent-Desiré Kabila, Jean Pierre Bemba, the son of an important Congolese businessman, joined forces with the Ugandan army while Professor Ernest Wamba Dia Wamba was chosen as the leader of a Rwanda-backed rebel group. During this period, both the government and the rebel sides argued that they fought war

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<sup>83</sup> “have deliberately violated the integrity of the territory”

on patriotic grounds. As a consequence, the concept of patriotism became so confusing that gradually it lost its meaning in the eyes of people.

To inform and develop the major themes of his play, Fabien Mukamba uses three images that are all often part of trauma stories: hell, beer and blood.

## **Hell**

Throughout the play, Fabien Mukamba presents war as hell.<sup>84</sup> The title of the play itself makes a strong reference to hell, the war zone to which Anifa is willing to go so as to prove her unconditional love to her husband. In the play, war is hell because it affects terribly people who experience it. Although the fighting is over, for example, Waro still remembers “les affres de la guerre de Shamwami” (9). Waro adds that all the soldiers who returned from this war were traumatized. The word “affres” here refers to deep forms of anguish that one experiences when they are confronted with death, poverty or an unbearable suffering. This word is also commonly used in relation to the pain in hell.

There is an interesting parallel between hell in *Anifa ou Même en Enfer* and the one that Dante describes in *Inferno*. Fabien Mukamba’s play is structured as a multi-layered descent into the evil of war. The story starts with a romantic conversation between two newly married people; then suddenly, it degenerates into frightening encounters with enemies that exhibit a gradual increase in their cruelty. Towards the end of the play, the hellish nature of war becomes more visible when an army chief who does not hide his sadistic personality captures Anifa and her countrymen. The commandant admits: “Je suis sadique et tu vas l’éprouver....Je n’aimerai pas être à la place de ton

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<sup>84</sup> Several texts represent individual trauma or war trauma as hell. See for example Rachel Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature: Western Descent Narratives Since 1945* (2005) and Anne Whitehead, *Journeying Through Hell: Wole Soyinka, Trauma, and Postcolonial Nigeria* (2008).

mari. Car avant de mourir, il va certainement souffrir...Je lui arracherai oreille par oreille, bras par bras et jambe par jambe..."<sup>85</sup> (48). The text here makes a reference to the use of torture in times of war, the type of torture that has characterized the Congo armed conflicts. The words of the chief of the invading army also speak about dislocation and fragmentation, two important features of the traumatic nature of war. The body of Mose, like the territory of the country, is threatened to be reduced to separated pieces when its members are torn apart from each other.

### **Beer**

Beer is present in Fabien Mukamba's play and serves different purposes. At the beginning of the play, it is first symbolic of men's domination over women. When Mose and Waro meet, the husband asks Anifa to go and get some beer for them and the latter goes out, carrying the plate and silverware that Mose just used. On her way out, Anifa says: "les hommes souffrent de complexe!"<sup>86</sup> (8). Although she expresses these words much more in relation to her conversation with her husband about gender equality and much less in regards to the drink she is getting for the two men, it is still possible to see the beer as a symbol of men's complex of superiority over women who are basically instructed to be at the service of their husbands.

When Anifa brings the bottle of beer, her husband does not drink it because he is just been informed about the invasion of the country and the news is too overwhelming for him to indulge in drinking. Fabien Mukamba then builds a contrast between this bottle of beer that Mose does not drink and those that lie around the main office of the

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<sup>85</sup> "I am sadistic and you will experience it...I would not want to be in the shoes of your husband. Because, before he dies, he will definitely suffer...I will tear away ear after ear, arm after arm, and leg after leg..."

<sup>86</sup> "Men suffer from complexes"

headquarter of the ennemi. In this office, one can see on the floor “plusieurs bouteilles de bière vides” and on the table “une bouteille à moitié pleine et un verre rempli d’alcool” (35). Concerned about war and consequently the fate of his wife and the future of his country, Mose refuses to drink something that is often synonymous with celebration, conviviality and relaxation. The news of war is so serious to Mose that a bottle of beer needs to remain closed. Unlike him, the members of the invading army are drinking heavily and expressing a celebratory mood. Mose and Waro appear then as two nationalist and patriotic individuals who are willing to deny a moment of relaxation to reflect on the seriousness of war. The commandant of the invading army, in contrast, is portrayed then as a drunkard soldier with an immoral agenda. The evil nature of this character is reinforced by several names by which Anifa and Mose define him. He is describes as “un meurtrier sans foi ni loi,” “le sauvage,” “le salaud,” “l’ogre”<sup>87</sup>... (42-56).

### **Blood**

*Anifa ou Même en Enfer* features “tant de sang” that speak about the horrific nature of war. Blood is spilled abundantly because hostilities are characterized by the use of mutilations and tortures. For example, during the Shamwami war, Waro complains, there were too many mutilations and horrible deaths (9). Commonly used as a symbol of life, blood in Fabien Mukamba’s play on the contrary suggests atrocities and death. This blood, the author implies, is simply wasted because of hatred, jealousy and human cruelty (27).

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<sup>87</sup> “A lawless and faithless murderer,” “the savage,” “the bastard,” “the ogre”....



The enemies are portrayed several times in the text as “des assoiffés de sang”<sup>88</sup> so as to highlight the barbaric nature of militias and armed groups that fight for no legitimate cause (38, 42). The text suggests that these “vulgaires envahisseurs”<sup>89</sup> commit atrocities simply for the sake of inflicting pain and suffering. They are thirsty for blood and eager to experience “le grand plaisir de contempler le sang rouge, tout rouge, se répandre...”<sup>90</sup> (48).

The incorporation of these three images---hell, beer, and blood---allow Mukamba’s play to function as a tool for reflection, reflection on the effects of war. Interestingly, these three images are also present in Nottage’s *Ruined*, carrying the same meanings. In *Ruined*, the war zone is described as hell, soldiers drink beer to forget their guilt and civilians are revolted at the amount of blood that is shed because of hostilities. Although they build two different stories and examine the Congo armed conflicts from different perspectives, both Lynn Nottage and Fabien Mukamba attempt to achieve the same goal: raise awareness about the horrors of war and its impact on populations.

The two playwrights build their plays differently and use two different linguistic styles because they address two different audiences. *Ruined* is written for a Western audience that can relate to a story that unfolds like a soap opera while *Anifa ou Même en Enfer* speaks to a Congolese audience that can empathize with a patriotic and nationalist soldier-character. Despite this difference, Both plays explore several identical themes: the absurdity of war, the role minerals play in fueling hostilities, the use of torture, the responsibility of Western powers, etc.

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88 “blood thirsty people”

89 “vulgar invaders”

90 “the great pleasure of contemplating red blood, all red, flowing...”

## CHAPTER IV

### COLLECTING AND SHARING STORIES: TESTIMONY AND TRAUMA IN LISA SHANNON'S *MAMA KOKO AND THE HUNDRED GUNMEN* AND JOSEPH MWANTUALI'S *TELL THIS TO MY MOTHER*

In this chapter, I consider Lisa Shannon and Joseph Mwantuali as oral historians and examine the similarities and differences in the way they collected and wrote their trauma stories. I specifically focus on the various narrative strategies that each author employs in their text and demonstrate that, for Lisa Shannon and Joseph Mwantuali, details about historical occurrences matter less than feelings and emotions that these historical events have caused. In both memoirs, both authors strive to communicate to the reader the pain and hope of the victims whose stories are being told. Stories in the two books often miss important information (especially stories about attacks that have really happened in several villages) about the location, the date, the time, the chronology of violent events simply because Lisa Shannon and Joseph Mwantuali have decided to purposefully leave those details out and direct the reader's attention to the pain of the victims.

