Third Chapter

Revolution, Reform, Reproduction: Strategies and Limitations for Change (1945-Present)

> "Of all words, phrases, and statements connected with Africa, even more than the word 'Africa' itself, the word 'Congo' sets off some very deep vibrations in black hearts, in black souls, in black minds."
>
> E. CLEAVER/REVOLUTION IN THE CONGO 1971

FREEDOM MATTERS: AN INTRODUCTION

In the 60s, the Congo emerged as a geographical hotspot much discussed in the Black American intellectual community. As had been the case in the past, illustrated in the previous chapters through the "atrocities" in the Congo Free State (Second Chapter) and the slave trade (First Chapter), the heightened circulation of the concept and attention paid to the phenomenon of the Congo was driven by certain events (mostly bleak ones in the previous chapters). This time, however, a more joyful occasion, at least at first sight, directed African American intellectuals to the Congo: Central West Africa's transformation from colony to postcolony. This led to the foundation of the Republic of the Congo, founded in 1960, and which was subsequently re-labeled Zaire in 1971, as well as The Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1997 (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2007: 171-213).

The end of colonialism in the Congo was, according to an editorial titled "Some Congo History" from October 1960 in the NAACP's house organ The Crisis, very much "of interest to American Negroes" (1960b: 536). The influential magazine of the groundbreaking Civil Rights organization reminded its readers that African Americans "are not a self-contained group" (ibid), thus framing Black Americans as

a more cosmopolitan minority. From this perspective, the plights of "African Negroes" and "West Indian migrants in England" were considered highly relevant to African Americans (ibid).

This sense of socio-cultural connection to Blacks on a global scale was no novelty, of course. Throughout the period covered by this book, real-and-imagined geographies such as Egypt, Haiti, Liberia, and most of all the Congo, were referenced by African American intellectuals. What marked a shift during this time, however, was the systematic engagement with the Congo in more affirmative ways. The Congo was suddenly perceived, albeit mainly in the short period between 1960 and 1975, as a desirable geography due to present aspects of it, and not merely by virtue of vague imaginations of the past or one's deep personal roots in Central West Africa. Although the dystopian version of the Congo re-emerged soon after, the push for change in Congo discourse, beginning in the 60s, cannot be overlooked. It is this change that is of interest in this chapter, which seeks "counterhegemonic" aspects in African American intellectual discourse by tracking the emergence of an "alternative ethical view of society that poses a challenge to the dominant bourgeois-led view" (Cohn 2004: 131).

This new focus on Congo was made possible by an intellectual African American arena that had achieved a heterogeneity and a degree of polarization hardly thinkable in the past. New voices, from within and without, began to intervene in the debates. The Black American intellectual circle had grown and had become increasingly tense due to controversial issues such as integration, affirmative action, and the threat of (anti-Black/anti-white) violence. This chapter demonstrates how the issue of the Congo – its independence, breakdown, and dictatorial regimes – served to further draw out these tensions. Looking at the Congo discourse reveals the emergence of revolutionary and reformist voices in the African American intellectual community that refuted the bourgeois, liberal, and conservative certainties from the present and the past.

The many new voices multiplied how Central West Africa was dealt with discursively and materially. Internationalist cultures, in addition to providing more global perspectives on politics and the African American community, addressed, questioned, and reshaped dominant Congo discourses. Apart from new voices from the African American "lower" social classes – represented by Malcolm X here – the African American intellectual community increasingly included female voices and American Congolese. External voices were integrated, too. Starting from the 60s at the latest, the (formerly) colonized intellectual did indeed speak. Confident, militant activists from Africa and the Caribbean cannot be overlooked in the African American archive. Re-appearing names in leading Black media outlets such as The Chi-

cago Defender were Frantz Fanon,[1] Patrice Lumumba, and Walter Rodney; their talks at and visits to Black universities were announced in these outlets and their books favorably reviewed. Their appearance in The Chicago Defender suggests an interest in these intellectuals that went beyond politicized circles.

The 60s and 70s are presented in this chapter as nothing less than a game changer in terms of the opposition to Congoism. The editorial comments in The Crisis, mentioned above, are a first sign of this. "Some Congo History" shows an understanding of Central West African society and history far superior to that of earlier pieces. Prior to 1945, it would have been unimaginable for editorials to have known leading Congolese officials as a matter of "basic fact" (1960b: 536), such as "Messrs. Lumumba and Tshombe" (ibid).

It would have been similarly inconceivable for African American editors to have taken Congolese politicians seriously enough to call for "sympathetic cooperation of the Free World" (ibid). It would, moreover, have been unfathomable to adopt such a skeptical and disapproving tone with regard to the Belgian colonizers. Although the colonial crimes of the Congo Free State were remembered as horrific, they were hardly conceived of as a problem of colonialism itself. As shown in the previous chapter, the Congo Free State was very often considered the personal wrongdoing of King Leopold II. By the 60s, however, the successor of the Congo Free State, the Belgian Congo, was harshly criticized by the editors of The Crisis because of its colonial politics as such, not because of atrocities it perpetuated. Thus, the Belgian Congo is labeled as economically exploitative, racially biased, politically undemocratic, and educationally unsound. As a final consequence, the blame for the failings of the Congo, in contrast to the past, was placed on the Belgians alone. The final sentence of the editorial "Some Congo History" in The Crisis reads, "Congolese are men who have been pauperized, disfranchised and insulted by the people who annexed them" (ibid: 537).

As the demography of public intellectualism changed (integrating both internal and external newcomers), the representation of the Congo changed, too. To discuss the forms and limitations of discursive change in the post-World War II period, the Black American archive must be traversed differently than in the previous chapters. This chapter is organized around issues such as genre, ethnicity, and gender, which,

1 The magazine Freedomways, which explicitly discussed Fanon's influence, provides a good demonstration of how Fanon was received in more radical African American circles. It remarked upon, for instance, a "growing popularity of Fanon's writing among Afro-American youth and intellectuals" (Jones 1968: 213). The magazine suggested this in an article titled "On the Influence of Fanon", which discussed the "basic theory and strategic theory" of African American activists in 1968 (ibid).

so far, have hardly been addressed on the book's structural level. Who speaks, in what texts is this done, and what does this mean in terms of knowledge production? While discussing fictional texts, non-fiction, and everything in between, the historical context of the African American Congo will be discussed through the Black American primary texts at hand. This can be accomplished with a degree of completeness for the first time in this book, as sufficient texts from a variety of sources and milieus have been produced on the Congo to re-construct a recognizable context for this period. This speaks to, on the one hand, the richness of information provided within Congo discourses from the 60s onward. On the other hand, the textual proliferation surrounding the Congo also underscores (ex negativo) the huge limitations of the African American Congo texts of previous generations, from which nothing close to a general overview of what was happening in Central West Africa could be deduced.

This chapter shows that freedom and empowerment matter: They open up spaces to contest, battle, and reject Black and white intellectual gatekeepers. In a spirit of a sustained revolt against racial, classed, and gendered authority, new understandings and uses of the Congo emerged. The thread that binds this chapter together is the question of how African Americans re-framed a region with such a long discursive history. Were they able to at all? What stones did they have to overturn to do so? And what limits did they encounter? Most of these questions are a matter of focusing on "choice and determination", as Jan Blommaert phrases it (2005: 98). "When people in general are communicating they 'choose' from a range of options," Blommaert states, "they 'select' discourse forms deemed appropriate in the particular context, and they consciously 'plan' the sequential moves, either by 'choosing' to 'follow rules' or by 'flouting' these rules" (ibid). This chapter is about African American intellectuals who try, succeed, and sometimes fail to "flout the rules" in order to create a Congo less dismissive than that of previous generations.

Choice and agency are understood here as complex discursive situations. Freedom of choice is, as Blommaert reminds us, "constrained by normativities, determined by the general patterns of inequality" (ibid: 99). This does not, however, eliminate "creativity, choice, or freedom" (ibid). It merely situates "individual agency in a wider frame of constraints" (ibid). African American intellectuals still had to write and orate within a tangible "frame of constraints", and this will be addressed in what follows. Much truth therefore still lies in Blommaert's assertion that "there is a limit to choice and freedom. It is the interplay between creativity and determination that accounts for the social, the cultural, the political, the historical in communicative events" (ibid). Against the background of decades of discursive determination and newly won freedom and agency, Black intellectuals illustrate that it

is possible for individual persons and groups to tackle Congoism, despite such pervasive commonsensical understandings of it.

This chapter therefore shows that Congoism can be identified and countered by those who are surrounded by it. It suggests that it is possible to speak against a discourse from a position within it. Counteragency, however, is hardly ever complete. Most intellectuals in this chapter question certain aspects of Congoism, but reproduce them somewhere else, very often as a parallel move in the same text. Malcolm X, who figures prominently in this chapter, tackled American Congo discourses like no other intellectual before him, for instance, but struggled to disentangle himself from some of Congoism's more winding tentacles. As this chapter shows, many intellectuals since Malcolm X have oscillated between the rejection and reproduction of Congoist tropes, whether they were activists or historians, Civil Rights or Black Power proponents, or modernist or postmodernist writers.

BROTHERS IN ARMS: ACTIVIST NEGATION AND METAREFLECTION

In 1961, the plight of Black America was perceived by African American intellectuals as deeply connected to that of Central West Africa. Exemplary is the novelist-activist James Baldwin's 1961 essay "A Negro Assays the Negro Mood", appearing in The New York Times Magazine. Assessing the importance of "Africa" for the Black community in the U.S., Baldwin underscored the significance of Congo's first prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, who had just been assassinated. Setting his piece against the demonstration of African American activists in the gallery of the United Nations, in "protest against the foul and cowardly murder of Patrice Lumumba" (as John Henrik Clarke phrased it in his essay "The Passing of Patrice Lumumba"; 1962b: 285), Baldwin highlighted Lumumba's great symbolic significance for African Americans. The deceased prime minister, according to Baldwin, had "captured the popular imagination [in Harlem]" (1961: 25).

Many Black intellectuals have used both events in their writings – i.e. Lumumba's death and the "riot" at the United Nations in his honor. Twenty-four years after Lumumba's untimely death, the scholarly journal Callaloo published Amira Baraka's dedication to Larry Neale. In an autobiographical 1985 essay titled "The Wailer", Baraka explains how he himself took part in the demonstration at the UN: "We came together, with a number of others, seeking to raise the level of Black struggle to a more intense expression" (1985: 248). Those who were trying to escalate the Black struggle were, in Baraka's words, "young people who responded to

the assassination of Patrice Lumumba by taking to the street, even invading the U.N. (way back when the U.S. controlled it) to show our opposition to U.S. imperialism" (ibid). This anti-imperialist attitude of upping the stakes of the domestic and international Black struggle, according to Baraka and Baldwin, presented quite a departure from earlier days.

An internationally-oriented mindset, combined with self-confident political activism, echoes the assertiveness claimed by the "New Negro" intellectuals at the turn of the century, who, as they told themselves, transcended the politically impotent days of the "Old Negro" (cf. previous chapter). Baldwin claimed, in a similar vein as Baraka, that he no longer wished to adhere to the old activist ways or listen to present leaders. He was tired of seeing Martin Luther King "beaten and assaulted" (1961: 25). Baldwin also contrasted the contemporary post-Lumumba mood in Harlem to bleaker days when he was growing up. Those were the days in which "[n]egroes in this country were taught to be ashamed of Africa [...] they were taught it bluntly by being told, for example, that Africa had never contributed 'anything' to civilization" (ibid: 103). Others, such as activist James Farmer, confirmed that this mood belonged to the past, at least in the African American community.[2] Baldwin asserted that times had changed for good. "Africa" was being self-consciously reimagined by a broader Black American activist community: Images of "nearly naked, dancing, comic-opera cannibalistic savages in the movies", as Baldwin described them (ibid), made way for an "Africa" that had become a marker of enviable success. This caused serious dissatisfaction with the domestic situation: "'At the rate things are going over here, all of Africa will be free before we can get a lousy cup of coffee" (ibid: 104).

"A lousy cup of coffee" in Baldwin's essay stood for the activist efforts in the early 60s to attempt to "integrate" public institutions, thus opening up the possibility of Blacks using them on equal footing. Activists went about this by reminding Americans of their self-proclaimed core values, such as "liberty and justice for all" (ibid: 25). This "Negro student movement" constituted one end of the African American activist spectrum, according to Baldwin. The opposite end was occupied

2 Farmer confirmed that until the mid-50s, the "mass of American Negroes had little knowledge of Africa" (1965: 132). "Hollywood stereotypes of the dark continent" were all black Americans had: "half-naked black savages dancing around a boiling pot of missionary soup" (ibid: 133). Farmer explains that attitudes first began to change when Haile Selassie visited the U.S. in 1954 and when Ghana and other countries became independent: "Men who would make history must have a history. As the Civil Rights revolution got rolling, it became essential that we locate ourselves within the total saga of mankind, telling of our role in the great story" (ibid).

by the "Nation of Islam", an organization that did "not expect anything at all from the white people [...] they insist on the total separation of the races" (ibid). By discussing activism along these lines (integrationist students vs. the separatist Nation of Islam), Baldwin self-consciously commented on the generally observed split in the "Black Freedom Movement" (as Carson 1991 termed it). To explain this split and reflect upon its consequences (for the Congo discourse) will be this chapter's task.

As a broader phenomenon, the Black Freedom Movement sought de facto and de jure freedom and equality. At the dawn of the 60s, African American citizens were far from possessing equal rights, whether one considers them from a de jure or a de facto perspective. "Jim Crow" apartheid and legalized racial discrimination, as discussed in the last chapter, were firmly in place when the Black Freedom Movement began gaining momentum in the mid-50s. Despite its unifying label, the Black Freedom Movement was anything but a uniform movement with clear cut, common goals (Van Hove 2014: 97-103). Right from the start of the movement, and until its demise in the mid-70s, African American activists debated passionately and perpetually with one another about the tactics, methods, aims, and gender politics of their efforts to improve their legal rights and everyday lives (as expressed through Congo discourse, too). Consequently, political agendas varied. They ranged from outlawing racial discrimination and segregation before the law, most frequently linked to the Civil Rights strand in the Movement, to economic and political self-sufficiency and racial pride, most prominently embodied by proponents of Black Power and Black nationalism.

Within these "camps" there was an enormous amount of heterogeneity, and contemporary African American observers and activist participants constantly commented on this. Black Power proponents, for instance, belonged to secular or religious groups and were internationalist, nationalist, or Marxist in their outlook (as identified in essays such as John Henrik Clarke's 1961 "The New Afro-American Nationalism"). In his essay, Clarke underlines the importance of Lumumba's assassination in nationalist environments: Lumumba helped to "rekindle the flame of Afro-American nationalism" (1961: 286). John A. Morsell's "The Meaning of Black Nationalism" (1962) also highlighted this, albeit ironically: Many Black Power proponents, writes Morsell, had "enshrined" Patrice Lumumba "as patron saint" (1962: 73).