Over the last two decades, many people traveled to eastern Congo to collect testimonies of victims. One of them, Leah Chishugi, has been able to interview approximately 500 rape victims over a period of two months.<sup>91</sup> Chishugi grew up in the region and fled as a refugee to Britain in 1994 after surviving the Rwandan Genocide. Revolted by the level of atrocities that were taking place in the Congo, she decided to

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<sup>91</sup> Leah Chishugi's story and testimonies are available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2008/dec/05/congo> and <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/dec/05/congo-rape-testimonies-walungu> (Accessed December 13, 2015)

return to the country, visit women in their villages and film their stories. As she videotaped them, she recorded their names, ages, the location of the rapes and the origin of the perpetrators. For Chishugi, it is essential to document these atrocities and allow the whole world to hear about the tragedies that are happening in central Africa.<sup>92</sup>

Like Leah Chishugi, Lisa Shannon and Joseph Mwantuali have also devoted their time and energy to collecting victims' stories. Lisa Shannon is an American human rights activist well known for having founded *Run for Congo Women*, an international organization that raises funds and awareness about the fate of women in the Congo. Her activism started in 2005 when she saw Lisa Ling's report on *Oprah* about the atrocities in the Congo. In the report, Ling described the region as "the worst place to be a woman."<sup>93</sup> Appalled by what she heard and saw on TV, Shannon decided to dedicate her life to helping rape victims live through war. After travelling to eastern Congo and meeting victims, she wrote her first book, *A Thousand Sisters: My Journey into the Worst Place on Earth to Be a Woman*, published by Seal Press in April 2010. In this memoir, Shannon recounts how she became involved in human rights activism and raised awareness about the Congo by telling stories of Congolese rape survivors. *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen: An Ordinary Family's Extraordinary Tale of Love, Loss, and Survival in Congo* is a second memoir that she wrote after making an additional trip to the region with Francisca Thelin, a Congolese expatriate who now lives and works in the United States.

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<sup>92</sup> Several interviews of Leah Chishugi are available on Youtube. In these interviews, she describes the purpose of her work. In this one, she tells the story of her life and her current activism <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cx8zxp3PhD8> (Accessed December 13, 2015)

<sup>93</sup> Lisa Shannon's story and activism work are available at her personal website <http://lisajshannon.com/>

As Shannon declares in her book, she travelled to the Congo because she wanted to “collect her (Francisca) family’s stories and share them with the world” (11).

In *Tell This to My Mother*, Joseph Mwantuali undertook the same project. He has documented the story of Coco Ramazani, a Congo war rape victim who fled eastern Congo in 2000 as a refugee and arrived in the United States through Kampala in Uganda. The author of the memoir is a Congolese novelist, poet and playwright who presently teaches French and Francophone studies at Hamilton College in New York State. He met Coco Ramazani in April 2000 right after she arrived in the United States and was diagnosed with AIDS.

I read these two memoirs in the light of the scholarship on the nature of oral history, personal testimony and trauma. I particularly focus my attention on the question of the authenticity and veracity of testimonies by examining the issues raised by Lynn Abrams in *Oral History Theory* (2010), Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992) and Leigh Gilmore in *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (2001). Lynn Abrams notes that the oral historian “asks people questions to discover four things: what happened, how they felt about it, how they recall it, and what wider public memory they draw upon” (Abrams, 78). These questions point to some important issues regarding the process of remembering past and violent events, the process of interpreting stories that are being told, and the process of writing those stories to share them with the world. Lisa Shannon and Joseph Mwantuali’s memoirs interestingly highlight these processes and offer valuable insights into the importance and limits of personal testimonies of war victims.

Trauma theorists offer different ways of defining “testimony.” In this chapter, I adopt the definitions that Shoshana Felman presents in her work because they help me understand better the goals that the selected memoirists are attempting to achieve in their texts. Felman considers testimony both as a “medium of historical transmission” and the “medium of a healing” as well (Felman *Education and Crisis*, 8-11). Testimony as a medium of historical transmission implies that the events that both memoirists recount are significant historical moments and their significance reaches beyond the lives of Coco Ramazani or Francisca Thelin. Testimony as a medium of healing suggests that the stories that Mwantuali and Shannon tell are capable of bringing a type of relief, not only to Coco Ramazani or Francisca Thelin’s family but also to anyone who can identify with the past traumatic experiences of these characters.

Indeed, testimonies play an important role in empowering not only the victims of war trauma but also their communities. The ability to share a testimony helps the victim regain control over what they experienced because, to share their story, they need to make sense of the horrific event and find a new meaning from it. As Nancy Goodman explains in *The Power of Witnessing* (2012), many survivors of horrific events “live to speak” and “they keep alive a sense that someone would be able to listen.” Without the testimonies of these survivors, Goodman adds, “the most terrible of events can remain untold, leaving a place of negation and ‘nothing’ in the mind and in the historical record” (Goodman 3).

Testimonies are also important for those who did not experience the traumatic event directly. A testimony helps people understand the pain of the victims and offer them the support they need. Without the testimony, the group of victims and “listeners”

remain two separate entities that cannot relate to each other. As Dori Laub explains in “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening” (1992), the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event... (because) the listener comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels” (Laub *Bearing Witness*, 58). Dominick LaCapra describes the same reality by coining in *Trauma, Absence, Loss* (1999) the expression “empathic unsettlement”, an expression that refers to the desired response of the “secondary witness” (LaCapra *Trauma*, 722). These secondary witnesses could be literary critics, ordinary readers or simply movie viewers.

Leigh Gilmore, however, highlights in *The Limits of Autobiography* some of the issues that trauma testimonies raise. She claims that these testimonies often “draw skepticism more readily than sympathy because they expose the conflict between identification and representativeness” (22). Gilmore asks some important questions: how can trauma survivors represent what eludes language or what is unimaginable to others? How can they connect with listeners who might become victims or voyeurs through the very act of listening? How can marginalized survivors share their testimonies when the violence they experienced is not recognized and endorsed by Western culture (23-32)?

Considering these questions, I find it interesting to study how Joseph Mwantuali and Lisa Shannon, in their respective memoirs, attempt to circumvent the limits that accompany the collection and the telling of personal testimonies. To better examine how both writers have handled the testimonies they collected, I divide my examination of the two memoirs into three parts that explore specific questions related to the categorization

of these texts, the manner in which the authors have collected their stories and the way they narrate them.

### **The Categorization of these Memoirs**

Many survivors of war and genocide (situations) choose to turn their tragic experiences into autobiographical witness accounts that provide details about what happened and how these individuals were able to escape death. Following the Rwandan genocide, Leah Chishugi, Louise Mushikiwabo and Immaculée Ilibagiza wrote invaluable memoirs of their ordeals.<sup>94</sup> Although these books tell the personal stories of their authors, some critics have argued that these texts should be described more as novels than as memoirs. For example, in his review of Leah Chishugi's *A Long Way from Paradise: Surviving the Rwandan Genocide* (2010), François Lagarde states that her book should not be considered as an autobiographical text but rather as "a novel, a work of the imagination" (Lagarde)<sup>95</sup>. Lagarde mentions factual errors and unrealistic descriptions of places that "turn the memoir quickly into a novel" (Lagarde).

It is important to note that most of these Rwandan authors have written their memoirs with the help of second writers. For example, Louise Mushikiwabo collaborated with Jack Kramer to write *Rwanda Means the Universe: A Native's Memoir of Blood and Bloodlines* (2006) while Immaculée Ilibagiza worked with Steve Erwin to create *Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust* (2006). This collaboration

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<sup>94</sup> See Leah Chishugi, *A Long Way from Paradise: Surviving the Rwandan Genocide* (2010); Louise Mushikiwabo, *Rwanda Means the Universe: A Native's Memoir of Blood and Bloodlines* (2006); Immaculée Ilibagiza, *Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust* (2006).