The embrace of Lumumba by Black Power communities draws attention to the differences between the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. Black Power and Civil Rights activists were clearly active in different geographies (urban and rural), attracted a middle- or working-class Black membership, and dealt with racism

in their own ways, both within and outside of the political power structures of the U.S. In the more rural American South, for instance, the Civil Rights Movement was characterized by major, well-orchestrated campaigns of civil disobedience, exemplified by the bus boycotts in Montgomery (1955-1956) and sit-ins in Greensboro (1960), as well as numerous mass demonstrations, such as the 1963 "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom", where Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his emblematic "I have a dream" speech (1991b). In the more urban and industrialized North, by contrast, African Americans pushed for their own political, religious, economic, and cultural institutions to promote African American collective interests, as well as to defend them from racial oppression and violence. This led, for instance, to the success of the Muslim organization Nation of Islam.

In contrast to Southern-based Civil Rights activists such as Martin Luther King, Northern agitators often advocated more militant forms of opposition. The influence of the Nation of Islam's national speaker, Malcolm X, on Black Power proponents and their heirs in Northern metropolitan areas, such as New York and Chicago, was considerable. This caught the grumbling attention of many Black newspapers oriented toward the middle class. Telling, in this respect, was The Chicago Defender's paternalistic introduction to an opinion piece by Eddie Ellis following Malcolm X's assassination, titled "The Legacy of Malcolm X". The paper introduced the article by stating that "the late Malcolm X held a strong appeal for restless, frustrated and disadvantaged youth in the Harlems of New York, Los Angeles and other American cities, as well as for young people of foreign lands" (Ellis 1965: 4). Malcolm X, according to The Chicago Defender, expressed "in impassioned words the feelings of hurt and hope of Harlem youth in the wake of the assassination of Malcolm" (ibid), of which Ellis's text was an obvious example.

Despite the many differences in style, politics, and appeal, the Civil Rights and Black Power movements were never fully separate from each other: The opposition and distinctions between the two, embodied by Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, were never absolute. In fact, as time went by, they inched closer to one another. Although King never endorsed the slogan Black Power, his rhetoric increasingly showed similarities to those who advocated it: "[P]ower is not the white man's birthright," he wrote in 1968, the year of his assassination: "[I]t will not be legislated for us and delivered in neat government packages" (King 1991a: 312). Malcolm X, in turn, never championed King's methods, calling the March on Washington the "Farce on Washington" (X 1999: 284). As time went by, however, Malcolm X did show an increasing amount of interest in King's push for voters' rights, a stance that culminated in Malcolm X's famous 1964 speech "The Ballot or the Bullet", in

which he advised his supporters to exercise their right to vote wisely, perhaps even as an alternative to a violent revolution (X 1990c: 23-44).

A key characteristic of the Black Freedom Movement as a whole was that its two strands were deeply self-reflective, and constantly named, categorized, and positioned themselves with regard to political others. In his 1968 Where do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community, Martin Luther King rejects those advocating "Black Power" because of their impatience and "unconscious and often conscious call for retaliatory violence" (1968: 54). King compared and opposed this stance to the peaceful and patient "civil rights movement" (ibid: 169). Black Power proponents, in turn, objected to the "'civil rights' movement" on the grounds that it spoke "to an audience of middle-class whites" and not to the "masses of black people", as Carmichael and Hamilton asserted in their classic 1967 Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America (1967: 50-51). For the latter two authors, "the goals of integrationists are middle-class goals, articulated primarily by a small group of Negroes with middle-class inspirations or status" (ibid: 53). This issue will return throughout the course of this chapter.

Self-reflection was a serious matter, as Huey Newton (the co-founder of the Black Panther Party) shows in his bestselling To Die for the People (1972). Huey claimed, "We called ourselves Black Nationalists because we thought that nationhood was the answer", only to find out that this label would not do; "Shortly after that we decided that what was really needed was revolutionary nationalism, that is nationalism plus socialism" (1972: 31). After testing the waters, however, Huey "found that it was impractical and even contradictory. Therefore we went to a higher level of consciousness. We saw that in order to be free we had to crush the ruling circle and therefore we had to unite with the peoples of the world. So we called ourselves Internationalists" (ibid). Labeling oneself was taken very seriously, and had equally serious consequences in framing the Congo.

African American activists developed a number of strategies for countering Congoist tendencies. A catalyst in this regard was Malcolm X, who turned epistemology as a whole into a recurring topic. Repeatedly, Malcolm X showed his sensitivity to the issue of knowledge production, especially as fabricated by authoritative institutions such as schools, scientific bodies, and the news media. "They told you and me we came from the Congo", Malcolm X stated powerfully in 1964, "I mean, isn't that what they taught us in school? [...] So we came from the Congo. We're savages and cannibals and all that kind of stuff from the Congo; they've been teaching me all my life I'm from the Congo" (X 1990a: 94). Malcolm X's epistemic activism knew no borders when it came to critiquing "newspapers, commentators, and some of these so-called scientists who are supposed to be authorities" (1970a: 128).

For Malcolm X, "most of the things that we've seen in print usually" were self-serving (ibid: 128). Authorities that produce text thus had a vested interested in depicting the Congolese as savage in order "to justify what the Western powers are doing in the Congo [...] and primarily the presence of the United States" (ibid).

Tackling the imagery of "savages and cannibals", Malcolm X identified central tropes that have also permeated the analyses in this work. Moreover, linking knowledge production to power and discourse, X aligned issues that have returned in contemporary (academic) research. The results of these investigations are not substantially different from Malcolm X's polemic indictment of the American press, for instance. A study by Alison Holder, to take up one example, found that American news channels such as ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN were very much capable of covering the country when, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the second Congo war unfolded. However, when the second Congo war began, the State Department ceased to hold daily press briefings on the subject, with the result that the second conflict was underrepresented in the media:[3] While the press corps had reacted instantly to these briefings in 1996, this was not the case during the second war (Holder 2004: 3-4). Holder suggests that Rwanda's role in perpetuating the second war in the Congo created a serious barrier to coverage, as Rwanda had been a staunch U.S. ally (ibid: 4-6).

Malcolm X's analysis in the 60s is strikingly similar to Holder's, although his tone is decidedly more militant. He named, shamed, and categorized the interest groups who pushed and profited from full-blown Congoism in the U.S. The white majority received the brunt of his attacks. After his break with the Nation of Islam, however, the all-out condemnation of white Americans as "devils" gradually softened. "All of them don't oppress," Malcolm X said, "All of them aren't in a position to" (X 1990a: 93; cf. Manning 2012: 389).[4] While differentiating between white communities, Malcolm X also highlighted internal, African American differentiation based on class. Though he never offered a full-fledged analysis of social class in the U.S.,[5] nor used the concept openly as an analytic tool – as might be seen

3 That year, Rwanda, Uganda, Angola, and Kabila's local rebels joined forces to bring down Mobutu, with the blessing of the U.S. (Turner 2013: 46-74).

4 He was quick to add that the "oppressive black people" were "only doing what the white man has taught him" (X 1990a: 92). As a consequence, Malcolm X framed Congoist discourse as an overwhelmingly white problem. If anything, this book has questioned this assertion throughout, demonstrating that Congoism among Black Americans was a mix of Black and white thought.

5 Malcolm X increasingly became sympathetic to socialist class analysis (Manning 2012: 336), but it remains quite difficult to pin one specific class analytic thread on him.

in Franklin Frazier's 1957 Black Bourgeoisie, for instance – Malcolm X did increasingly hint at differences based on wealth, occupation, and privilege. He did so most famously by invoking the terms "house negro" and "field negro". "Just as the slavemaster [...] used Tom, the house Negro, to keep the field Negroes in check," X explained in 1963, "the same old slavemaster today has Negroes who are nothing but [...] twentieth-century uncle Toms to keep you and me in check, to keep us under control, keep us passive and peaceful and nonviolent" (X 1990b: 10).

X framed himself and his followers as "field" Blacks, whereas the "house Negroes" of his own days were the Black bourgeoisie. Within the latter strata, Civil Rights leaders were singled out and derided as the "middle-class so-called Negroes" (qtd. in Manning 2013: 203). It is through his rejection of Black and white bourgeois subjectivity that Malcolm X arrived at a new Congo narrative. Malcolm X lifted the class veil of bourgeois intellectuals by calling them what they were, in the process undermining the "incognito" of the bourgeois (Moretti 2013: 371-372). Revealing bourgeois mentalities and discourse also meant rejecting the Black bourgeois discourse on the Congo.

Malcolm X considered the American press, particularly the white one, as a racist, bourgeois vehicle for the defamation of the Congo that was dangerous and irresponsible. He stated, "The press is so powerful in its image-making role, it can make a criminal look like he's the victim and make the victim look like he's the criminal" (X 1990a: 93). "A good example of what the press can do with its images," according to X, "is the Congo" (ibid). Statements such as these place Malcolm X at the African American vanguard of news media critique on Congo reporting from the early 60s on.[6] Much speaks in favor of X's condemnation of the press.

6 This news critique recurs again and again in the African American archive. In one of its first issues in 1962, the Black arts journal Freedomways published an extensive media critique of the "treatment of Africa and its National Leaders". This treatment had been, as the journal asserted, "little short of scandalous" (Howard 1962: 361). Titled "How the Press Defames Africa", the journal faulted the American and European press for stereotyping the African as a primitive with "rings around his ankles, a spear in his hand, dancing around a boiling pot with a white man in it" (ibid: 362). The journal assured its readers that these stereotypes were produced by biased "American reporters" for the sake of American foreign policy, since they "use their personal influence with leaders there to foster policies they and their governments wish followed" (ibid: 363). The Congo, and Lumumba in particular, stood as proof of the claim that "'good or bad press' can make or break an African leader" (ibid), as Lumumba was obviously boycotted by American journalists. "Lumumba is the best illustration possible", Freedomways wrote, of how the press is used as "a weapon for creating the kind of countries and governments that we

Even liberal and left-leaning white American newspapers were making thinly supported statements about the Congo and its leaders in the early 60s. The widely read "socialist democratic" magazine Dissent (Mills 1994: 15), for instance, framed its only article on Africa's freedom in 1960 (the year of successful mass independence movements on the continent) in an ongoing litany of evolutionary language. The magazine claimed, "Most of these backward territories had not even arrived at a historical level where national feeling was a deep impulse" (Friedenberg 1960: 188). The article in question "An Economic View of Negro African Independence", provided clues as to how the magazine might have framed prime minister Lumumba if it had actually decided to discuss him: "The most dangerous aspect of the new Congo is that the Belgians [...] refused all political and humanistic training to the natives [...] We have the frightening image of a state evolving with embryo political leaders not trained beyond tribal values" (ibid: 199). With this evolutionary view of tribal leaders in an embryonic state, Dissent inscribed itself in the long history of Social Darwinian Congoism, as discussed in the last chapter.

The same can be said about the liberal The New York Times, as well as more conservative magazines such as Life and Time Magazine, which had their tribal characterizations of Lumumba firmly in place even before the conflicts surrounding independence began.[7] Furthermore, they discussed the Congo and Lumumba in articles overwhelmingly filled with violence but devoid of analysis.[8] Malcolm X re-

want" (ibid: 364). The net result of all of this, the journal concluded, "is to deprive the average American community of a difference of views on vital questions, leaving an ill-informed public" (ibid: 369). This kind of media critique is still being conducted today, as I show in the remainder of the chapter.

7 For instance, "Messiah in the Congo: Patrice Emery Lumumba", an article published 18 May, 1960 (two weeks before the Congo's independence amidst the formation of the government), describes the Prime Minister as "looking like a dark, bespectacled Davy Crockett under his chieftain's dress – a feathered sheepskin cap […] He is married to a girl of his neighbourhood in the jungle" (1960: 10). The quotation illustrates how The New York Times painted a portrait of a near-incurable primitive. Conveying an air of objectivity, the vocabulary of the quote can hardly hide that it is a hodgepodge of rumors and hearsay, a mélange of nonsense typical of Congoist discourse. The parade of white people accusing Lumumba in this passage, calling him names, or describing him negatively, culminates in the description of him as a "dark, bespectacled Davy Crockett", a reference to a nineteenth-century larger-than-life American frontiersman with more passion than political intellect.

8 For instance, Life's article "In Chaos, a Deep Fear" from 18 July, 1960, discussed post-independence demonstrations and mutinies in terms of "chaos", "terror", and "mob". The

lentlessly attacked the corporate press for its "Lumumbophobia" (De Witte, The Assassination 49), which led to the ongoing demonization and infantilization of the prime minister in the white U.S. and European media, as Ludo De Witte and others have suggested.[9] Malcolm X exposed this journalistic bias, for instance, in the midst of the Belgian-American intervention in the independent Republic of the Congo. He warned his listeners to "never believe what you read in the newspapers [...] the truth isn't in them. Not when it comes to the Congo" (X 1979d: 135). For Malcolm X, the representation of the American bombings as a "humanitarian project" (1990a: 94) was a deception through which the legitimate struggle of the "brothers in Stanleyville" was reduced to irrational violence or savagery (ibid: 95).

Malcolm X's accusation of misrepresentation draws attention to his insistence on the presence of historical Congo facts against which false claims could be measured. At this point, Malcolm X's discourse shows strong affinities with the "modernist"[10] knowledge tradition within Congoism. Malcolm X emerged as most modern when he attempted to offer a rhetoric and line of reasoning surrounding the Congo that went beyond outright rejection or negation. He thus began mobilizing strategies that had failed African American intellectuals in the past, as demonstrated at length in the previous chapters. Like his predecessors, too, he confused at times, as Richard J. Evans has it, "facts" with "evidence". Whereas the former is a verifiable event that is independent of how it is interpreted, the latter is concerned with using factual accounts to produce a coherent story of some sort by using theory and interpretation (Evans 2000: 76).

Revealing in this respect is Malcolm X's discussion of the historical casualties in the Congo Free State. X maintained, after reading Twain's famous King Leopold's Soliloquy, that the Belgians "butchered" 15 million Congolese (1970a: 128).

latter is said to have dangerous mood swings, on the verge of "slaughtering any whites they found … determined to kill" (Snell 160a: 32). The rationale behind violent behavior against whites is linked to the Congo's tribal irrationality, which found an outlet, according to the magazine, in the "anti-white riots" of 1959 which – more accidentally than willfully – led to independence, as the article "IndepenDANCE Dance in Congo" from 11 July, 1960 went (1960: 21).

9 Jean-Claude Williame and Christine Masuy (1997) confirm De Witte's results in their investigation of the Belgian newspaper La Libre Belgique and the American congressional records.

10 I use "modernity" and "modernist" in a philosophical (rather than historical) sense here, i.e. as an amalgam of knowledge practices and institutional knowledge forms, ranging from science to instrumental rationality (e.g. classification, binary oppositions) and positivist objectivity (cf. Cooper 2005: 123).

This number can never be truly verified, of course, which means it cannot be strictly regarded as "fact". X's claim of factuality points, however, to his interests in invoking this number. X was trying to provide evidence for something entirely different. When he cited the number, Malcom X reminded his colonial-friendly white interlocutors of the "remarkable restraint" (ibid) that the Congolese had shown after independence in light of the severity of their oppression. He thereby framed history (the millions that died) through a contemporary lens, turning it into argumentative "evidence". To understand and frame the present, X went back to the Leopoldian regime that had validated the "cutting of the breasts of Black women when they didn't produce their rubber quota; cutting off their hands, cutting of their feet" (ibid: 131). Despite delivering "evidence" for his main point (Congolese restraint), X insisted that his authority was based on "historic fact" (ibid).

Malcolm X the modernist believed in facts delivered by knowledgeable eyewitnesses. To clarify "the deep-rooted hostility that seems to lie in the hearts of our Congolese brothers" toward the "white man" and to debate whether "our brothers are savage" or not, X invited some of "our African brothers and some of our Afro-American brothers [...] who are well-versed in the facts concerning the history of the Congo" (1970d: 135). X relied on eyewitness epistemology (in terms of inviting insiders, i.e. "Africans") to back up his belief in the factuality of the non-savageness of the Congolese. In contrast to earlier generations, however, this eyewitness was not naively mobilized. X clearly differentiated between "well-versed" and naive eyewitnesses.

The result of X's belief in facts delivered by eyewitnesses was that he silently African-Americanized the Congo once again, mobilizing it against bourgeois Blacks. Malcolm X was very consistent in how he approached opponents from other ideological camps. First, he offered claims of his own, against which everyone else could be measured. He repeatedly asserted, for instance, that the Congolese were "just as humane, just as human, and just as intelligent as anybody else on this planet" (1970a: 131). X followed through with this assertion, dividing the Congolese leaders into good and bad ones, thus differentiating and humanizing the Congolese. The bad leaders were embodied by Tshombe and Kasavubu; the good by Prime Minister Lumumba. Whereas Lumumba is labeled "the rightful ruler" and "one of the greatest black leaders" of the Congo, Tshombe is described as "uncle Tom" (X 1970b: 18, X 1970c: 36).[11]

11 By drawing upon the major character of Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel Uncle Tom's Cabin as a political designation for Tshombe, X invoked a well-known American epithet for slavishness and subservience to white people.

Finally, however, Malcolm X fully Americanized the Congo by turning Tshombe and Kasavubu into puppets of the white political elites of the U.S. X turned Kasavubu and Tshombe into negative symbols of Black liberation, in much the same way as the Civil Rights Movement was framed. Claiming that the U.S. used Tshombe to kill Lumumba, "just like they do with us in this country" (X 1990a: 95), X proceeded to explain how only certain Black leaders are used by whites as a voice for the larger community: "They get a Negro and hire him and make him a big shot – so he's the voice of the community – and then he tells all of them to come on in and join the organization with us, and they take it over" ("ibid). In the next lines, it becomes clear that X is talking about the Nobel Prize-winning Martin Luther King, who is subsequently compared to Tshombe: "Then they give him peace prizes and medals and things. They will probably give Tshombe the peace prize next year for the work he's doing [...] Because he's doing a good job. But for who? For the man" (ibid).

Disappointed in many African American leaders, X turned to the Congo and found Patrice Lumumba, whom he admired, idealized, and identified with for very specific reasons. "He didn't fear anybody," Malcolm X says of the prime minister, "He had those people so scared they had to kill him. They couldn't buy him, they couldn't frighten him, they couldn't reach him" (X 1970c: 64). Thus, X considered Lumumba, in a way that was idolizing and, once again, dehumanizing, "the greatest black man who ever walked the African continent" (ibid), a judgment strongly informed by the individual weaknesses of his Black compatriots and by the systematic defaming of Lumumba as a "tool" of the "Communist World" by the white press, for instance in Life (1961:16). By Americanizing the Congo, X constructed a framework that was dangerously Congoist once again.

Emblematic in this regard is how X discussed the rape of white women following independence. Rape was an ongoing infatuation in the white and Black press alike. The rape of white women was, to Malcolm X, an instance of the "chickens com[ing] home to roost" (1970b: 18), a comment he famously used before in the context of the assassination of U.S. president John F. Kennedy, and which had cost him his prominent place in the Nation of Islam's hierarchy (Manning 2012: 69). Both in the U.S. and the Congo, the chickens came home to roost because of anti-Black violence, X suggested. The parallel between America and the Congo was an obvious one for X: "Lumumba was murdered, Medgar Evers was murdered, Mack Parker was murdered, Emmett Till was murdered, my own father was murdered" (1970b: 25). In passages such as these, X aligns Lumumba with famous African American activists (Evers) and victims of lynching (Till, Parker, and his own father). The African Congo, at this point, has become very much an "American Con-

go" again. As with the American Congo discourse at the start of the century, Malcolm X explicitly drew a parallel between the Congo and the American South in terms of savagery: "If there are savages in the Congo then there are worse savages in Mississippi, Alabama, and New York City, and probably some in Washington, D.C., too" (1970a: 128).

X's representation of the Congo is thus pervaded with the "tension between what people do with language and what language does to them" (Blommaert 2005: 106). The discursive building blocks and generative discursive tools of X's Congo discourse could not be invented completely from scratch, whether or not X desired to do as much. He had to work with what was historically available to him in order to re-shuffle, re-phrase, and reject these blocks and tools in a way that would lead to a Congo that was acceptable to him. While he remained embedded in the hegemonic discourses on the Congo (in order to be understood), he openly pushed its limits through negation and denial (in order to redraw them). Thus, he African-Americanized the Congo, as previous generations had done, but at the same time humanized its inhabitants and highlighted the geopolitical interests behind Congo's Othering. X applied modernist positivism and eyewitness epistemology to back up his claims; at the same time, however, he deconstructed the manner in which Congo knowledge was produced, thereby underlining the relative value of truth. An awareness of social class enabled X's epistemic critique. In his alienation from non-violent, Christian bourgeois activists, whom he framed as "sellouts", lies an important key for his rethinking of the Congo: Class consciousness allowed Malcolm X to question the bourgeois abjection of the Congo.

Activists and artists who embraced Black Power co-produced and, after his assassination, reproduced X's epistemic novelties. The issue of "brotherhood", observable in X's idolization of Lumumba, is a case in point. X's cultural heirs produced a veritable "'Lumumba Poem' genre" (Dworkin 2003: 206); the prime minister was at once both a concrete historical figure and a topos in these texts. Langston Hughes's 1961 poem "Lumumba's Grave" sets the tone for many other poetic expressions surrounding the prime minister in the following decades: "Lumumba was black / And he didn't trust / The whores all powdered / With uranium dust." (2000: 533). In this poem, Lumumba is racialized right from the first line ("Lumumba was black"). Immediately after that, economic motives ("uranium dust") are suggested for his murder. In the next lines, the topic of remembrance is broached: "They buried Lumumba / In an unmarked grave. / But he needs no marker–," Hughes wrote, "For air is his grave. / Sun is his grave, / Moon is, stars are, / Space is his grave. / My heart's his grave, / And it's marked there. / Tomorrow will mark / It everywhere" (ibid). In these lines, the poem moves from the political to the natural and

the personal, as the prime minister is imagined as buried both in the "air" that the writer breathes and in the "heart" of the writer's body. In describing this intricate and intimate connection between writer and prime minister, X's "brotherhood" is re-generated. Similar devices are at work in other contemporary poems.[12]

What is striking about the Lumumba poem genre is that it was dominated by male artists. The few female activists, poets, and playwrights who wrote about the prime minister made something quite different of Lumumba. Disillusion, in these accounts, takes the place of brotherhood. Adrienne Kennedy's 1969 play Funnyhouse of a Negro provides an ideal illustration of this. In the work, Kennedy merges Lumumba with the father of the main character, Sarah, resulting in a flat-out rejection of both: "Her father never hung himself in a Harlem hotel when Patrice Lumumba was murdered. I know the man. He is a doctor, married to a white whore [...] her father is a nigger who eats on a white glass table" (1969: 24). There is no hint at "brotherhood" here. Lumumba exists here as an embodiment of disappointment and deceit (although there are exceptions to this).[13]

Julia Hervé's Orwellian 1973 "A Short Story", appearing in the magazine Black World, provides another female perspective on Lumumba. The story posits the existence of a forgetting pill, or a "technical fix" to make "everybody nonviolent, the pill that would make everybody forget why he wanted to fight, or love or hate, the pill to make everybody forget they have forgotten" (1973: 58). The "political meet-

12 Walter Lowenfels's 1962 poem "Patrice Lumumba Speaks", appearing in Freedomways, aligns Lumumba with the poet with its first line: "I am dead, dead, dead!" (1962: 32). Of course, neither the "I" nor "Lumumba" is truly dead, as Lumumba's "fragments" come together "in you, my brothers, / in the four corners of the world" (ibid). Through Lumumba "the holy Ghost of the Congo" haunted many artists, as Larry Neal put it in his 1974 "Funky Butt, Funky Butt, Take It Away" (1974: 17). Many Lumumba topoi have a longevity among male Black poets that reaches into contemporary times, as Raymond Patterson's 1989 poem "Lumumba Blues" indicates. Evoking the African American blues tradition of lamenting personal misery and social oppression through repetition and call and response, Lumumba is, on the one hand, personalized: "Well, he didn't want much, / just like you and me. / No, he didn't want much, the same as you and me", a typical (blues) line went. In the course of the poem, the African-Americanization of Lumumba, on the other hand, is not just accomplished through style, but also through well-known African American phrases and topoi such as "set my people free" (2001: 239) and "lynched him in the end" (ibid: 240). The theme of remembrance is reinforced with the lines "I won't forget, / Don't think I ever will" (ibid).

13 Shawna Maglangbayan's 1972 monograph Garvey, Lumumba and Malcolm: Black National-Separatists is an example.

ing at the Lumumba Club" (ibid: 60) – which had its real-life counterpart in Angela Davis's Che-Lumumba Club[14] – figures prominently in the narrative as the illustration of the damaging force of forgetting. Drugged amnesiac activists re-frame Mobutu here as a patriot and a follower of Lumumba, instead of remembering him as the prime minister's killer (ibid: 61). Hervé, who, as the biographical note at the end of the story reveals, was an African American in Ghana with a famous émigré father (the novelist and activist Richard Wright), mobilized the story to critique the superficiality and historical shallowness of the Pan-Africanism espoused by African Americans. The story seems to ask: What good is a Pan-Africanist perspective if it is so easily misled by symbolic action (e.g. re-naming streets) that tries to legitimize dictatorship?

Much can be said in favor of Hervé's critique of Black American Pan-Africanist shallowness and commodification if one takes a look at how Black news magazines, such as Jet, discussed the Foreman-Ali Fight in 1974 in Mobutu's Kinshasa. Jet filled its pages with the offhand Pan-Africanist remarks of those involved in the fight. For instance, the official promoter of the event, Don King, went on record stating that he was "offered as much as $1 million to bring the fight to the United States. 'But I was determined to make this fight happen in Africa [...] from the slaveship to the championship'" (Kisner 1974: 52). Although Jet confirmed in that article that both boxers – the aged Ali and the financially destitute Foreman – were offered five million dollars each, this was not just a "clash for cash", as the magazine asserted (ibid). What it was, in the end, was a fight between the materialist Black American Foreman and the proud Black African Ali. Ali's recorded statements did a lot to contribute to this framing. "'When I see George Foreman in front of me,'" Ali was quoted as saying, "'I think about Blacks being enslaved for 300 years. I think if he wins, we (Blacks) stay in chains'" (ibid: 53). The hidden financier and enabler of the event, the dictator Mobutu, was implicitly legitimatized in the course of these events. Hervé's story openly critiqued this kind of commercialized Pan-African shallowness, and offered a type of criticism rarely heard among African American male intellectuals.[15]

14 The Che-Lumumba Club became a household name through the ongoing attention lavished on Angela Davis by the Black press of the early 70s, exemplified here by the 1971 article "The radicalization of Angela Davis" in the lifestyle magazine Ebony. This "all-black collective of the Communist party of Sourthern California" (Sanders 1971: 114), as the magazine explained it to its horrified readers, constituted a continuation of the Congo naming practices pervading African American history (cf. previous chapter).

15 An exception is Amira Baraka's tract "The National Black Assembly", which aligned Newark with Zaire in order to juxtapose the African American "bureaucratic élite" to

This is not to say that there was no in-depth, reflective, Pan-Africanist engagement with the Congo to be found. "Brotherhood" was not merely male rhetoric. The most obvious example in this respect was the Black Panther Party, whose chairman, Bobby Seale, wrote in his 1970 memoir, entitled Seize the Time, that the Panthers lived "in the spirit of Nat Turner, Patrice Lumumba, and Malcolm X" (1970: 217). The Panthers walked the walk, sending their minister of information, Elridge Cleaver, to Congo (Congo-Brazaville, that is, not Congo-Kinshasa), dubbed the People's Republic of the Congo in 1971. Cleaver's report, Revolution in the Congo, took up Malcolm X's meta-perspective. In the same vein as X, Cleaver paid special attention to the symbolic significance of the Congo for African Americans: "Of all words, phrases, and statements connected with Africa, even more than the word 'Africa' itself, the word 'Congo' sets off some very deep vibrations in black hearts, in black souls, in black minds" (1971: 9).

The importance of the Congo, which Cleaver called the "heart of Africa" (ibid), a metaphor inherited from the past (cf. previous chapter), was to be found in its relation to African American politics. Cleaver openly reflected on this issue: "Ideologically, Africa was up for grabs" (ibid: 8), he asserted, "one could refer to Africa and make Africa say anything that one was seeking to prove", since as Africa was "not speaking for itself, or because it spoke with so many voices that much confusion resulted in selecting which voice to listen to" (ibid). Cleaver thus critiqued the use of "Africa" and the Congo for one's own purposes, going against the grain of idealized "brotherhood".

However, in true Congoist fashion, which is a deeply contradictory discourse after all, Cleaver's assertions were then followed by statements adhering to the very logic he was critiquing. Building on the typical self-reflective observation of an increasing schism between "cultural nationalists" and "revolutionary nationalists" (ibid: 7) in African American circles, the Black Panther Party decided to go to "Africa, to the Congo [...] to unite the Afro-American liberation struggle more strongly than it has ever been united before [...] to regain that synthesis between the cultural aspects of our Africanness and the revolutionary aspects" (7). To re-unite Black nationalists was thus the function of the Congo voyage, reducing the region to a template for domestic use. Besides unification, the Congo also facilitated the rejection of Black bourgeois leaders, who were called "CIA niggers" and other "uncle Toms in the United States" (ibid: 8, ibd: 27). These Uncle Toms, according to Cleaver, led

"neocolonial Mobutu", who Baraka considered "the murderer of Patrice Lumumba. The Ali-Foreman fight cannot change that! It just announced the open collaboration with U.S. imperialism" (1975: 23). Through this scathing critique, both Mobutu and Black bourgeois leadership in the U.S. were rejected.

by "James Farmer, were sent to Africa in Malcolm's footsteps in order to destroy the effect he was having" (ibid: 8).