<sup>95</sup> Professor François Lagarde reviewed Leah Chishugi's book on January 28, 2011 on [http://www.amazon.com/review/R1ZQ56GTUWPYCT/ref=cm\\_cr\\_dp\\_cmt?ie=UTF8&ASIN=B004BDOJUY&channel=detail-glance&nodeID=283155&store=books#wasThisHelpful](http://www.amazon.com/review/R1ZQ56GTUWPYCT/ref=cm_cr_dp_cmt?ie=UTF8&ASIN=B004BDOJUY&channel=detail-glance&nodeID=283155&store=books#wasThisHelpful) (Accessed November 29, 2015).

between survivors and second writers raises interesting questions in relation to the veracity and validity of facts that are described in the memoirs since, in most of these books, there are no specific indications about the contributions that each individual made during the writing process.

The memoirs about the Congo armed conflicts offer the same challenges. Most of these texts are written by individuals who did not experience the events they are recounting. The authors interview the victims and survivors, collect information and manage to create texts that function as autobiographical witness accounts. Katia Clarens, for example, reveals that she received a 15-page manuscript from Lucien Badjoko, a former child soldier who wanted his story to be published.<sup>96</sup> However, details in Badjoko's text were at times incomprehensible. Clarens, a news reporter for *Le Figaro*, travelled to Kinshasa and interviewed the former combatant. About their collaborative work, Clarens comments that "Il (Badjoko) s'est prêté au jeu au-delà de ce que j'avais espéré. Il a creusé, fouillé. Il a eu mal à la tête et au ventre en répondant à mes questions..."<sup>97</sup> (Badjoko 7). In Badjoko's memoir, *J'étais Enfant Soldat*, readers then confront the testimony of the former child soldier, a testimony that Katia Clarens has collected, organized and written. This type of collaboration raises some important questions: What are the moments that Badjoko had difficulty remembering? How accurate is his memory/recalling? What shaped Clarens' writing style? Are there details that she chose to leave out or add to the story? How can one describe the finished product? Is this a memoir, a novel or an autobiographical novel?

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<sup>96</sup> Lucien Badjoko and Katia Clarens, *J'étais Enfant Soldat: Le Récit Poignant d'une Enfance Africaine*, 2005.

<sup>97</sup> "He played the game of the interview beyond what I hoped for. He dug deep, searched. He had some headache and stomachache answering my questions..."



One needs to recognize, however, that the border between a memoir and a novel or between a memoir and an autobiography is not always easy to delineate. Memoirists who share trauma stories often borrow techniques used in fiction to build captivating narratives. And some novelists give their fictional texts the form of a memoir to convey a sense of authenticity. Lisa Shannon's and Joseph Mwantuali's memoirs raise the same type of questions. They both present personal testimonies that the authors have collected and organized after interviewing the victims of violence. Lisa Shannon tells true stories of several members of Francisca Thelin's family while Joseph Mwantuali reports what Coco Ramazani told him about her war experiences in the Congo. Ramazani is a former girl soldier who was forced to join the rebellion in eastern Congo. She ended up being used as a sexual slave by drugged foreign soldiers but she eventually managed to escape the military camp and fled into Uganda where she took a plane to America.

Although they present themselves as memoirs, both texts read like novels. This is highlighted by the publishers' description of the books in the titles. *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen* is subtitled as a "tale" while Joseph Mwantuali's book is labeled as a "novel." The Oxford dictionary defines a tale as "a fictitious or true narrative or story, especially one that is imaginatively recounted" while a novel is said to be "a fictitious prose narrative of book length, typically representing character and action with some degree of realism." The subtitling of these two texts as a tale and a novel suggest that the authors want their memoirs to be read as both fictional and non-fictional texts.

Categorizing Shannon and Mwantuali's narratives is important because, as G. Thomas Couser comments, we approach memoir differently from fiction and "we invest in them very differently" (Couser 13). Although the memoir and the novel share several

similar characteristics,<sup>98</sup> they are essentially different from each other. The memoir basically constitutes “a nonfictional record or re-presentation of actual humans’ experience” while the novel “creates its own lifelike reality” (Couser 15).

This distinction is not so clear when we consider the structure and content of Lisa Shannon and Joseph Mwantuali’s books. Both *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen* and *Tell This to My Mother* feature real people and historical events. However, they also present details that appear more fictional than nonfictional. Joseph Mwantuali, for example, incorporates in his narrative the voice of Nganga, a retired doctor that the narrator, Coco Ramazani, does not recognize as part of her life story. By adding the voice of Nganga,<sup>99</sup> Joseph Mwantuali makes the story more compelling, especially for Congolese readers, but he also complicates the categorization of the book.

*Tell This to My Mother* appears as part autobiography, part biography, part storytelling, part essay, part novel and part memoir. Because of the multiplicity of its forms, Mwantuali’s book can be difficult to approach. From its cover, the book promises to deliver a novel that is “based on the *true* story of Coco Ramazani, a war victim.” Since the book is said to be a “novel,” the reader might assume that stories and characters inside the narrative are fictional, which is not the case. Stories in the book are historical events that have happened and characters are real people that have experienced those events. The real names of most of these people have been used in the book without or with little modification. Because of the use of all these factual details in the book, readers

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<sup>98</sup> For example, both a memoir and a novel feature characters that interact with each other. Some are given more importance than others. Also, the dialogs between characters are presented the same way in a memoir and a novel. Moreover, a memoir and a novel also have a plot that evolves so as to make the story coherent and meaningful.

<sup>99</sup> Nganga means traditional healer

who have a good knowledge of historical events of the Congo conflicts can conclude that *Tell This To My Mother* bears a stronger resemblance to a memoir than a novel.

The word “true” in the title also raises another set of challenging questions. Considering that the narrator in the story is still Coco Ramazani, how can a reader differentiate between the true story of Coco Ramazani and the narrative of Coco Ramazani, the narrator? Is the “novel” really featuring a true story? Or is it presenting a fictional narrative that draws its details from a true story? If yes, where then can the reader find the true story? Which part in the book is true or untrue? The book does not provide clear answers to these questions.

Unlike *Tell This to My Mother* that does not indicate clearly which part of Coco Ramazani’s story is true, *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen* describes itself as “a true story” (207). Lisa Shannon declares that there are no “composite” characters in the book (207). All the stories that the author has heard from the mouths of Francisca Thelin’s family, friends and neighbors are said to be “firsthand accounts” that have been “verified” and “confirmed” by several other people (207).

Shannon’s process of verification and confirmation of her material raises interesting questions in relation to the veracity of testimonies. The author recounts several tragic events that have been experienced by people who underwent their ordeals in the presence of perpetrators and the absence of any bystanders. Since Shannon did not interview any perpetrators to collect their testimonies, how can all stories in the book be verified? The point here is that *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen* might be a true story, however, it is a story that cannot be totally verified and confirmed.

By labeling their narratives as “a true story” and “a novel based on a true story,” Shannon and Mwantuali are probably aware that their texts will attract some scrutiny. One can also assume that the two authors understand that, because of the political nature of their writings, critics and readers will examine possible inaccuracies and fabrications in both books. And, these inaccuracies are actually part of the writing process of any memoirs. As Professor John F. Kihlstrom comments in his study of the causes of inaccuracies in memoirs, “errors and distortions are natural consequences of the reconstructive process: individual experiences will be confused, vicarious experiences will be remembered as personal, and the stories of many individuals will be conflated into the story of one person (Kihlstrom, 2002). Therefore, the subtling of a memoir as “a true story” does not imply that the text is totally devoid of any possible factual errors.