To truly appreciate the (both problematic and liberating) novelties introduced by Malcolm X and his heirs (The Black Panther Party, among others), one has to examine some of the rest of the African American activist rhetoric on the Congo. Following Cleaver's lead, let us consider, for instance, James Farmer and his monograph Freedom – When? Despite their differences, it is important to note that Farmer did have more in common with Malcolm X than the latter would have admitted – proof that some of X's strategies did find an audience broader than his own constituency. The first trait they held in common is their interest in the Congo for its own sake. Even in the internationalist times of the 60s, this was not a given, as the example of Martin Luther King shows.[16] The second common trait was their meta-reflection on representations of Central West Africa and their non-acceptance of the authority of news media.[17] Finally, Farmer shared with X a belief in the eyewitness. Especially since his second trip to Africa, Farmer could see "Africa [...]

16 Martin Luther King's public addresses and writings, for instance, hardly contained any reference to the Congo. The exception was his Where do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community? in which King mentioned the Congo while positioning himself against Black Power novelist John O. Killens. The latter considered the violent revolutions in Cuba, North Korea, and China as important political examples for Black America. "Mr. Killens might have some validity in a struggle for independence against a foreign invader. But the Negro's struggle in America is quite different", King asserted (1968: 62). To illustrate the differences between America and colonial countries, King mobilized the Congo ex negativo. "The American Negro is not in a Congo," he claimed, "where the Belgians will go back to Belgium after the battle is over" (ibid). King used this example to emphasize how important his integrationist approach was: "[I]n the struggle for racial justice in a multiracial society where the oppressor and oppressed are both 'at home,' liberation must come through integration" (ibid). The Congo thus served here to counter the threat of violence within the Black Power ideology.

17 In Freedom – When?, Farmer applied the new meta-tactics to his discussion of the Congo. Like X and the Panthers, whose doctrine Farmer called "mistaken and misguided" (albeit with "certain psychological validity"; 1965: 100), Farmer turned the Congo into a cause célèbre of white hypocrisy: "There was a silence in the press during the years in which hundreds of thousands of Congolese were being slaughtered," Farmer asserted, "but then there came huge headlines: FIFTY WHITES KILLED IN CONGO. Why not an airlift to Mississippi, they ask?" (ibid: 100). In essence, both Farmer and X adopted an anti-authority stance typical of much of the anti-Congoism up until today, especially in terms of news media critique.

less emotionally. I could see more dispassionately and rationally – the flaws, the frailties, the power plays, the cruelty, the evil, and the goodness and kindness" (1965: 134-135). By painting a picture of Congolese heterogeneity, Farmer also highlighted their humanity, much as Malcolm X had done.

In contrast to X, however, Farmer casually evoked the Congoist topoi of primitiveness and savagery. When he met the Congolese Prime Minister Moise Tshombe, Farmer found him "more urbane and sophisticated than I had expected him or any Congolese person to be at the present stage of history" (ibid: 148). Farmer's surprise was fed by an evolutionary framework assigning to the Congolese backward, brutish, and rural habits. Farmer's belief in the atrocities of Congolese rebels – chopping off the legs and arms of white and Black alike, as well as eating their hearts and livers (ibid: 149) – reveals the degree to which the idea of the Congo-as-Savage had become entrenched. Through the Congo, and Africa as a whole (which merge frequently, in true Congoist fashion), Farmer propagates his own solution to racial issues in America. In contrast to X, these solutions reflected those of a bourgeois Black culture, hinging on middle class leadership, American nationalism, and education. "As in our own civil rights revolution, the future of the new African nations will depend upon the quality of leaders they produce" (ibid: 143), Farmer proclaimed. Hence his extensive talks with Tshombe and Kasavubu. Farmer had put his trust in the future of Congo into an emerging group of "brilliant university students – the politicians, administrators, and professional classes of tomorrow" (ibid: 162). His hope in this "class" was far more theoretical and ideological than practical, as he seems not to have talked extensively to anyone on his trip other than the Congolese leaders available to him (Tshombe, Kasavubu, and the leaders of their opposition). In a telling exception, Farmer recounted talking to younger East Africans on the issue of the Congo. Many of his younger interlocutors told him that "we [Americans] should get out of the Congo altogether" (ibid: 161). This ran very much counter to Farmer's own opinions. "I thought this nonsense," he wrote, "no major power would withdraw from so important a place as the Congo." The reasons he gives is that "it is both implausible and undesirable, as everyone of the African nations which are nudging Congo affairs along knows" (ibid). This is perfect Congoist non-rationale by Farmer, who seems to be suggesting that "we" are in the Congo because it is inevitable and "normal". Imperialistic attitudes are thus boiled down to the "common sense" rationale that X attempted to counter.

None of the activists mentioned above were entirely successful in countering Congoism in its depth and breadth. The following section examines to what extent historians and journalists picked up on this anti-Congoism in their own work, or developed their own critical ways of dealing with the Congo.

Genre Matters: History, Journalism, and the Limits of Postmodernity

Works of History, Works of Modernity

African American historians have been deeply affected in their depiction of the Congo by the chasm between the Black Power and Civil Rights movements. The most radical strategies for change among works of history appeared in the Black Power camp, which not only challenged contemporary representations of the Congo, but also questioned the validity of historical knowledge more broadly. This challenge came both from within and without a small circle of Black American historians. For instance, in a special issue of the Journal of Black Poetry from 1970, dedicated to the continent of Africa as well as Black nationalism and Pan-Africanism, the sociologist Gerald McWorter (also known as Abd-al Hakimu Ibn Alkalimat) criticized the modernist idea of "history as 'value free' social science" (McWorter 1970-1971: 23). Instead of presuming to be value free, McWorter maintained, history should deal with "the dynamic of a people's reality", rather than coldly assembling a "chronology of personalities and events" (ibid). This critical stance was directed against the pseudo-objective position adopted by bourgeois Black historians and authors of earlier days, and exemplified in this chapter by W.E.B. Du Bois, John Hope Franklin, and Langston Hughes.

McWorter's critical attitude announced the dawn of a new historiographical era. The authority and truth claims of the older generation were radically challenged by young public intellectuals. Most of them were highly strategic and nationalistic in their aims. Frequently, they published shorter and more specialized pieces for a broad audience in independent magazines. As the Congolese gained independence, these authors radically challenged the old ways of writing about Central West Africa by conscientiously filling in the gaps that traditional histories had left open. This becomes clear if one compares and contrasts these new stories to, for instance, a mainstream history such as John Hope Franklin's From Slavery to Freedom: a History of American Negroes. This had been an influential monograph, with the 2010 edition of the work re-published in much the same form as the 1947 edition. In contrast to these new voices, the latter monograph largely ignored the Congo and declared it "impossible to trace with any degree of accuracy the political development of these peoples before Europeanization" (1952: 21). Franklin was by no means an exceptional case in this regard; W.E.B. Du Bois and Langston Hughes made similar claims.[18]

18 The latter, for instance, declared the whole of Africa unknown until some hundred years ago when "darkest Africa" was explored (Hughes 2003: 363). Du Bois, in turn, adopted a

In the 60s, young activist historians did not accept the unknowability of the precolonial Congo and started writing with great force and confidence about it. The historian-columnist Eugene P. Romayn Feldman, for instance, took great issue with "the image of the Congolese as a savage people without culture or history" in a 1965 article in the Negro Digest (1965: 83). According to the author, "historical records reveal that the Congolese had a civilization of their own which was quite well developed and needed least of all the European 'civilizers'" (ibid). In what followed, Feldman listed in detail what remained out of sight (or out of mind) for Du Bois, Franklin, and other historians: The rich corpus of comments and texts on Congo's precolonial past. This corpus included encyclopedias, oral accounts, travelogues by Portuguese explorers from the sixteenth century, and texts by other nationalist Black intellectuals, such as John Henrik Clarke.[19] The "true facts of history", as Feldman termed it positivistically towards the end of his "Truth about the Congo" (ibid: 86), were thus finally revealed.

These were facts that seemed so true, in fact, that even Du Bois began to accept them by the end of his life, thus revising half a century of his own scholarship. Du Bois's revision became obvious, for instance, in a newspaper article titled "A Logical Program for a Free Congo" in 1961, in which he suddenly recognized a substantial pre-colonial history of the Congo. Du Bois's article in The National Guardian illustrates how history is changed and broadened as soon as contemporary concerns create an urgency for it. In "A Logical Program for a Free Congo", Du Bois explained his motivation to write about Congo's past. One element was his desire to counter the widespread depiction of the Congo as a land of savagery during the time of its independence struggle. "The Congo valley is not, as currently painted a nest of howling savages", Du Bois wrote (1961: 6). Ironically, this was the image of the

stance very much like Franklin's in his 1946 The World and Africa by reducing the Congo's colonial prehistory to "Bantu herdsmen" throwing themselves upon Central West Africa in gigantic migratory waves (1972: 78), causing serious mayhem – "they destroyed villages and massacred the inhabitants" (ibid: 48). The home of these scavenging, militant hordes of "Bantus" was the "true 'Heart of Africa'", according to Du Bois, which was located in "the tropical rain forest of the Congo" (ibid: 97). How exactly the kingdom of the Congo fits in this story of brute force and conquest – a historical aside in Du Bois's account that is clearly at odds with the rest of his history (e.g. ibid: 170) – is never really resolved.

19 John Henrik Clarke's essay "The Old Congo" (1962a), which was published in the academic magazine Phylon in 1962, is plagiarized in parts by Feldman. The fourth paragraph is copied without reference, for instance.

Congo he himself had helped shape in much of his oeuvre. Independence, however, had clearly changed this.

Other historians followed suit or themselves reflected self-consciously on this changed attitude towards the Congo, as the example of John Henrik Clarke shows.[20] In the 60s, the Congo also stood for something positive. This required countering the idea, as Du Bois phrased it in the article just mentioned, that "a few half-educated leaders filled with crazy and impossible ambitions" (1961: 6) had taken over the region. A number of Black Power-oriented historians found various means of discrediting this stereotype of primitive savageness. For instance, the historian-novelist-activist John A. Williams' Africa: Her History, Lands and People Told with Pictures (1962) produced one of the first historical accounts that made a point of representing Africa both in its urban modernity and rural tradition. This is exemplified by the cover of the book, which showed three half-naked Black men playing music, all seated in front of an anonymous modern building. In Williams's fact files on the Congo, a picture of a traditional "Muluba dancer" was matched up with photos of Leopoldville's main street, Boulevard Albert, as well as a picture of a copper smelting plant in Elisabethville and a photo of a helicopter that "sprays for mosquitos and flies in Congo city" (1962: 115). The leader of the Republic of the Congo at that point, Adoula, is shown talking to another Black man dressed in a suit (ibid: 113).

The reality and existence of these images served as a powerful impulse to question past representations of the Congo. But the final push to use these depictions was, quite simply, the will to do so. Pictures of Congolese in modern Western clothing had already been published very early on in the century, as was shown in the previous chapter. As Central West Africa was generally considered a useless human landscape that could serve as a marker for original "blackness" or, at best, for primitive, sexually-charged creativity, the Congo could not be incorporated into

20 The discursive influence of concrete events in the Congo was actively contemplated by John Henrik Clarke in "The Afro-American Image of Africa" from the magazine Black World (February 1974). The article discussed the history of the changing Black American image of Africa, attributing the growing interest in Africa to "the rise of independent movements on that continent" and the ongoing reference to this event in "the literature and activities of the civil-rights movement" (1974: 19). This materialized, according to Clarke, into an institutionalization of African history with the development of "Black Studies programs…" (ibid: 20), which in turn strengthened the identification with Africa. Independence, civil rights, and Black Studies, all of which were interconnected, were thus the decisive developments required to broaden the discussion on the Congo, according to Clarke.

any serious history. Once the Congo provided elements that could be helpful for the plight of those writing the histories, however, it became an area of intense focus. This volatility of the Congo signifier also meant that, once the Congo lost its affirmative utility, it was in danger of disappearing from the radar again. This is precisely what happened.

The changing political landscape, both in the U.S. and the Congo, is responsible for the Congo's apparent evaporation in the decades following independence. As the 70s, 80s, and 90s went by, and the Congo slipped into Mobutu's and Kabila's indefensible dictatorships, the Congo disappeared once again from sight. Post-60s historical writing reduced the Congo to the Congo-as-Slave or the Congo-as-the-Vital (cf. previous chapters). Within the latter topos, the pre-modern Congo or the Congo of Lumumba reappear frequently. Molefe Kete Asante's important Afrocentric oeuvre is truly emblematic of this latter treatment of Central West Africa – reducing the Congo in his Encyclopedia of Black Studies to its folklorist leftovers in the U.S and to the symbolic usage of Lumumba. Whenever the contemporary Congo is discussed, it is absorbed into the larger Afrocentric story of "the quest for eternal harmony", as the subtitle of The History of Africa phrases it (Asante: 2007). Thus, the wars in the Congo from the late 90s onward are discussed under the chapter title "Africa consolidates independence". The conflicts made it perfectly clear, however, that the Congo state was politically, militarily, and socially deeply unstable after decades of Western-funded, exploitative Mobutu rule. If anything, the Congo was under pressure by its neighbors, as well as international institutions such as the World Bank, the U.S., and the IMF (cf. Turner 2013).

Apart from the powerful pressures of reality (i.e. independence, the emergence of Lumumba), the changing epistemological orientation within the field of history also contributed to the emergence of fresh representations of the Congo. American history writing was transformed by the introduction of both Black studies and postmodern thought into academia beginning in the mid-1960s. Until then, the study of African Americans hardly ever appeared as a systematic part of university curricula (Banks 1996: 183). When Black Freedom Movement activism hit the campuses, however, the energetic call for the establishment of Black Studies departments became a major rallying point. This resulted, by the early 90s, in the establishment of various programs in over 250 institutions (ibid: 186). In the wake of these came scores of new journals and newsletters. Soon enough, Black studies were "no longer a small affair in the American academy" (Asante/Masama 2005: xx). However, given its central desire to study "the great contributions" of Africans to the "discourse of knowledge", as Asante has it (ibid: xix), Congo knowledge hardly developed within the field.