It is important to examine the authenticity of testimonies in *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen* and *Tell This to My Mother* because these texts make strong statements regarding the involvement of political and armed groups in Congo armed conflicts. Shannon and Mwantuali’s memoirs resemble *I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. Despite their literary characteristic, these memoirs are political texts that draw attention to important human rights issues such as the extermination of entire villages or communities.

By presenting their texts as “true stories,” Shannon and Mwantuali seem to make the same claim that the Pulitzer Prize winning Mayan memoirist Rigoberta Menchu advanced in her text as she stated at the beginning of it:

My name is Rigoberta Menchu. I’m 23 years old. This is my testimony. I didn’t learn it from a book and I didn’t learn it alone. I’d like to stress that it’s not only

my life, it's also the testimony of my people...My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people (Menchu 1).

Menchu's memoir was originally written in Spanish and then translated into English by Anne Wright. In the original, the author recounts horrible atrocities that the indigenous Quiche Indian populations have experienced during the thirty-six-year period of Civil War in Guatemala. After winning the Pulitzer Prize, Menchu's memoir was criticized for its inaccuracies. For example, Professor of Anthropology David Stoll of Middlebury College, after researching government documents and interviewing several witnesses, wrote a book entitled, "Rigoberta Menchu and the Story of all Poor Guatemalans," in which he accused Menchu of having distorted details about her life, family and people to generate some publicity for the guerilla movement to which she belonged. Although Stoll's research and motives have been criticized by several scholars and critics, many claims the anthropologist makes in his book have been recognized as valid. Menchu herself has responded to Stoll's criticism and acknowledged that many details in her testimonies were not totally accurate. For example, she admitted that, contrary to what she says in her memoir, she has received some education while growing up and she had not personally witnessed the atrocious killing of her brother. It is her mother who was present during the murder, she confessed. Moreover, she has also admitted that she distorted some elements in her stories to protect relatives and friends who were still alive in Guatemala in 1982, when her memoir was published.

Although Shannon and Mwantuali each make a claim about the veracity and authenticity of their materials, just like Rigoberta Menchu does at the beginning of her

memoir, it is also possible that their texts contain some distortions that result from the natural desire of romanticizing or dramatizing some stories. Like Menchu, Shannon and Mwantuali use their texts to speak on behalf of groups of people who are denied the right to raise their voices. Their memoirs are valuable platforms for political and social change. Because of that, it is not surprising that, in the process of speaking for the voiceless, some authors might be tempted to embellish their testimonies to elicit interest and empathy from readers.

### **The Collection of These Stories**

In *Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening*, Dori Laub argues that, throughout the process of collecting testimonies, “there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an other” (Laub 70). Testimonies cannot be gathered as monologues. An exchange of information has to take place between the witnesses of past events and the “other”. The latter commit themselves to listening to what the witnesses have to say. The main task of the listener, Laub comments, is to remain “unobtrusively present” even when the witnesses become absent or detached from the conversation (Laub 71). As they express themselves, the witnesses provide important cues that reveal their emotions, feelings and attitudes toward the testimonial process itself. It is up to the listener to understand these cues and respond accordingly.

Both Joseph Mwantuali and Lisa Shannon have pieced their trauma narratives together by listening to what victims and survivors of violence in the Congo had to say. They interviewed them and recorded their testimonies. However, the various challenges that each author faced throughout the process of collecting the materials deserves some examination because they raise questions about the authenticity and credibility of

testimonies. Mwantuali admits that it was “almost impossible” to get Coco Ramazani to talk about her experiences in the Congo. To have Coco Ramazani talk and share her testimony, the author declares that he asked for the help of Nganga, an experienced psychiatrist and a retired seasoned doctor who lived in Manchester, New Hampshire (xv). And when Coco Ramazani decided to talk to the author, she “spoke about everything except what was really troubling her” (xv). In the process of collecting the testimonies from the rape survivor, Joseph Mwantuali had to deal with all kinds of trauma symptoms such as “circumlocutions, evasions, mental blocks, uncontrollable tears and long digressions” (xv). It was clear to the author that the interviewee was unable to open up and share her atrocious experiences. Coco Ramazani was able to talk painlessly and extensively about non-sensitive subjects such as polygamy or her childhood but when it came to recounting her experiences as a girl soldier or a sex slave, she simply became speechless or started crying or even changed the subject of the interview.

Lisa Shannon encountered similar challenges as she interviewed Francisca’s relatives about highly emotional moments of their past lives. One of them, for example, Francisca’s uncle---known as Papa Alexander---had to tell his story in several sittings because some details of his life were so sensitive and traumatic that he would often respond to Lisa Shannon’s questions with silence. During the second sitting, the author admits that Papa Alexander “was teetering on the edge, across the chasm of emotions that someone who hasn’t been to that hinterland couldn’t grasp...He folded into a gasping sob, way beyond words or even sound” (140-141).

In addition to dealing with interviews that triggered painful traumatic memories, Lisa Shannon also confronted translation difficulties. Most conversations and interviews

were mainly conducted in French or Swahili and Shannon relied on her friend Francisca to provide translation. Depending on the nature of the conversations and the questions that Shannon asked, Francisca sometimes would refuse to translate or simply “periodically whisper a rough translation” (97, 141). Francisca’s attitude towards her translation duty suggests that, during the interviews, she valued the comfort of the interviewee more than Shannon’s determination to collect information. Whenever her relatives became emotional and unable to continue sharing their stories, Francisca would simply not want to translate.

The language barriers that Shannon faced in the collection of materials have increased the possibility of inaccuracies, embellishments, distortions or fabrications in her text. One can assume that some information has simply been added or “lost in translation”. This loss or addition does not imply that Shannon’s memoir is a false account of what she heard and saw while visiting the Congo with her friend Francisca. The possible loss or addition that Francisca’s translation has generated simply points to the composite nature of Shannon’s memoir. It is a mixture of truth, fiction, facts, reality and skillful recreation.

Because of the traumatic nature of stories that Shannon and Mwantuali share in their respective books, the interviews these authors conducted to collect these materials deserve a closer examination. Without conducting them, Shannon and Mwantuali would have never been able to collect their stories. These interviews reveal that both books are collaborative endeavors and the results of the relationship Shannon and Mwantuali have had with survivors of atrocities. In *Tell This to My Mother*, the interviews were conducted in what I can describe as a triangular communication. Coco Ramazani, the rape victim,



has shared non-sensitive parts of her story to Joseph Mwantuali the author. She has chosen to reveal sensitive information to Nganga, the psychiatrist who, in turn, has trusted the author with the traumatic details that Coco had trouble expressing. And more importantly, most of these exchanges among these three individuals were made over the phone. In *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen*, Shannon conducted group and individual interviews. An important detail here is that Shannon videotaped some of her interviews to be able to revisit the testimonies she collected. However, in both memoirs, there are no indications about the number of interviews that each author has conducted with their informants. Shannon and Mwantuali also do not reveal how long each interview took.

In *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen*, Shannon provides details about some of the questions he asked to her interviewees. For example, to Papa Alexander, the author asked: “How did André (Francisca’s father) die?” (140). Instead of presenting all stories directly to the reader, Shannon from time to time reveals the questions that generated those stories. Some of these questions take interviewees several years or decades back in their past, allowing them to remember happy events. But some other questions bring them back to recent events, forcing them to recall painful moments of military attacks from rebel groups.

In *Tell This to My Mother*, Mwantuali reveals that he spoke with Coco Ramazani six years after she left Eastern Congo and settled as refugee in the United States. During all those years, Mwantuali comments, this woman has carried “her deadly wounds deep inside of her” (3). The meeting between Mwantuali and Coco Ramazani occurred at an interesting moment. Mwantuali was doing some research about the ongoing Congo armed

conflicts because he had to write an article for a local newspaper. Meeting someone who was coming straight from the battle zone “lit a great hunger in the stomach” of Mwantuali who wanted to know more (5). With Coco Ramazani, the author had the opportunity of receiving “an eye-witness account” of the war in the Congo. The first interview Mwantuali had with Ramazani “lasted long into the night” (5). The next interview that Mwantuali conducted over the phone was not successful because the interviewer admitted to Ramazani that he was taking notes of what she was saying and the woman hung up her phone. The interviewee simply “wanted to keep her private life to herself” (12). After his next two phone calls were not answered, Mwantuali realized that he was facing “the kind of trauma that only a psychiatrist knows how to treat” (12). It is not clear why Coco Ramazani later changed her mind and decided to reconnect with her interviewer, now allowing him to write down her words and create a book that he would later publish. At this point, the reader can only assume that the author called Nganga the psychiatrist for help.

Ramazani’s reluctance to share all her stories with the author at the beginning of the collection process points to a couple of important issues. First, it highlights the problematic situation in which Joseph Mwantuali found himself as he was about to collect and write about stories of atrocities that he did not personally experience. Because of his determination to hear about all the details of Ramazani’s stories (especially details of sexual violence that she experienced), the author appears as a voyeur who draws pleasure from a victim’s pain. Secondly, Ramazani’s reluctance draws attention to the gender difference between the author and his interviewee, a difference that might be a source of problems. In the Congo, women are not expected to share intimate details of

their lives with men, especially men who are not closely related to them. Considering this aspect of Congo culture, one might think that, If Mwantuali had been a woman; there would have been fewer problems in the collection of stories that *Tell This to My Mother* is reporting.

It is also interesting to observe that details about the conversation between Nganga the psychiatrist and Coco Ramazani are not provided. The only thing that the reader learns is that Coco Ramazani has “opened up” to the psychiatrist (xvi). From the description of his credentials, one can only assume that the psychiatrist has been more skillful at breaking Ramazani’s shell and making her talk about her painful past. Nganga is said to be an “experienced” psychiatrist, a “seasoned doctor” and a kind of traditional griot, a gift that he has received “from an ancient ancestor from his forest village in equatorial Africa” and although he has retired, everybody “in the West” still “consults him by phone, mail or in person” (xv). Despite this psychiatrist’s claimed qualifications, one still wonders how well he did transmit the collected stories to Mwantuali, the author.

Some parts of *Tell This to My Mother* are then the result of a double transcription: the transcription of the author on the basis of what the psychiatrist recorded from his conversation with Coco Ramazani. This is extremely problematic. Mwantuali has written some stories---especially painful stories of sexual attacks---from materials he has received, not directly from the victim of these attacks but from information that the psychiatrist has chosen to share with him. Considering that the conversation between the psychiatrist and Ramazani (or the interviewee) was a multilayered communicative event, one can assume that a lot has been lost in the process of the double transcription. Did the

psychiatrist reproduce faithfully the interviewee's possible hesitations, repetitions, sobbing or silences?

In any interview, paralinguistic elements are as important as linguistic ones. For a transcription to be accurate, it has to convey what Lynn Abrams describes as the "meaning of the speaker" (13). This is only possible when linguistic and paralinguistic information is reproduced. In most cases, linguistic elements reveal the what, where, when, how and who of events. Paralinguistic elements go deeper than that as they expose the true emotions and feelings of the people who have experienced the events. To grasp the meaning of *Tell This to My Mother* and *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen*, one then needs to examine how the two authors have treated the linguistic and paralinguistic elements of the interviews they conducted. In addition to the exploration of what was said, it is important to study the way in which what was said was said and how it was said.

### **The Narration of Stories**

After gathering their materials, both Shannon and Mwantuali had to deal with the challenge of transforming verbal materials into written narratives. They both faced what Lynn Abrams describes as the "semblance of similarity---a verisimilitude---between the narrative as told and the narrative as written down" (Abrams 13). The process of writing memoirs like *Tell This to My Mother* and *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen* means that the spoken word had to be transferred to a written document. These two texts are different from memoirs that are simply created from information that the memory of the authors generates. Although *Tell This to My Mother* and *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen* are also the result of Mwantuali and Shannon's treatment of their memories,

they primarily feature stories that originate from verbal elements. How did the two authors interpret and re-create the stories that they heard? Which elements of stories were (un) important to them? What determined the authors' choice of their narrative styles or techniques?

To create their texts, memoirists resort to the same talents that novelists use when they complete their fictional stories. The only difference between the two groups is that memoirists write about events that have happened in actuality and people that have lived or are still living. In *The Veto of the Imagination*, Louis Renza elaborates on the distinction between the work of novelists and memoirists by saying:

Perhaps the most obvious way involves citing the presence of explicit fictional techniques or elements in specific autobiographies. But the presence of such elements only shows that autobiography self-consciously borrows from the methodological procedures of imaginative fiction, not that autobiography is founded on the immediate requisites of imaginative discourse. (2)

Most of the main characters in *Tell This to My Mother* and *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen* are still living and all these individuals have experienced the atrocities that Mwantuali and Shannon describe in their books. Although both authors deal with real historical events, they still cannot make us "witness" the same events. They can only recreate or represent them with the help of fictional techniques. Mwantuali, for example, cannot take his readers back to the actual past of Coco Ramazani while Shannon cannot make us witness the actual killing of her friend's father.

*Tell This to My Mother* and *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen* shed light on two important choices that Mwantuali and Shannon made regarding not only the

recreation of the traumatic past but also the narration of stories both authors collected. First of all, both authors chose to call much more attention to the emotions and feelings of their characters than the historical events that the latter experienced. Most of these characters witnessed or lived through heart-breaking and horrible events and as they recount their stories, they cannot hold back their grief, anger, frustration, guilt, anguish or distress. Each story that they tell reveals more about the agony of their heart than the details of the attack they witnessed. To highlight the painful emotions of these characters, both Mwantuali and Shannon present the narrated stories just as they heard them, in fragments. For example, in *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen*, Francisca's family members use many short sentences to tell the story of a recent attack by the gunmen of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA):

The day of the attack, a few children were collecting water after school... They spotted men in long coats with guns. LRA. The children ran... A bullet hit a father carrying his three-year-old... They shot a young woman running with her one-year-old baby boy, ripping her genitalia. She collapsed... (34)

As the narration of each of these stories reveals, details about the attacks matter less than the feelings that the survivors or the witnesses have regarding the incidents. Stories that Mwantuali and Shannon tell in their respective books miss details that might be important to individuals who are more interested in the authenticity of each historical event, especially violent events. For example, the story above does not tell us the name of the father who was carrying the three-year-old. The story does not elaborate on what happened to him later on. Was he killed? Or captured? Was he able to escape the attack despite being hit by a bullet? What happened to the children? To Shannon, these details

about the attack are not important. What matters is the transmission of what people feel or felt about the violence that took place.