Parallel to Black Studies, "postmodernist" thought came to the fore in American academia. This body of knowledge challenged and eschewed the self-evidence of reality, as well as the sense of academic objectivity, and called attention to the inadequacy of traditional historiography. One expression of this skepticism was the rise of New Historicism, the proponents of which have acknowledged that their work was driven and inspired by the anti-racist, feminist, and working-class-oriented movements of the 60s and 70s (e.g. Gallagher/Greenblatt 2000: 53). In Practicing New Historicism, Gallagher and Greenblatt underline the importance of the movement's central concerns for their own work – to pluralize, democratize, and revise historical accounts. This involved a new attentiveness to how historiographical sources favor administrative and political accounts from white, European, middle- and upper-class male authors over other kind of sources. Via the social movements of the 50s and 60s, the New Historicists felt the need to broaden the base of historical sources and to try to dislodge the idea that the 'Man' of the administrative and political pamphlets was a universal one (Van Hove 2014).

Although the relationship between postmodern innovations and Black history remained strained (as is shown in what follows), New Historicism's influence in terms of broadening sources considered legitimate is obvious in many African American histories. An excellent example of this is the two-volume To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans, which uses traditional archival documentation, as well as journalistic and poetic sources. However, in contrast to African American fiction writers,[21] who systematically set out to correct the limited historical record on slavery through postmodernist fiction writing (Spaulding 2005: 2), Black historians have been reluctant to engage in meta-discussions on fact and fiction. Keith Gilyard suggests in the Encyclopedia of Postmodernism: "Insofar as postmodernism seeks to destabilize notions of fixed or essential truths and identities, it is a body of thought both useful and problematic for the discipline of African American Studies" (2001: 4). The conflict with postmodern thought arises at the point when "foundational truths about all African Americans" are created (ibid).

Molefe Kete Asante's The History of Africa: The Quest for Eternal Harmony is a case in point. The metanarrative of "eternal harmony" is as essentialist as it is anti-postmodernist. Asante knows this, of course, and defends his stance explicitly in the preface. In it, the author frames his history as a "straightforward, illustrated, and factual text [...] a chronological and critical examination of the extensive history of Africa" (2007: xii). In another edited volume by Asante, one of the contributors openly rejects what Asante has called in The African American People: A Global

21 Including Ishmael Reed, Octavia Butler, Toni Morrison, Charles Johnson, Samuel Delany, and Jewelle Gomez, for instance.

History the "current trend in historiography to discover the bizarre, the odd, and the unusual in order to announce something novel" (2012: x). In his Encyclopedia, Asante's anti-postmodernism is performed through Lumumba. "To reread Du Bois, Nkrumah, Lumumba, Cabral, and Fanon in the light of the current state of world affairs," the Encyclopedia states, "implies a reexamination of some of the premises of the current trend of postmodernism" (Mutombo 2005: 52). As such, postmodernist and postcolonial approaches are described as neo-imperial tools, "for it is too obvious that in this imperial era, where 18th- and 19th-century rhetoric has come back to the fore, there is nothing 'post' in the dominant postcolonial discourse of our time, especially when we recall that postcolonies are to a certain extent none other than an Africanization of Western colonies" (ibid).

Apart from the suspicion of neo-imperialist meddling, what other reasons do Black historians have for resisting postmodern tendencies in their writing? One reason for the hesitant response to postmodernist history is no doubt the touch of arrogance with which some postmodernist academics proclaim their importance within African American Studies. For instance, the Encyclopedia of Postmodernism asserts earnestly in its article "African American Studies" that Black Studies can "be regarded as a triumph of postmodernism" (Gilyard 2001: 4). This is a statement that obviously glosses over the ongoing struggle of generations of African Americans. In the end, Gilyard's stance is an anti-postmodernist posture itself. It was precisely the siding of the postmodernists with those who did not fit into the larger, modernist stories – the subordinated and the marginalized – that made its practice and practitioners, as Butler noted, "dissent" (ibid: 15). To give postmodernism credit for the emergence of Black Studies contradicts its own aim to give those subordinated a voice.

Another reason why Asante and others might have refused a postmodernist stance in their histories is the approach's playfulness and relativism. Asante's refusal to go looking for "the bizarre, the odd, and the unusual" (as New Historicists, for instance, tend to do) and to focus instead on the broad brush of African and African American history, is based on the fact that African American historiography has been written with "vindicationist" and "contributionist" aims, or with the aim of inscribing Black Americans constructively into the overall American or African story. Postmodern playfulness, which is often mobilized for epistemic reasons, seems out of place in this deadly serious epistemic-political field. It also seems superfluous, as African American historians have been undermining the alleged objective certainties of historiography all along. They have done so by incorporating their personal stories into their historical work and by openly discussing their political aims (cf. previous chapters).

Moreover, there is not much for Black American historians to gain from the postmodernist tendency to blur fact and fiction. Natalie Zemon Davis's The Return of Martin Guerre is an excellent example of this postmodern merging of personal speculation and archival material in order to fill historical gaps. In her introductory announcement, she reminds her readers that the story of the sixteenth-century French peasant Martin Guerre "is in part my invention, but held tightly in check by the voices of the past" (Davis 1983: 5). This kind of statement cannot be made so easily if one's historiography had been criticized, defamed, and denied for its real-and-imagined subjectivity. The subjective aspect of the writing of Black history has to be defended and addressed even in the present day. Even in the Encyclopedia of Black Studies, Asante is compelled to state that the contributors have "created an encyclopedia that is conceptually driven rather than personality driven" (2005: xxi).

In the same vein, African American history cannot easily absorb Davis's tendency to evoke the "perhapses" and the "may-have-beens" of history (Davis 1983: viii). The reason is that Black history actually matters. It matters politically, personally, and financially to African American communities even now. Whether the real Martin Guerre had come back or not matters very little in Artigat today, whose inhabitants (as Davis reports), "smiled, shrugged their shoulders, and said, 'That's all very well – but that pretty rascal, he lied'" (ibid: 59). African American history, in contrast, is not about smirking about petty stories for the epistemic reason that, as Davis concludes, "it reminds us that astonishing things are possible. Even for the historian who has deciphered it, it retains a stubborn vitality" (ibid: 125). Black history has socio-political consequences that are still felt; the deeply controversial issue of affirmative action, for instance, hinges on the degree to which the rectification of the well-documented, factual wrongs of anti-Black American history, most notoriously slavery, Jim Crow and lynching, is perceived as justified. To question the truth claim of the past, particularly with respect to lynching as Bryant Simon has done,[22] is to potentially undermine political tools for justice in the present.

One wonders if postmodern thought nevertheless provides avenues for anti-Congoist approaches. "The critique of essentialism encouraged by postmodernist

22 Bryant Simon's postmodernist attempt to address a lynching in Blacksburg in 1912 was an attempt to tell "a truer story than the archive reveals" (2004: 152). To do so, Simon turned to fiction full of "perhapses and maybes", just as Davis had done (Davis 1983: 180). The reason for this was that Simon discovered the rather banal truth that newspaper accounts are limited in their potential to tell a full story. I agree with Lubomír Doležel that the "cognitive gain" of filling in the historical gaps of the archive through fiction is quite limited and that it leads to events like lynchings being declared unknowable (2010: 51).

thought is useful for African-Americans" (1990: 28), bell hooks asserted in her 1990 essay "Postmodern Blackness". African Americans, according to hooks, "have too long had imposed [...] from both the outside and the inside a narrow, constricting notion of blackness" (ibid). Postmodern critiques, hooks hoped, would "challenge notions of universality and static overdetermined identity" (ibid). In her very valid remarks, hooks highlights important advantages of postmodern thought hardly applied by Black historians. It is because of this very avoidance of the postmodern that Congoism may have stayed off the radar. As long as African American historians could not write about themselves as subjects at odds with other Blacks (Congolese, lower class Americans, etc.), the move from self-determination to "other-determination" (Butler 2002: 59) could not be made.

Journalism and Postmodern Self-Reflectivity

Contemporary Black journalism provides a partial answer to the question of whether postmodern thought might be a helpful anti-Congoist tool. This genre has embraced postmodern stances and attitudes more overtly than works of Black American history. Journalism, considered more broadly, became amenable to postmodernist tactics in the 60s, when the ideal of objectivity was questioned by the proponents of the New Journalism, such as Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, and Hunter S. Thompson, whose journalistic accounts merged with biographical ones. This challenge by the white New Journalists and the academic postmodernists resulted in a humbler understanding of journalism, as media scholar Stephen Ward explains: "The pillars of truth and objectivity show serious wear and tear due to a post-modern skepticism about objective truth" (2009: 302).

Journalistic partisanship did not need the sanctioning of New Journalists to be carried out on a broad scale, however. African American journalism had done so long before (and defended it as such). Magazines like Ebony, for instance, explicitly and systematically contradicted anti-Black imagery in white-oriented mainstream media. According to the founder and publisher of the magazine, John H. Johnson,[23] his focus on Black life was a new development in post-war America because "there was an almost total White-out" (Johnson/Bennett 1989: 114) on Black news in white media. Johnson explained this in his autobiography as the "unwritten rule [...]

23 Ebony's founder, publisher, and long-standing editorial influence was the African American "entrepreneur of passion" John H. Johnson from Chicago (Summer 2010: 99), who originally knew little about publishing, but was passionate about his main concern: showing the "total Black experience", as Johnson wrote in his autobiography Succeeding Against the Odds (Johnson/Bennett 1989: 157).

that a Black's picture could not appear in the press unless in connection with a crime. There was no consistent coverage of the human dimensions of Black Americans in northern newspapers and magazines" (ibid).

Partisanship reached new heights in the early 60s through the issue of the Congo and especially Lumumba. The white, middle-class magazine Life represented the prime minister more as an abstract idea than a human being. Lumumba was a symbol for violence, irrationality, and communism. All of these topics were narrated against the background of the Congo's monstrousness and tribal chaos. As a response to that particular imagery, Life's Black counterpart Ebony took a more human-interest approach in Lumumba's representation, including lengthy descriptions of his house by the African American correspondent Era Bell Thompson in the article "African Independence 1960" from December, 1960: "The Prime Minister lived in a large frame house on the main boulevard, not far from Parliament" (1960: 148). Thompson continued, "I talked my way past the guards at his gate and met Mrs. Lumumba and their five children. A secretary made an appointment for an interview the next day. When I returned, the tall, scholarly-looking Lumumba shook hands with a room full of foreign delegations and journalists, begged to be excused and dashed off to attend to matters of state" (ibid).

Written in the personable narrative quite typical of the New Journalism, Thompson framed Lumumba in ways recognizable to African Americans. Based on the clues about the "main boulevard" and particularly the "frame house" – a popular kind of suburban home or holiday residence in the American 60s – Lumumba would probably be read favorably as a well-to-do professional who managed to live in a nice area. The passage would also frame Lumumba as an industrious official, one who needs a secretary to manage the many "foreign delegations and journalists" and to organize his urgent "matters of state". His "scholarly-looking" stature would hint at some kind of academic background; his polite excuses would serve as a marker of well-mannered humility; and the presence of his wife and five children in his bustling home office portray him as a family man.

Given the magazine's ongoing celebration of Black success through hard work, education, and effort, chances are high that Lumumba's personality would be recognized and even approved of by Ebony's readers. Ebony's values, as Gußmann suggests, reflected those of its readers, who strongly believed in success, progress, material values (such as owing a house and a car), and responsibility (Gußmann 1998: 97-98). Confidence in American democracy (ibid: 107, 114) and family life were central issues for Ebony's readers, too. According to sociologist Franklin Frazier in his classic 1957 study Black Bourgeoisie, the Black middle class sought compensation for its ongoing rejection and denial by whites by escaping into a

world of "make-believe" (1962: 150-151, 189). This fairytale world was driven and perpetuated by the Black press – most prominently, as he claimed, Ebony – which constantly focused on and exaggerated the economic and cultural achievements of Black Americans (ibid). The desire of the Black middle class for recognition may also be seen, for instance, in the continuous interest in African Americans who succeeded in the white world and the strong focus on Africa's increasingly successful anti-colonial struggles and elites.

By opposing Life's Lumumba to that of Ebony's, it becomes obvious that Black journalistic partisanship had both an external and internal aspect. The external aspect turned Lumumba into a symbol of resistance against the white media's anti-Black defamation. The internal aspect, as echoed in Era Bell Thompson's passage, turned Lumumba into a template for Black bourgeois subjectivity. This double move can also be observed in the works of Black journalists who traveled to the Congo in the decades succeeding Congolese independence. During this time, Black American journalists traveled to Central West Africa in bigger numbers than ever before. In contrast to Era Bell Thompson's 1954 monograph Africa, Land of My Fathers: The Story of the Return of a Native Three Hundred Years Later, disappointment and alienation permeated many travel accounts. In Who Killed the Congo (1962), Philippa Schuyler could not establish a sympathetic connection with the Congo as a nation, nor with its inhabitants. Schuyler's apologetic attitude towards Belgian colonialism eventually led to her blame the Congolese for their own misery. "It is a rarely mentioned fact," Schuyler asserted, "that Congolese were very difficult to deal with, and Belgian impatience with them was only too often justified [...] Congolese were maddeningly slow, maladroit and dilatory" (1962: 93).

Under pressure by postmodernist, postcolonial, and African American critical theories, paternalistic passages such as Schuyler's gradually disappeared in Black journalism. Newer journalistic reports on the Congo – exemplified here by Howard French, Keith Richburg, Eddy Harris, and Lynne Duke – tell stories that are skeptical of universality, objectivity, and of the power elites from the U.S. and the Congo. A major feature of contemporary Black journalistic writing on the Congo is self-reflectivity. In the writing of Harris, Richburg, French, and Duke, the personal plays a key role in the larger narrative. The personal here cannot be equated with the private, however, as was the case in some of the postmodern historiography discussed above.[24] Through their life accounts, Richburg, French, Duke, and Harris re-

24 In Simon's attempt to postmodernize lynching historiography, self-reflectivity slips into a private story of how the author enrolled in a fiction class. This account is filled with moderately interesting and hardly relevant details about, for instance, the "prim-looking Southern" teacher who turned out to be "wonderfully generous and open" (2004: 181).

cast contemporary African American activism. Keith Richburg's 1997 Out of America narrates his interest in Africa against the background of his student years at the University of Michigan, where the freshly introduced curricula in African American studies in the late 70s provided him with his first substantial information on Africa (1997: 9). This happened amidst the ongoing activism of the "Black Action Movement", which demanded greater recruiting of minorities for the university's staff (ibid: 17).