To understand this narrative choice that Shannon and Mwantuali made, we need to examine what lies at the center of the process of remembering and telling stories, especially stories of violence: memory. Lynn Abrams notes that memory does not simply involve the recalling of past events “in an unproblematic and untainted way” (Abrams 78). Memory is at work when one remembers facts, moments, images, stories, experiences, feelings and emotions from their past life. After remembering them, they order them, “placing them within a narrative or story and then telling them in a way that is shaped at least in part by their social and cultural context” (Abrams 79). However, whenever traumatic experiences are concerned, memory seems to function differently. Some parts of an emotional event might be remembered with accuracy while other parts are not recalled. Some people may repress their painful memories as a way of surviving their past experiences while others simply make the choice of expressing their grief with words. What is certain, Lynn Abrams comments, is that “the memory narratives produced by trauma survivors are different from conventional stories, largely because the respondents have still to come with what happened to them in the past” (93).

Some survivors remember and talk about their traumatic experiences with strong emotions. As they talk about the events, they may cry, sob, become angry or simply silent. Others choose to talk about them with some emotional detachment. This detachment is actually a protective mechanism by which they create a distance between them and the pain of the past experience. These people usually recount events chronologically, focusing exclusively on facts and leaving their emotions aside. This

difference is important because it can influence the way writers ---especially those who do not experience the events they are recounting; like Joseph Mwantuali and Lisa Shannon--- decide to present the victims' stories. Depending on how the stories were delivered to them, these writers can either focus on reporting the facts or communicate the emotions and feelings of the victims, or focus on both facts and emotions.

It is then interesting to note how the narrators in *Tell This to My Mother* and *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen* struggle with the memory of painful events. For example, as Coco Ramazani recounts how she was raped, she admits that there are details she cannot remember accurately. What she remembers vividly is how she felt about the whole ordeal. She uses the verb "to think" several times to express what she did not know with certainty:

I think that I lost consciousness, but I'm not sure. The only thing I remember afterwards was that my count got all mixed up by the fifth or sixth man. I also remember that at any given moment the one who was holding my arms was replaced and came to penetrate me, he also. How long did the rapes last? I could not say. Nor could I tell you the number of men who raped me....I felt so nauseous that I vomited as soon as they removed that disgusting gag from my mouth. I vomited right there, on their feet and on their sleeping bag----on them also----I think (180-81).

Ramazani's memory seemed to work selectively, recording some details and disregarding others. As the rapes continued, her memory about the events deteriorated even more until she sunk into "a sort of blackout" (182). At some points, Ramazani could not tell if she was raped by ten or more than ten people.

These horrible rape experiences have affected Ramazani's life so profoundly that, even after being rescued and relocated to the United States, her body and mind continued



to suffer from them. She contracted AIDS because of those rapes and she now struggles with many mental (psychological) problems that she often has to be hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital. What *Tell This to My Mother* and *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen* demonstrate is that a memoir is not simply the remembering and the telling of an individual's past historical events. It is also the exploration of how those past events affect their present feelings and emotions. Mwantuali and Shannon wrote their texts with the knowledge that their readers would care as much about the feelings and emotions of the narrators as they care about the details about what happened to them, when it happened, how it happened, where it happened or who was involved in the event.

Shannon is probably the author who clearly represents how past violent events have affected the emotions of the Congolese people she has interviewed. Whenever she introduces her reader to a new story of an attack, she makes sure to reveal the feelings of the speaker, these feelings are often so strong that they affect their bodies. For example, Shannon describes how Modeste, one of Francisca's cousins, "spoke with barely audible tones and restrained hands, as though paralyzed with shock" (61). Francisca herself, as she listened to the stories of the survivors of atrocities and translated them to Shannon, she would feel like throwing up. At some point, Francisca was so overwhelmed by the horrible nature of testimonies that she stopped looking the speakers in the eyes. Whenever she looked at their faces, she burst into crying. Considering the incorporation of these details, one can assume that the ultimate goal of the author is to shock her readers into some type of humanitarian action. Shannon writes her stories as if she wants her readers to throw up or cry as well.

The second choice that both Shannon and Mwantuali made regarding the narration of the collected testimonies is the use of fictional techniques and elements. The two authors demonstrate that the telling of a fictive or a real story always requires some artistic talents. For the story to be compelling and engaging, some specific narrative techniques have to be employed and because of that, novelists as well memoirists do not hesitate to resort to these artistic devices to convey the meaning of their stories.

For memoirists, the dependence on memory alone is not sufficient to captivate the attention of readers. Creativity has to step in and provide the elements that memory lacks. Memoirs appear then as true artistic creations in which true events are transformed into what I describe as “fiction-like stories”. A narrator in a memoir might be a real person but, within their story, they function and interact with others just as a fictional character does in a novel. As Roland Barthes said: “When a narrator of a written text recounts what has happened to him, the I who recounts is no longer the one that is recounted” (Barthes 163).

From the first page of Mwantuali’s *Tell This to My Mother*, the reader quickly realizes the use of fictional elements in the memoir. The book starts with a poem entitled “To My Ignored Dada.”<sup>100</sup> It is clear that the poem, written by the author, is addressed to Coco Ramazani. The “dada” in the poem refers to this woman who has survived sexual violence in the Congo. Some lines of the poem repeat the details that Coco Ramazani reveals in her story, especially the details about her rapes by Ugandan gunmen:

*How you wept forlorn woman  
Under your dirty, reeking gag  
Helpless, swallowing their filthy scum*

---

<sup>100</sup> Dada means sister in Swahili

*While between your butchered thighs  
Waves of hyenas, one after the other, sniggered with pleasure.  
Oh woman, how you wept, choked  
With grief and rage, Oh Homeless One. (x)*

The poem uses words that are similar to what Coco Ramazani uses. In her testimony, the woman talks about the “sweat and the filth of the gag” (257), the “swallowing of a lot of their come” (181), the “disgusting gag” (181), the “crying” (181) and the “chorus of silent mourners” (181). The whole poem could then be regarded as a poetic translation of Coco Ramazani’s story. Her attackers are described as hyenas and vultures. Attacked by these hyenas, this “black”, “abandoned” and “lonely” woman screams in vain and nobody comes to her rescue. The poem also uses this weeping woman as a metaphor for the Congo, which is often described in media as a forgotten country. The Congo also screams for help but no one is listening because “the world has more urgent things” (x).

It is interesting to note that Coco Ramazani often uses poems to express her feelings and emotions within the text. As she escaped sexual violence in the Congo and found refuge in Kampala, Uganda, the woman reveals that “a pressing desire prompted (her) to tackle expressing the discomfort that (her) encounter with kampala had provoked in (her)” (191). “Armed with a pen and paper”, she wrote the following verses:

*Kampala, welcome me  
I don't know where to go,  
I've given my home to some visitors from here  
Kampala, welcome me  
It is the least you can do.  
Did you know: the gold, the diamonds and the timber  
That you kindly receive  
As anonymous presents,*

*It is I who send them?  
To purge from sin  
All that you would like to tell me.  
And also tell me why  
These decorated men, whom they call: the new generation  
Of African leaders”  
Have the blood of my vagina  
On their unpunished hands that the decorators shake. (191)*

In this poem, Coco Ramazani expressed her mixed feelings about the country that receives her. Although Uganda offers her protection, she can still remember that her attackers in the Congo were Ugandan gunmen. In her poem, she also highlights the irresponsibility of African leaders who allow the perpetration of rape as a weapon of war. “The blood of my vagina on their unpunished hands” suggests that the narrator places a heavy blame on leaders who commit their violence with impunity.

In addition to poems, Coco Ramazani also uses short fictional stories to recount her experiences and express her feelings. She starts each story as Swahili speakers have always told popular stories. Before starting the story, they say: *Hadisi njo* [this means “here is a story”]! And the audience or listeners are expected to respond by saying: *Njo hadisi* [tell your story]! (200). Coco Ramazani’s short stories are a mixture of Congolese myths, fables and legends. They feature characters such as the devil-giant, Nzakomba, the Soma Priestess of the Nyano initiation ritual for Lega women and the Supreme Spirit of the Bwali male initiation ritual.

It is important to examine the reason why Coco Ramazani has incorporated these stories into her narrative. She comments that she often tells herself stories so as to survive her tragedies. The telling of stories offers her a mechanism of protection and survival

because it helps her come out of her painful experience “without being too damaged by the actions of the hyenas” (197). Coco Ramazani also comments that she has “the firm conviction” that the telling of stories is going to “exorcize the demons” that have been “injected” into her through repeated rapes (198). The words that she uses here to describe what happened to her through rape are interesting because they evoke psychiatric and exorcism sessions. They also bring attention to the possible roles that Nganga the psychiatrist played at the beginning of the writing process of the memoir. In any case, these words highlight Ramazani’s belief in the power of stories. She believes that the telling of stories can cause a type of catharsis and deliverance from her inner pain.

Fiction then plays an important role in *Tell This to My Mother*. The book can be described as a collage of real events and fiction. This memoir suggests that the narration of real events does not provide healing and relief if it is not accompanied by the telling of fictional stories. To understand the meaning of the memoir, the reader has to dive deep into the different layers of the text, going from reality to fiction and then from fiction back to reality.

In *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen*, Shannon chooses to reproduce some collected stories in a form that resembles that of a poem and a novel. For example, some parts of the story of one of Alexander’s grandsons, Nyakangba, are presented as a poem:

They threw bombs many times again, and they started fire---fire everywhere.

*I saw the bombs.*

*I saw the fire.*

*I was happy.*

*I was happy to be in the airplane that finishes those guys. (161).*

One of Shannon's preoccupations in the memoir is the recreation of traumatic symptoms, symptoms that her interviewees are all struggling with. The author resorts to specific narrative devices to reproduce those symptoms on paper. The use of poetic forms allows her to represent repetitions, as she does with the story of Nyakangba. Poetic forms also allow the author to reproduce the fragmented nature of the testimonies that she collected. In *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen*, fragmented memories are best represented with short sentences. For example, Raphael, one of the characters in the memoir, witnesses the killing of his best friend Roger with an axe. Then the same LRA gunmen use their axe to strike Raphael's head. They leave Raphael in the dirt thinking that he is dead. Shannon at this point reproduces Raphael's story with words that shed light on the trauma that the man has experienced:

I'm dying, he thought.  
He pushed to get up. Arms bound. Couldn't.  
He struggled again. Collapsed back, limp.  
He rolled over. Sat up. Praise God. (155)

As Raphael's words show, *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen* highlights the parallel that exists between the forms of the novel and those of the memoir. Both genres rely on the same techniques, devices and strategies to grab the attention of the reader, convey the meaning of their stories, and communicate a sense of hope. The two memoirs I have analyzed in this chapter seek to achieve those goals. In *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen* and *Tell This to My Mother*, stories are built and presented in a specific order so as to create curiosity in readers and captivate their attention. Words are selected purposefully to shock readers and move them to humanitarian action. The two texts offer unique testimonies, testimonies that allow victims of violence to experience "the feelings

both of mourning and hope,” feelings that Shoshana Felman describes in *Education and Crisis* (Felman *Education and Crisis*, 48-49).

Both Shannon and Mwantuali recognize the importance of sharing their collected stories. The title of Mwantuali’s memoir, in particular, evokes the imperative to disseminate the victims’ testimonies. Commenting on this “imperative to tell,” Dori Laub says that the survivors of trauma “do not need to survive so that they can tell their story; they also need to tell their story in order to survive” (Laub *A Event Without a Witness*, 78). Coco Ramazani in *Tell This to My Mother* wants her story to be told, shared, acknowledged, and responded to. It is interesting to note that Ramazani dedicates her story to her mother Regine Wamumbamba whom she has never known. Her father died when she was five and all the five wives that he had were asked to leave the house and their children and return to their respective families. Coco Ramazani grew up in one of her sisters’ home and never knew what happened to her mother. Considering this aspect of her past, the title of Joseph Mwantuali’s memoir then highlights the need for Coco Ramazani to reconnect with her mother through her testimony. But beyond her mother, she wants all Congo mothers to know about the fate of children who are left without the protection of their parents and who find themselves in situations of war.

*Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen* and *Tell This to My Mother* effectively break the silence of victims. Since trauma thrives where there is silence, the act of telling horrific stories brings the type of awareness that facilitates the healing of victims. Coco Ramazani and the family of Francisca Thelin know very well that there is no quick cure to the inner pain they endure. The sharing of their testimonies, however, ensure that their past ordeals will always be acknowledged and transmitted as important historical

moments and above all put in the near future pressure on the government as well as on the international community to punish such acts of violence..



## CONCLUSION

This dissertation combined literary criticism and insights from trauma studies to study the representation of the consequences of violence in narratives about the armed conflicts in the Congo. I analyzed two novels, two plays and two memoirs from six different writers who use their texts as tools to bring their readers' attention to the destruction of lives and to the ecosystem that is taking place in the Congo. Presently as I am writing this conclusion, following many failed agreements, armed groups are still attacking villages in eastern and northeastern parts of the country, militias are still slaughtering entire families, journalists are still being attacked and killed and the government is still unable to protect local populations. Peace and stability will be restored in these war-torn regions only when all the parties involved in the hostilities and the international community hear the voice of the victims, understand their fate and take appropriate action. That is why, to raise awareness about the tragedy that these victims face on a daily basis, many journalists and news reporters risk their lives to meet with the survivors of atrocities, collect their stories and share them with the world. Besides them, novelists, playwrights and memoirists also turn to the power of story telling to alert the world regarding the atrocities perpetrated in the Congo. These writers tell stories of violence, oppression and hope. Although they use different techniques to build and convey the meaning of these stories, all these archivists and cultural producers seek to highlight the traumatic nature of people's experiences in the Congo and the consequences of such a situation.

As my work demonstrates, the act of telling stories, especially stories of war, is liberating because it generates reflection and collective action, which brings about hope.

Each story, be it fictional or not, sheds more light on the unspeakable consequences of these human atrocities. It seeks to make sense of the absurdity of war by putting into words what constitutes an unimaginable violence, which destabilizes in many regards the entire country. Above all, these stories attempt to break the silence, a silence that facilitates the continuation of the armed conflicts. Joseph Kony, for example, is able to continue to perpetrate his atrocities in Northeastern Congo simply because the world cannot hear the cry of most of his victims. Kony's gunmen are famous for spreading absolute terror by cutting people's lips and tongues. Filled with the fear of death, the victims keep silent and many of them take their trauma stories to their graves.

Joseph Kony and the other leaders of all the rebel groups are aware that the Congo is extremely fragile, unstable and vulnerable. They all realize that the Kinshasa-based government is totally unable to protect people in all provinces and this inability offers to different armed forces the opportunity of taking total control of vast regions of the country and exploiting its natural resources. This economic exploitation creates a vicious circle since it allows armed groups to purchase more weapons and to perpetuate violence on defenseless populations.

The stories within the selected works clearly expose the vulnerability of these populations and the state's inability to ensure national security. They discuss the fate of children who lose their parents, the personal struggles of women who are rejected by their husbands, and the dislocation of local communities that cannot protect themselves against external attacks. Because of the nature of these issues, as I have argued in my dissertation, it is important to study the selected texts through the lens of trauma theory.

Building on the notion of traumatic memories, my analysis has highlighted how writers represent both the individual and collective effects of the Congo armed conflicts. These effects are long lasting, divisive and by extension physically, emotionally and psychologically destructive to not only the victim of the violence but also to entire communities (the people around him or her). These effects ultimately pave the way for the collapse of the entire country. Whenever a woman is raped, her entire family is tragically affected, the sense of community is destroyed in her village and national cohesion is demolished. This is clearly illustrated in Puis Ngandu Nkashama's *En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmier* as Munanga's life and sense of community are totally destabilized by the killing of his family.