The point of this personal reflection is very political. Afrocentric identity politics in his student years made Richburg aware of, and interested in, his own "blackness". Unlike in the 60s, however, this awareness led to a refusal to think racially altogether (which is the whole point of the book, really). Richburg thus trims his identity down to simply American. Richburg flatly denies in his travelogue any type of racial link between the "Africans" he met during his time abroad and himself, in spite of his skin color. Confronted with the ethnic cleansing of Rwanda, with which he prefaces his book, Richburg admits that he was seeing all of "this horror" a bit differently "because of the color of my skin. I am American, but a black man, a descendant of slaves brought from Africa". But there the racial connection stops, Richburg implies. To distance himself from the African identity that was so energetically claimed in the 60s (and continuously re-stated by academics from the Asante circle, for instance) he openly thanks "God" that his ancestors were enslaved so they got away from the genocidal continent (ibid: xvi-xviii). Other journalists begin their accounts with similar assertions of racial non-connection.[25]

The racial disengagement in the journalistic accounts echoes the skepticism of postmodernist thinking about essential connections, identifications, and identities. It is no coincidence that Black journalists integrate the activism of the 60s into their accounts, which gives them the chance to refute the "modernist universalizing agenda" of the Black Freedom Movement, as hooks terms it (1990: 29). In contrast to the activism of the 60s, the authors demand that racial thinking take a backseat as an explanation of social realities. Refusing to accept an essential, Pan-African racial identity does not automatically mean that debates about identity become postmodern, however. The identity of these journalists is not discussed as a result of plural and intersecting discourses, as they would be by postmodernists (Butler 2002: 50-51), nor as the effect of contradictory ideologies. Richburg does not reflect on why

There is nothing of that kind of private, narratively irrelevant detail in the Black travelogues mentioned above.

25 Harris, for instance, asserts that "because my skin is black you will say I traveled Africa to find the roots of my race. I did not – unless that race is the human race, for except in the color of my skin, I am not African" (1994: 13).

he dismisses the link between himself and other Blacks (Africans and Americans alike). Reading his text against the grain, one might suggest that if he were actually to do that, he would find that both Africans and Black Americans are a disappointment to him as a bourgeois subject. Africans kill each other without justified cause and refuse to take responsibility for it, Richburg asserts throughout the book. Black Americans, in turn, are also full of excuses concerning the "problems of the black underclass" (1997: 178), which is "still struggling on the streets, hustling just trying to make ends meet" (ibid: 179). To make things even more worse, according to Richburg, "the black underclass" explains its misery by pointing to slavery and the Jim Crow laws.

The disappointment in fellow Blacks found in Richburg's work (and French's, although it is less pronounced)[26] results in the conclusion that "in Africa, there's a lot of that same backward-looking attitude" (ibid: 180). The implication is the same for the U.S.-American Black communities. Richburg's lack of connection "to this strange and violent place" (ibid: 227) ultimately leads to reducing his identity only to his Americanness. This occurs in other accounts, as well. Postmodernist skepticism towards innate Black identity thus leads to reduction, substitution, and apolitical rejection, not to the pluralization or politicizing of identifications and identities.

African American identity politics, as seen through the lens of reductive postmodernism, produces Congo discourses that are divested of the worst derogatory argumentation and rhetoric. In this sense, postmodernist approaches do work. At the same time, the travel accounts by Richburg, French, Harris, and Duke also show that their postmodernist stance, arguments, and language are of no real consequence. These authors remain very much ingrained in the modernist project of constructing conceptual oppositions to make sense of the Congo. The Congo becomes once again rigidly and hierarchically fixed, despite the emphatic and oftentimes critical language with which this is done. Lynne Duke's Mandela, Mobutu and Me contains a textbook example of how this works. While standing on the banks of the Congo, Duke feels "trapped by Africa's wonder and its woe as I watched the river's swells" (2003: 11). This kind of binary rhetoric (wonder vs. woe) is almost always

26 French, too, makes this disappointment in both Africans and his fellow Black Americans obvious in a key scene in his book, where he portrays the Congolese president Laurent Kabila in such a fashion as to resemble a "streetcorner hustler … a genuine thug" (2005: 214), whose "strut" was shown on CNN in an endless loop. To French, who had grown up in a strong middle-class African American family, where pride and self-respect were passed on daily, the street hustler signifies a culturally determined worst-case scenario. The comparison of Kabila with Conrad's Kurtz (ibid: 215) demonstrates just how thoroughly French disapproved of this kind of hustler.

flanked by essentialist stances, as we have seen throughout this book. And it is true here, too. For instance, Duke explicitly frames her time in Africa as the opportunity to receive "a taste of Africa's essence – the surging aspirations and the crushing struggles I was fortunate enough to know" (ibid: 287). These struggles and aspirations are not in Duke's book to humanize Africa, but to naturalize extremes in Africa's "essence". It is not unusual that this leads to a return to traditional "uplift" rhetoric. Richburg, in a manner reminiscent of Booker T. Washington (cf. previous chapter), states: "It seems to me that if the race is ever going to progress, we might start by admitting that the enemy is within" (ibid: 179).

These two examples should not imply that all of these authors reach their conclusions in similar ways. Harris, for instance, truly attempts to overcome the oppositions at work in Duke's and Richburg's texts (American/African, wonder/woe, aspiration/struggle) by positioning himself as more than a "hybrid" – "another race, perhaps, "newborn and distinct, forged in the blast furnace of slavery" (1994: 28-29). Harris's pondering, despite this "right" postmodern, postcolonial language and self-reflectivity, nevertheless quickly slips into binaries: He literally feels like "Jekyll and Hyde" due to his perceived in-betweenness. Harris's postmodernist pondering thus ultimately leads to modernist certainties. One of these certainties is that Harris has more in common "with a handful of whites" than with the "Africans" with whom he is surrounded (which he reads as a denial of his blackness rather than, for instance, a confirmation of class affiliation). Harris discovered this on the banks of the Congo, as many intellectuals did, which was to be "the end of Africa for me" (ibid: 299).[27]

Postmodernist approaches and self-reflectivity have led to cosmetic changes in the language of journalists, but have not led to a radical breach in the Congoist foundations of internal and external Othering. What is missing is an awareness of class and the limitations of genre. As prominent members of the American bourgeoisie, journalists fail to spot their own class biases, especially when newsrooms are packed with people with similar (middle- and upper-) class backgrounds and aspirations, as Cunningham has noted. Moreover, journalistic self-reflectivity never

27 With this gesture, Harris juxtaposed himself with many generations of Americans who went to the Congo and had an epiphany. This included the founding father of American Studies, Perry Miller, as well as a key figure in today's African American Studies, Molefe Kete Asante. "At Matadi, on the banks of the Congo," Perry Miller wrote in his authoritative Errand into the Wilderness, "it was given to me … the mission" of "expounding my America to the twentieth century" (1956: 2). Asante, in turn, decided "to write a narrative history of Africa" while "standing on the banks of the mighty Congo river" as he writes in the preface of The History of Africa (2007: xi).

goes so far as to question whether journalism as a genre should itself be left by the wayside. The economic pressures and commercial interests of newspapers lead to well-known dismissive reporting on the Congo because this reporting has a long and (commercially) successful tradition. "Reporters are biased toward conflict because it is more interesting [...] biased toward sticking with the pack because it is safe," Cunningham asserts, "biased toward event-driven coverage because it is easier [...] biased toward existing narratives because they are safe and easy" (2003: n.p.). These biases are well-known to the most critical of these journalists. French's A Continent for the Taking is permeated with critique towards the news media he had been working for for so long. Despite his attempt "to be different", there he was, French wrote, "just like everyone else, rushing toward another lurid African mess that, thanks to the magic of television, had become the global story of the week" (2005: 59). Like French, many of the Black American journalists are astounded by their own inadequacies, including their own anti-African racism (e.g. Harris 1994 33; Richburg 1997: 248). Welcome as these self-reflections may be, they do not lead to anything substantially different: Congoism is still reproduced in these accounts. Which begs the question: Is "racism" itself, of which Congoism is part and parcel, "becoming reflexive" (Žižek 2000: 6)? This certainly appears to be the case in Black journalism. But does this observation hold for other genres, such as postmodern Black American theater? This will be debated in what follows.

GLOBAL SISTERHOOD: "EVERYDAYING" THE CONGO AND THE FAILED STRATEGY OF SELECTIVE SILENCE

In the period following World War II, a number of Black female writers received unprecedented critical acclaim, as evidenced by the Nobel Prize for Literature won by Toni Morrison in 1993 and the Pulitzer Prizes for Fiction and Drama won by Alice Walker and Lynn Nottage (in 1983 and 2009, respectively). The link to the Congo in Walker's and Nottage's oeuvre is obvious: The latter won her Pulitzer for a 2009 play titled Ruined, which tells the story of a brothel in a war-torn Congolese village; Walker, in turn, wrote a collection of essays (published in 2010) on a number of gender-issues hotspots that she had recently visited, titled Overcoming Speechlessness: A Poet Encounters the Horror in Rwanda, Eastern Congo, and Palestine/Israel. Here, too, the connection to Central West Africa cannot be overlooked.

The link between Morrison and the Congo is an epistemic one. Through her strategy of selective silence – an epistemic issue famously tackled via her 1987

slave novel Beloved – Morrison addresses "unspeakable thoughts, unspoken" (62) revolving around the historical topics of the Middle Passage and slavery (DiPace 1994: 40). In true postmodernist fashion, Morrison told the press that her novel was fiction based on the historical record. She underlined this by dedicating her novel to "the Sixty Million and more" (1987: n.p.) who died in the broader context of the Middle Passage. Asked by Time Magazine whether this number is accurate, Morrison backed up her claim by referring to the vast numbers of Congo slaves: "There were travel accounts of people who were in the Congo – that's a wide river – saying, 'We could not get the boat through the river, it was choked with bodies'" (1994: 257). Morrison thus answered Time's provocative question by referring to eyewitness accounts on the Congo. Notably, she speaks only vaguely of accounts of "people" here, foregoing any specifics. This contrasts to her particularly mentioning the diary of the U.S.-American, slave-owning Burr family, for instance, to which she alludes a few lines later in the interview in order to back up her historical thoughts on slavery at the American end of the ocean (ibid).

Morrison's vagueness regarding the Congo indicates that the finer details of the historical record (e.g. the origins of the slaves) were not her central interest. If this had been the case, she would have mentioned the Congo in Beloved (which she did not). Morisson's project has always been a broader and deeply epistemic one – i.e. to insert slavery as a whole into the American archive by transcending the willed "national amnesia" (ibid) surrounding this issue. In the Time interview, she stated that "I don't want to remember, black people don't want to remember, white people won't want to remember" (ibid). In order to correct the biased American archive, Morrison decided to write intimately on the subject. "This book was not about the institution – Slavery with a capital S," Morisson asserted, "It was about these anonymous people called slaves. What they do to keep on, how they make a life, what they're willing to risk, however long it lasts in order to relate to one another" (ibid).

The Personal, the Political, the Silent

Nottage and Walker, it seems, picked up Morrison's strategy of telling horrific stories in muted and personal ways, thereby attempting to find new ways with which to narrate Congo's unspeakable horrors of rape and war. Nottage's representation of the Congo is part of a broader political agenda. In her introduction to the published edition of Ruined, director Kate Whoriskey explains the play as a tool to "activate change, heal a bit of horror, restore hope and give voice to the silent and unseen" (2009: xiii). The "horror" in question (a well-known topos in discussions of the Congo, as we have seen in the previous chapters) was what Thomas Turner called

"Congo's war against women" (2013: 120-146), or the massive amount of sexual assault perpetrated against women and girls in the course of the second Congo war from 1998 onward. Lynn Nottage's initial intention, as the director Whoriskey explains, of doing "a version of Mother Courage set in the Congo" (2009: ix) places the play in a critical, Brechtian tradition of theater as "social commentary" (ibid). Nottage attempts to execute this agenda, as the director suggests, through a personal and complex narrative "portraying the lives of Central Africans as accurately as [Lynn Nottage] could" (ibid). The ultimate aim is to "examin[e] the spectrum of human life in all its complexities" (ibid: xii).

The narrative of Ruined is personal throughout, as was Nottage's proclaimed intention. This turns the play into an everyday story of how "normal" people get through war times. The story is set in Mama Nadi's bar and brothel in an unnamed mining town in the eastern Congo, from which rebels and government soldiers roam and return. These men are played by the same male actors, thus implying that they are indistinguishable in the crimes they commit. The setting shows, moreover, that "the social contract is utterly tenuous here", as The Feminist Spectator remarks in its review of the play (2009: n.p.). This tenuous social contract leads more than once to the invocation of the well-known Congoist topic of "chaos". This term is also applied in Whoriskey's introduction; the director explains how she and Nottage went to Central West Africa to interview rape survivors in order to find the right "structure" for the play that was "true to our experience" (2009: xi). Interestingly, what they saw was nothing short of "incredible chaos" (ibid: xii).

"Chaos" surfaces frequently in the play, too. "Chaos" is used carefully, however, as a label for very specific situations and exclusively used by male characters. For instance, chaos designates a traffic jam that is experienced by the traveling sales man Christian (Nottage 2009: 6). It also describes the aftermath of a rebel attack on a hospital, as explained by government Commander Osembenga (ibid: 76). Furthermore, the networking pains of the Lebanese diamond merchant Mr. Harari are framed through "chaos". "The man I shake hands with in the morning is my enemy by sundown," the merchant complains, "And why? His whims. Because?! His witch doctor says I'm the enemy. I don't know whose hand to grease other than the one directly in front of me" (ibid: 89). Mr. Harari ends his lament by comparing the current situation to the past: "[A]t least I understood Mobutu's brand of chaos. Now, I'm a relative beginner [...] I must befriend everybody and nobody. And it's utterly exhausting" (ibid).

The way Harari uses the word "chaos" draws attention to the personal investments he has in it. This is the general rule in the play: All the men who use "chaos" profit from it, in one way or another. Christian explains his lateness by mobilizing

the word, Osembenga underlines the rebels' lack of morality through the concept, and Harari applies "chaos" to explain the difficulties encountered by businessmen like himself in adapting to changing power relations in the Congo. None of the situations described, however, are "complete confusion and disorder", as the online Oxford Dictionary explains the term "chaos" (n.d., n.p.). Chaos in Ruined is not "a state in which behavior and events are not controlled by anything", as the Dictionary defines it. Instead, chaos describes claims of disorder used to explain shortcomings. Mentioning chaos is a way for Christian, for instance, to keep his business relations with Nadi's brothel alive. He has to somehow justify his long absences, which threatened Mama Nadi's business, so he evokes "chaos" in order to do so. In the same vein, highlighting "chaos" ensures Osembenga's moral high ground with regard to his military opponents; Mr. Harari uses the rationale of chaos in order to trick Mama Nadi into giving up her precious diamond (which he then steals, thus ruining her). "Chaos" in the play, in other words, is a cop-out that allows users to avoid addressing the complexities of the Congo.

Thus, Congoist topoi and topics, such as the Congo-as-Slave and "chaos", are applied with great critical care here.[28] The same goes for other Congo clichés. The assertion of Congolese irrationality and "madness", as Mr. Harari puts it (ibid: 27), are constantly questioned by the cool, collected, and calculated behavior of Mama Nadi. She undermines the brash bluff and the life-threatening ignorance of young Congolese soldiers by addressing them as "men" and not as "monsters", as one of the raped girls, Salima calls them (ibid: 70). "This is a nice place for a drink. Yeah? I don't abide by bush laws," Nadi reacts calmly to the menacing demands for unequal trade by a soldier. "If you want to drink like a man, you drink like a man. You want to behave like gorilla, then go back into the bush" (ibid: 22).