As I have noted in the course of my analysis, the lines between individual and collective trauma are difficult to draw. Forcing a child to become a soldier, for example, can be regarded as both a personal and a collective tragedy. Many of these child soldiers lose their lives in war and those who manage to survive and escape military service have serious difficulties readjusting to civilian life, fragilizing the entire country. Most of these former child soldiers end up committing more crimes, and thereby, affecting many more lives around them.

The analysis of the selected texts has also highlighted the long lasting nature of the effects of war trauma. When individuals experience atrocities, the pain affects the structure of their families for many generations. Not only do the psychological effects of these atrocities last but they may also become cyclic and chronic. As a result, it takes decades for these communities to make sense of their traumatic past and return to normal

life. This is illustrated in Fabien Mukamba's play when young soldiers evoke with painful emotions the horrors of past wars.

The significance of my dissertation first lies in the various questions it raises, questions that are all related to the literary representation of the unspeakable nature of traumatic experiences of war. Some of these questions are: how can writers represent effectively the traumatic effects of war in Central Africa without creating unnecessary stereotypes? How do language and translation issues affect the accuracy of writers' depiction of the realities of victims? How will these texts be different from those written in French or English? How does the literary representation of war trauma resist and challenge the official accounts of states and governments?

Secondly, this dissertation breaks new ground by introducing unfamiliar texts and presenting the Congo armed conflicts as a new area of study about the relationship between war, trauma and testimony. The selected authors and texts are important because they examine several aspects of war trauma from unique perspectives. By mixing fictional and journalistic texts, Puis Ngandu Nkashama's *En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmiers* can serve, for example, as a useful tool in the study of the relationship between war literature and journalism. This novel can help students realize the role language can play in the denunciation of war atrocities. One can also teach this text in parallel with specific war stories that Congolese writers have written before the beginning of the present armed conflicts. Puis Ngandu Nkashama's *En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmiers* could be analyzed in contrast with Mudimbe's *Le Bel Immonde*. Such an analysis would help students understand better the historical context of war in the Congo and the narrative strategies writers employ to denounce the corruption of political leaders.

The authors that I have chosen, Pius Ngandu Nkashama, Mashingaidze Gomo, Lynn Nottage, Fabien Honoré Kabeya Mukamba, Lisa J. Shannon, and Joseph E. Mwantuali, are different in many ways. Although they all highlight the same issue, mainly the devastating impact of war on civilians, the selected authors differ in not only the perspective from which they criticize how hostilities affect populations but also the tools they use to build their critiques. Pius Ngandu Nkashama wrote a novel that features the long and painful journey of a traumatized child. Unlike all the other texts, *En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmiers* presents itself as a very fragmented novel that reflects on the effects of violence through the disturbed mind of a child. The author deliberately uses fragmented speeches, dialogues and materials to draw attention to the effects of traumatic memories. He also tells his story in a non-chronological way to represent how characters struggle with flashbacks. Mashingaidze Gomo, in a novel that reads like a poem, looks at the impact of war through the eyes of a former army pilot. The author incorporates songs and poems into his text to emphasize the role that music and poetry play in the healing of trauma. Lynn Nottage explores through the use of theatre how some raped women struggle to survive in times of war. Fabien Honoré Kabeya Mukamba also chooses the structure of a play to tell the story of a woman who joins the army to fight alongside her husband. Lisa J. Shannon recounts in a memoir the stories of an entire family who has witnessed and experienced repeated attacks from Ugandan gunmen and Joseph E. Mwantuali, in a memoir that reads like a novel, relates the story of a war refugee who has been abused as a sexual slave in a military camp.

Another important difference among these authors is related to the variety of audiences to which they address their texts. Pius Ngandu Nkashama's *En Suivant le*

*Sentier sous les Palmiers*, written in French for Congolese intellectuals, incorporates materials from Congo media, history, languages and popular music, ultimately featuring a very fragmented text that is difficult to follow. Mashingaidze Gomo's *A Fine Madness* targets both African and Western audiences as it critiques the effects of war in the Congo through the lens of the colonial history of Zimbabwe. The message of Lynn Nottage's *Ruined* is specifically directed at a Western audience. Written in English, the text is built in the form of a soap opera to elicit empathic responses and humanitarian action from the audience. Fabien Honoré Kabeya Mukamba's *Anifa ou Même en Enfer* is addressed to Congolese readers who can reflect on the tragic consequences of war by examining the life of a young married woman who decides to enlist in the army so as to fight alongside her husband. Both Lisa J. Shannon's *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen* and Joseph Mwantuali's *Tell This to My Mother* are targeting a Western audience. These two last texts openly urge readers to respond to the narrated stories by taking action to help stop the perpetration of violence against Congo women.

As my dissertation shows, the differences among these authors underscore the complexities involved in the narration of war stories. These stories take several forms. They feature different narrative strategies to represent the psychological effects of war. Among all the texts I have analyzed, Puis Ngandu Nkashama's *En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmiers* appears to me as the most effective one. Its power lies in the way it represents the unspeakable and the unimaginable. The novel uses various techniques to depict silences, repetitions, hesitations, hallucinations, flashbacks and other symptoms of trauma. However, it is a more difficult text to read. *En Suivant le Sentier sous les Palmiers* also skillfully recounts moments of horrors and atrocities. The text avoids crude

expressions. It uses a beautiful stylistic language filled with metaphors to discuss difficult issues such as the killing of an entire family.

Despite the various narrative forms deployed by the selected materials, all works analyzed here discuss atrocities that are to this day happening in the Congo, which makes their need to bear witness even more vital. Almost every month, local media report the burning of entire villages and the killing of populations with machetes. Many women and girls are still being raped on a regular basis. Each day, dozens of children are being abducted and forced to join military and rebel groups. At the end of *Mama Koko and the Hundred Gunmen*, Lisa Shannon comments, “(Joseph) Kony is indeed still out there. People are still dying even in Duru at the hands of the LRA...” (188).

For any social and political changes to take place, it is essential that people first realize the enormity of the human destruction. It is this realization that brings individuals to care about a specific war and to seek to understand it better. This is where the role of writers lies. Through their texts, Pius Ngandu Nkashama, Mashingaidze Gomo, Lynn Nottage, Fabien Honoré Kabeya Mukamba, Lisa J. Shannon, and Joseph E. Mwantuali effectively fulfill the important role of denunciators. By portraying the killing of entire families, the enlistment of child soldiers, the rape of women, the destruction of local communities, these writers clearly criticize and denounce the powerlessness and the collapse of a state that cannot protect the basic human rights of its members.

As I conclude this dissertation, I am aware that more studies need to be conducted to address some important issues that I was not able to tackle in this project. One of these future studies can for example examine the significance of war stories written in local languages such as Swahili, Lingala or Kinyarwanda. For instance, Kasele Laïsi Watuta’s

collection of poems, *Simameni Wakongomani* (meaning “Stand Up Congolese”), can provide new insights into the ways writers employ local languages to not only reach a wider audience within their communities but also start meaningful conversations about the effects of war. These authors who write in Swahili, Lingala or Kinyarwanda, for the most part, live in territories affected by armed conflicts and they personally know people and families who have experienced atrocities. As a result, their works constitute mines of information that should not be ignored. Moreover, it would be important to study the impact of musicians, in particular rappers, who are attempting, through their work, to further denounce the consequences of the wars in Eastern Congo and mobilize international as well as national consciousness.



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