The rhetoric of this passage is disturbingly Congoist, of course, evoking the old dehumanizing topoi of Congolese men as "gorillas" from the "bush". Nadi's goal, however, is to address the soldiers as "men" in order to keep her business afloat in

28 When Christian discusses two pieces of merchandise for the price of one with Mama Nadi, he is referring to two abused young women (Sophie and Salima). Mama Nadi first refuses to take Sophie, as she has been "ruined": Rebels have raped her with a bayonet and destroyed her genitals. Although Nottage demonstrates multiple times that Nadi has more heart and shrewder politics than she first appears to, her survey of the two women recalls the behavior of a slave auctioneer. This is, however, not simply another unreflective use of the Congo-as-Slave, a well-known topos from the past. Nottage raises the topic of Congolese involvement in slavery in a way that allows her to humanize the Congo. Telling the "full story, the positive alongside the negative" (Whoriskey 2009: xii) is indeed a strategy that works well to achieve this.

an orderly manner. Nadi does not insult them with these stereotypes, nor does she reduce them to subpersons (which, ultimately, would be quite counterproductive; these men do have guns, after all). From Nadi's point of view, these soldiers are not inherently gorilla-like, as Congoism would have it, but have to decide whether they want to be gorillas or not. This is the difference to authors in the past writing about the Congo, who have portrayed Congolese men as inherently beastly (cf. previous chapters). Congoist language is thus used to show the relative power and fleeting meaning of stereotypes – they can do good, too, by inciting order in potentially explosive situations.

Ruined is committed to showing the Congo as a tangible, albeit problematic, "home" of and for the Congolese. It is a home in which "people were determined to survive and build lives", as the director phrased it (Whoriskey 2009: xii). Thus, Nottage builds the characters slowly and carefully, delivering information about the setting and the specific political moment in time. This is done with reference to a number of American topics, and most prominently African American pop culture. There is a casual reference to a "poster of a popular African American pop star" hanging over the bed of one of the brothel's girls, for instance (Nottage 2009: 30). Another example is Nottage's framing of menacing soldiers as young gangster rappers who chase off Congolese coltan diggers in the area they control: "Dirty poacher been diggin' up our forest, we run 'em off. Run them good, gangsta style: 'Muthafucka run!'" (ibid: 21). This use of the African American vernacular and of typical pop cultural topoi such as the "gangsta" is reinforced by the behavior the stage comments suggest for the soldiers: "The Rebel Soldier strikes a hip-hop 'gansta-style' pose" (ibid).

Telling the full and personal story was part of Nottage's critique of the corporate news media, which, as the director puts it, too often focuses solely on "the violence, the poverty and the AIDS crisis" (Whoriskey 2009: xii). Again, then, we encounter the media critique which has been gathering steam since the 60s and has continuously entered critical Congo texts. This, in fact, has truly become the new standard in Congo discourse. There is absolutely no lack of commentary on the Congo's extraordinarily paltry coverage. This critique is so widespread that it has even become the standard in the news media itself. Exemplary here is how CBS's 60 Minutes introduced a 2008 documentary titled "War Against Women: The Use Of Rape As A Weapon In Congo's Civil War". "You probably haven't heard much about it" (CBS News 2008), the voiceover mentioned at the start of the film, followed by the assertion that this is now going to change by directing serious attention to "the deadliest conflict since World War II" (ibid).

Quite typical of contemporary media coverage of the Congo rapes is allowing victims to narrate their own misery in the most painstaking detail. In the CBS documentary, for instance, Lucienne M'Maroyhi talks about her own harassment. "I was lying on the ground, and they gave a flashlight to my younger brother so that he could see them raping me," she recalled (ibid). "They were telling your brother to hold the flashlight?" CBS journalist Anderson Cooper asked. M'Maroyhi confirmed and told Cooper that "they raped me like they were animals, one after another. When the first one finished, they washed me out with water, told me to stand up, so the next man could rape me" (ibid). The story in the reportage finished, painstakingly, with Cooper's voice telling his audience how Lucienne was "then dragged through the forest to the soldier's camp. She was forced to become their slave and was raped every day for eight months. All the while, she had no idea where her children were" (ibid).

Baaz and Stern justifiably call this kind of journalism a "pornography of violence" (2013: 92). This concept will be used here to frame how American attention towards the Congo increasingly revolves around cruelty, leading to mass media coverage that highlights violence, linking condemnation to a constant, obsessive replaying of horrible sequences. The problem with these unceasing replays of violence is that certain limits "of respect, piety, pathos" (Behar 1996: 2) are crossed, leading to a representation of the Congolese that is deeply disrespectful (ibid).

Nottage attempts to avoid reproducing the media's sensationalist Congo reporting on mass rape. She refuses to go into detail regarding the specifics of rape, for instance. When Christian sells Sophie to the brothel, the crimes against her are silenced. "Militia did ungodly things to the child, took her with […] a bayonet and then left her for dead," Christian tells Mama Nadi (2009: 13). As soon as he wants to continue the story, Nadi interrupts him forcefully: "I don't need to hear it. Are you done?" (ibid). Silence and ellipsis return frequently in these moments,[29] echoing Toni Morrison's strategy of bespeaking the unspeakable through hints rather than description.

Alice Walker echoes Morrison, too, albeit with less success than Nottage. In discussing her work Overcoming Speechlessness in an interview with Democracy Now!, Walker explains the origins of her own speechlessness: "Things can be so horrible that people lose the ability to talk about them" (Walker 2010b) To exempli-

29 For instance, in one of their first interactions, Nadi offers a glass of liquor to Sophie to help against "the pain down below. I know it hurts, because it smells like the rot of meat. So wash good" (Nottage 2009: 17). Sophie herself interrupts another traumatized girl, Salima, from talking about her destroyed family: "Stop it! We said we wouldn't talk about it" (ibid: 38).

fy this, Walker dug into the Congo past, on which she had "written a thesis of sorts" when she went to college (2010a: 8). Speechlessness set on in her own experience when "she learned that the King of Belgium had decided that if the Africans in the Belgian Congo could not fulfill their rubber quota that he had imposed on them, he could order their hands to be chopped off" (Walker 2010b). The effect of this story on Walker as "a student, as an eighteen- and nineteen-year-old" was that she "couldn't speak about it. I just – I put it somewhere that I left for many years" (ibid). This strategy, Walker asserted, was applied by many of her contemporaries, too, in light of the recent atrocities in the Congo and Rwanda: "[T]hey encounter these brutalities and they literally can't talk about them, and so we don't speak. But if we don't speak, then there's more of it, and more people suffer. So it's a call to overcoming speechlessness" (ibid).

Walker alludes to the same paradox described by Teresa Behar, who discusses "the central dilemma of all efforts at witnessing" (1996: 2): What should one do, she asks, "in the midst of a massacre, in the face of torture, in the eye of a hurricane, in the aftermath of an earthquake" (ibid). Should one "stay behind the lens of the camera, switch on the tape recorder, keep pen in hand?" Or should one do the opposite: Mute oneself, as documentation, too, easily slips into voyeurism, egocentrism, and dehumanization (ibid)? Walker is paradigmatic of how this paradox is too often reconciled in the context of the Congo. Her story, as it turns out, seems to be an easily resolvable personal matter, not a difficult epistemic struggle. Her speechlessness, in other words, does not seem that big of a deal, as it is mainly a matter of personal "healing" through a "sangha, a Buddhist circle of support" (Walker 2010a: 17). Shallow reflection of this kind leads, once again, down the Congoist path. If one does not relentlessly reflect on the ethico-political implications of one's own representations, debasement is reproduced, as Walker's example demonstrates. To avoid Congoist discourse, one must continuously ask, as Illan Kapoor does (building on Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?"), "to what extent do our depictions and actions marginalize or silence [...] what social and institutional power relationships do these representations, even those aimed at 'empowerment', set up or neglect? And to what extent can we attenuate these pitfalls?" (2008: 42).

Walker does not place her own representational involvement with the Congo front and center. What becomes central are her identity and "tears of hopelessness" (Walker 2010a: 17). Thus, the author frames victims of rape in her terms, not in those of the Congolese. Indeed, Walker re-asserts that she would rather not talk about the atrocities that women in general, and a Congolese woman named Generose in particular – experienced. "It has been almost impossible to speak of it" (ibid: 16), she writes, and causes her to despair of "humanity" (ibid). But the author had

to speak up in order to help this Congolese "sister" who "understood the importance of speech, speech about the unspeakable, and is a source of my ability to share the following story, a story that has propelled me into a period of speechlessness" (ibid: 12-13). Thus, Generose's story is told as the Congolese woman herself wanted it, Walker suggests. The simplicity and clarity of this argument allows Walker here to resume Congoist business as usual.

What Generose describes to Walker is this: This "proud woman […] who reminded me of a young Toni Morrison" related how her husband was hacked into pieces by "gunmen who also carried machetes" and who chopped off her own leg (ibid: 14). Walker goes on, "They cut off her leg, cut it into six pieces, and began to fry it in a pan […] they tried to force her son to take a bite" (ibid). As the son refused to do so, he was shot dead. The daughter, however, did bite into a piece of her mother's body and had since disappeared" (ibid: 15). This was the child that Generose hoped Walker could help her find through the latter's connection to the NGO Women for Women International (ibid).

The pornographic elements of Walker's story render "speechlessness" and "selective silence" suspect as an effective anti-Congoist strategy. To her credit, Walker's story deviates from CBS's, as she focuses on the atrocities surrounding the rape of Generose, not on the act itself. On the other hand, Walker's account is not all that different from CBS's in terms of its detailed narration of almost unthinkable acts of violence that cannot be understood properly by reading her story alone. Walker presents a worst-case sexual violence scenario to a Western audience that is motivated to respond with benevolence towards those "poor" Congolese "sisters".

Nottage's silence departs radically from Walker's. The playwright refuses to narrate horror openly, for instance. In contrast to Walker, silence does have some bearing with regard to the larger story, thus protecting the fictional Congolese women from exhibitionist external gazing and giving them some agency in a war-torn, male dominated environment (an agency most notably embodied by Mama Nadi). Despite this difference, however, it is striking how similar Nottage's buzz words are to those taken up by Walker and CBS. As in the efforts of the latter, Ruined offhandedly mentions "coltan" numerous times (e.g. Nottage 2009: 13, 21, 25, 31, 89), as well as "blue helmets" (ibid: 95) and "aid workers" (ibid: 80, 88, 90, 91). The Congolese gynecologist Dr. Mukwege makes an appearance both in the preface to Ruined (Whoriskey 2009: xii) and in the CBS documentary.[30] In the same vein as the CBS reportage, the published edition of Ruined contains frontal pictures of the (crying) Congolese rape survivors with whom Lynn Nottage spoke, whose "painful

30 Mukwege founded and works in Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, where he specializes in the treatment of women who have been gang-raped.

narratives [...] in the gentle cadence and the monumental space between their gasps and sighs" (2009: n.p.) can, according to the conclusion, be found in the play. As in the news media narratives, it seems that stories of Congolese rape survivors require photographs of victims in order to attract readers – pictures which would be unthinkable if these were European or American rape survivors, as Baaz and Stern righly remark (2013: 92).

These similarities between CBS and Ruined highlight a real problem in the overall strategy of selective silence: It does not work if an audience has no notion at all about what might be happening in the moments of quiet. Ultimately, the theatergoer must have some background knowledge of Central West Africa in order to fill in the gaps. As a strategy, "unspeakable thoughts, unspoken" (Morrison 1983: 62) does not quite work as a way of describing the Congo's complexity, or at least not without alluding to other narratives, such as those offered by the media. Ruined is an excellent example of how a certain set of discursive events and explanations used by the media return in a work of fiction. And they must return in order to even understand the fiction, in this case.

The idea of rape as a "weapon of war", which has achieved a near-hegemonic status in terms of explaining sexual violence in Central West Africa, as Baaz and Stern explain, translates problematically into theater. In Ruined, it culminates in Salima exclaiming to her male harassers that "you will not fight your battles on my body anymore" (Nottage 2009: 94). Although "rape as a weapon of war" discourses grant a certain rationality to Congolese men (they rape as a strategy to enrich themselves), it does, in the end, reproduce a known trope surrounding Congolese men: Congolese as subhuman abusers of women. In Ruined, women like Mama Nadi may possess some authority as she brings soldiers and miners to order in her regulated establishment. In the end, however, these men miserably fail the women, and are goodhearted losers at best. Salima's husband, for instance, was buying a new pot when the rebel soldiers overran their village and attacked her. Finding herself pregnant after the attack, she cries that she's carrying the "child of a monster" (ibid: 70). As her husband pleads with Mama to allow him to see Salima, he holds a pot in his hand, a pitiful symbol of the reparations he's unable to make.

All in all, in contrast to what it suggests through its use of the rape-as-a-weapon-of-war discourse, Ruined is not a "gendered" reading of war-torn Congo, but a "sexed one". It is, in other words, about one sex (men) abusing and failing the other (women). "God, I don't know what those men did to you," the traveling salesman Christian says to Mama Nadi, who is financially ruined, "but I'm sorry for it. I may be an idiot for saying so, but I think we, and I speak as a man, can do better" (ibid: 101). A consequence of Christian's stance, which is the also the one as-

sumed by the play, is that the rapes in the Congo can be solved when men better themselves individually and morally (by becoming less greedy, less violent, and more thoughtful, for instance). Apart from this obvious bourgeois individualist take on social matters (which echoes Walker's), the sexed story in Ruined thrives on the dichotomy between, on the one hand, men as abstract perpetrators and, on the other, women as concrete, everyday victims and survivors of sexual assertions of male power. Dauphinée is right in stating that this stance dehumanizes rapists in the face of their actions: "[W]e abandon the perpetrator. The perpetrator becomes Other" (2007: 119). Congolese women, in turn, are also Othered by the shameless taking and publicizing of their photographs, the pressure exerted on them to tell their stories for Western interests, and the denial of a humanity more readily granted to Euro-American women.

Gendering the story of the Congo is one way of humanizing the Congolese involved – both men and women. In their interviews with male Congolese soldiers and officers, Baaz and Stern heard truly repellent stories of desperation, disappointment, humiliation, and violence which they endured and committed. Against this background, the authors ask how one should "write of the subject who commits rape" (2013: 37) when this subject himself is marked by human suffering. How does one understand, in other words, the suffering of those who rape and are raped without condoning the former's violent act (ibid: 39)? These are compelling questions, which, however, neither the media nor Ruined can or will ask. What one is confronted with instead is an oversimplification of the rape story, blaming men in ways that do not cast them as parts of a larger social picture. With these reductive explanations, the anti-male "gendercide"[31] in the Congo wars has remained off the radar, as has the systematic recruitment of male child soldiers whose families were murdered by the same people who turn them into warriors (Turner 2013: 144). There is very good reason to believe that other topics remain unaddressed because of explanations that simply blame men. Rape in these accounts is seldom discussed as a part of a broader "culture of violence" (ibid: 132) that accepts rape and male violence as "normal" or even fetishizes it.

Radical Historicism

Tackling Congoism necessitates thinking historically and radically historicizing eyewitness reports. Ruined, however, explains the sexual violence in the Congo solely through a contemporary lens. Nottage (like Walker and Cooper) is misguided

31 Or the targeted killing of young males, especially non-combatant men who have been and continue to be the most frequent targets of mass killing and genocidal slaughter.

in believing that visiting the Congo and personally talking to victims will allow direct access to the complex truth behind the brutalities. This becomes very clear in a number of concrete narrative situations. The returning story of Generose is one such case. Walker's version of Generose's story (cf. above) revolves around the topos of cannibalism, for instance – a well-known and empirically extremely poorly documented infatuation, which featured in many media reports on Congolese rape (Stern/Baaz 2013: 91). One must express skepticism as to whether this topos was invoked by Generose to represent her reality or to grab Walker's and her readers' attention. This skepticism may not be easy to maintain, but is, nevertheless, legitimate – especially since Generose's story appears in another book on Congolese rape survivors, namely Lisa J. Shannon's A Thousand Sisters, whose author is active with the same NGO as Walker (Women for Women International).

In Shannon's book, Generose narrates her story in a strikingly different manner: In Walker's version, Generose is at home with her two children and her husband. In Shannon's account, on the other hand, Generose said to be there with "six children, one was my sister's child" (2010: 150). Walker tells her readers that the husband was chopped into pieces; Shannon states that he was shot. Walker mentions that Generose's leg was fried in a pan, while in Shannon's it was "burnt in the fire" (ibid). Most importantly, in Shannon's story there is no hint of a lost child who must subsequently be found. Shannon tells us that the next time Generose saw her children was "two months and a week" later (ibid). Why does Shannon's story deviate so dramatically from Walker's? Did Shannon and Walker not listen carefully, or did Generose give Shannon and Walker different accounts?

These irreconcilable stories are indicative of a systemic problem: Shannon's and Walker's rape stories (and other texts building on them, such as Nottage's Ruined) have become commodities. As a global issue, conflict-related rape has over the last decade become a multimillion-dollar industry in which Congolese women have been "encouraged to represent themselves as survivors of rape in order to establish themselves as legitimate recipients of humanitarian aid" (Baaz/Stern 2013: 99). In Generose's specific situation, it is quite possible that she framed the deeply traumatic story of the loss of her husband and her leg (the overlapping topics in Walker's and Shannon's stories) as an experience of rape in order to get hold of much-needed support for the survival of her family. The willingness of Nottage, Walker, and others to "save brown women from brown men", as Spivak famously phrased it (1988: 101), leads to deeply unbalanced communicative situations that rule out the possibility of Congolese women speaking for themselves on their own terms (cf. Kapoor 2008: 41). This epistemic challenge remains mostly unacknowledged in Walker's and Nottage's texts. They disavow their own determinations, such as their

"favourable historical and geographic position" (ibid: 46). When Walker and Nottage, naively or knowingly, pretend to have no determination apart from being a woman, they are silently justifying self-interest through the voice of the sister-other.

Self-interest renders accurate, truthful human communication extremely difficult, if not impossible. Shannon's engagement and writing are motivated by the personal desire to overcome her banal former life, which she describes in her book, and to finance her new one in the service of the NGO Women for Women International. The benefits for Generose framing herself as a rape victim in her interactions with Shannon surface regularly in her story, too. Generose tells Shannon: "Already the benefit has been more than a hundred dollars, which I used to buy a cow" (Shannon 2010: 151). On top of that, Shannon offers to pay for an operation on Generose's leg, which, as the author explains, is rotting from a "life-threatening bone infection" (ibid: 149). Naive eyewitness epistemology combined with a luminous rhetoric of "global sisterhood" hides, but does not erase, the power difference between the Euro-American activists and the "object" of their writing, which, in its most extreme cases, results in outright abduction by humanitarian organizations.[32]

Ruined falls into the trap of ahistoricism. Thomas Turner's observations regarding a historically determined Congolese "culture of violence, rape and impunity" (2013: 131) must lead to an investigation of the broader Congo archive to understand the present disaster. Rape in the Congo has a history that goes beyond the brutal "now" of "Africa's world war" (ibid: 17). A deep understanding of the historicity of sexual violence is a prerequisite for grasping it as a real-and-imagined Central West African phenomenon. Nancy Rose Hunt, for instance, links the 2003 "angry mass rape [...] on some 200 girls and women in a village named Nsongo Mboyo" (2008: 220) to the brutalities of the Congo Free State in that same village. Hunt explicitly makes the case that the rape of the present had its roots in the much-neglected wife abductions,[33] "hostage houses", mutilations, and sexual abuses that

32 Euro-American humanitarian organizations resort to sheer force, as Baaz and Stern remind us, in order to showcase their victims to donors (2013: 97), thereby abusing them to secure funding for their own organizations in the lucrative business that Congolese rape has become in the wake of its increasing commercialization (ibid: 88-106). Unintentionally, the isolation of Congolese rape victims and, in some cases, their outright abduction reminds us of the hostage houses for women of the Congo Free State.

33 Hunt notes that pictures of non-sexual mutilation have been favored over those of sexual abuse, especially sexual abuse of women (2008: 222-223). Mutilation was more sayable, according to Hunt – and more photographable – than either rape or forced incest. Morel's Red Rubber, as discussed in the previous chapter, indeed confirms this bias. Sexual muti-

occurred from 1892 onward, when the violent rush for raw rubber began (cf. previous chapter).

The most compelling element in Hunt's research is that she shows how Congolese rape cases raise serious questions regarding the "duration, reproduction, and repetition in history and historical writing" (ibid: 221). Memories of the crimes of the Congo Free State could have easily persisted for decades, as Hunt concludes, leading to stories and attitudes that still have an effect today. The words of women such as Boali and Mingo, whose voices were registered in depositions before King Leopold's Commission of Inquiry in 1905 and 1906, are very similar to contemporary rape stories.[34] Many topoi in Boali and Mingo's narratives overlap with that of Generose's (e.g. the absent husband, the violent house visitation by a soldier, the chopping off of legs, and other stories of absurdly painful sadism and cannibalism).

The similarities of past and present rape accounts draw attention to sexual violence as a discursive ritual in the overall Congo discourse, ready to be told in similar wording for reasons that have little foundation in the present Congo itself. To be sure, rape is very likely to be endemic in the Congo, and thus is very "real". But looking at the African American Congo archive, which is permeated by all sorts of gendered violence committed by Congolese men against "their" women, it must at least be acknowledged that rape hardly ever signifies Congolese sexual violence alone, but also points to domestic issues of those who write about the Congo. To understand the Congo, one must, in other words, historicize both the Congo and one's own involvement in the broader realm of sexual violence.

The historicization of the Congo through Black American perspectives must include, for instance, a reflection on the embattled significance of rape within the African American community as a whole. In the 60s, for instance, the "myth that all black men were rapists" was very much alive (hooks 1981: 63). Thus, as soon as independence troubles started in the Congo, white middle-class magazines such as

lation by "the agents of the Anversoise" (ibid), for instance, receive scant attention, whereas other forms of violence permeate his account.

34 "One day when my husband went into the forest to gather rubber, the sentry Ikelonda came," Boali stated, "finding me in my hut where I stayed, and asked me to give myself to him". Boali "rejected his proposition" and the sentry became enraged and "fired a gun shot at me, which gave me the wound whose trace you can still see". The story ended with Ikelonda thinking "I was dead", only to realize that the torture had just started when the sentry "cut off my right foot" in order to rob her of her bracelet (Boali of Ekolongo 1905, qtd. in Hunt 2008: 225). Mingo's story, in turn, mentioned how sentries made "me take off my cloth and put clay in my sexual parts which made me suffer a lot" (Mingo of Ilua 1906, qtd. in ibid: 236).

Life were ready to start spreading suggestive images and stories about the systematic rape of white women by Congolese soldiers. This eagerness was reminiscent of the will to believe that lynched Blacks in the South at the turn of the century were truly rapists (cf. previous chapter). These media stories, of both African American and Congolese rapists, have since been discredited and disregarded as nonsense.[35]

However, if one wants to discredit those rape stories, more has to be done than insist on their falseness (which, theoretically, can easily be refuted in turn). To understand Congolese rape stories through an American lens, one must examine one's own historical attitudes towards rape. African American sexual violence has always been a deeply contentious discursive battleground. This becomes obvious if one takes a look at African American news media such as The Chicago Defender. The paper discussed Congolese rape in the 60s the way Black intellectuals had done throughout their history: by questioning the legitimacy of the rape charge, as shown by Ida B. Wells-Barnett in the previous chapter. In the early 60s, rape was explained as a political act of resistance, as echoed in the title of The Chicago Defender's article from August 13, 1960, "Congolese Claim: 'Belgians Mistreat Our Women; We Mistreat Theirs; Now We Equal' (Siggins 1960: 160).[36] Attempts to rationalize Black rape were in great demand in the 60s and 70s, as bell hooks explains (1981: 70). Elridge Cleaver's confessions in his bestselling Soul on Ice (1991) are a case in point. In the book, Cleaver claimed to have become a rapist for political reasons. "Rape was an insurrectionary act," the author stated (ibid: 33), "It delighted me that I was defying and trampling upon the white man's law, upon his system of values, and that I was defiling his women – and this point, I believe, was the most satisfying to me because I was very resentful over the historical fact of how the white man has used the black woman. I felt I was getting revenge" (ibid). Behind this smoke screen of "avenging themselves against racism" Black men were

35 Stories about the "hundreds of white women, even children of 12" who had been raped, "many repeatedly", as one correspondent of Life wrote in an attention-grabbing 1960 article titled "Faces of Terror in Congo" (Snell 1960b: 32), had hardly any correspondence to the situation in the Congo, as even the colonialism-friendly 2002 Belgian monograph Weg uit Congo (Verlinden 2002) confirms. The trouble with these narratives is, however, that they stay in the archive, awaiting recollection and re-inscription.

36 In this story, The Chicago Defender blamed the Belgian women for wearing shorts that were too short and offering their "apples too freely to lusty 'Adams'" (Siggins 1960: 2). Rape thus ceased to be a flat-out questionable event (as it had been when African Americans were involved in early twentieth century), but became an occurrence that was to be explained racially and sexually, by, among other tactics, blaming or ignoring the real-and-imagined victims.

expressing "exploitative feelings about white women and finally all women", as hooks argues (1981: 70).

Here, too, we might examine Nottage's framing of Congolese rapists as hip hop youngsters, amongst other framings. Obviously, this framing is an instantiation of the ongoing African-Americanization of Central West Africa. Discussions of sexual violence (including rape) within contemporary hip hop culture have been indicative of a larger gender crisis within the Black community. This crisis was already foreseen by the Black Power movement in the 60s, as hooks has it, when Black Power proponents "disassociated themselves from chivalrous codes of manhood" and started embracing "those men who exploited and brutalized women" (1981: 106). As Tricia Rose also maintains, contemporary hip hop culture produces tropes of aggressive Black promiscuity for mainly white audiences that have helped to "justify the violence and domination of black people", "including the rape of black women" (2008: 179). With rape as such an embattled African American signifier, Nottage's particular framing of Congolese rapists is striking: She addresses both the Congo rape crisis as well as the African American one. It is at this point that Nottage's strategy of "everydaying" the Congo, or of giving the everyday in the Congo a voice through personal narratives and respectful silences, crumbles under the weight of self-indulgent, parochial interests.

All in all, the most progressive aspect of Nottage's theater lies in the way she evokes her stories through a disciplined, non-damaging use of language. This becomes evident if one compares Nottage's work to the CBS documentary, which is filled with Congoist language and attitudes: "Right now there's a war taking place in the heart of Africa, in The Democratic Republic of Congo," CBS journalist Anderson Cooper introduced his topic in "heart of darkness" fashion, "and more people have died there than in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Darfur combined [...] more than five million people have died and the numbers keep rising" (CBS News 2008). Nottage refused Cooper's (and Walker's) numbers game for good reason, since this strategy easily "depersonalize[s]" via the "mark of the plural", as Memmi phrases it, allowing people to "drown in an anonymous collectivity" (Memmi 1991: 687). Nottage circumvented the "crushing objecthood" (Fanon 2005: 101) of the plural by confining herself to the personal mode of narrating.

Mama Nadi's brothel is thus unapologetically center stage. This allows, to a great extent, for stereotypical Western interests in the story to be side-stepped. Lynn Nottage's infatuations (nor those of the African American community) do not play a main role in Ruined. This contrasts with Alice Walker's essay, which hinges on "overcoming speechlessness", that is, her own speechlessness, rather than that of Congolese rape survivors. Nottage's strategy of decentralizing herself and remain-

ing "close" to the perceived everyday Congo is a key prerequisite for producing knowledge on the Congo, rather than on oneself. Congolese women are the ones that are "ruined", not Nottage. Quite the contrary, in fact, as the work won Nottage a Pulitzer.

Nottage's play thus shows that being somewhere that is not the Self (Kapoor 2008: 57) is possible, no matter how incomplete this somewhere may be. Ruined, despite all its inadequacies in terms of the Congoist fallacies it takes up, indicates that it is possible to resist the temptation to produce an Other to suit one's own interests alone. Although Nottage's work goes far to counter Congoism by purging her language of the usual Congoist tropes and topoi (and if they are used, they are applied critically), and through her devotion to telling stories for their own sake, there remains the problem of the transferability and coherence of what lies beyond the author. In the end, Nottage speaks for the Congolese women. The question becomes: Can Congolese Americans break through this barrier?

SUBALTERN CONGOISM

According to the 2000 U.S. census, about 3800 individuals in America originated from the Congo (Bureau of the Census 2000). This number describes those who emigrated from the Congo in the last few decades – not the hundreds of thousands who became enslaved in the 18th and 19th centuries. This number might have tripled since then, as a 2013 report by the European Resettlement Network mentions 10.000 new Congolese refugees in the United States (European Resettlement Network 2013: n.p.). Among the Congolese diaspora in the U.S. are highly prolific intellectuals, such as the historian Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja and the novelist Emmanuel Dongala. Both work at American universities and have gained considerable critical acclaim for their work, Nzongola for his 2002 history, The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People's History, and Dongola for his tales of Liberian child soldiers in the 2006 novel Johnny Mad Dog.

In what follows, the lesser known Congolese American writers Albert Makelele and the Ngwala brothers will be examined – particularly Makelele's 2008 autobiography This is a Good Country: Welcome to the Congo and the latter's 2012 novel Congo: Spirit of Darkness. These authors will be discussed because (and not despite) the fact that their works are located at the fringes of the American Congo corpus. Neither of them can be called professional writers with a substantial oeuvre, nor do they have systematic backing from a powerful community (academic or otherwise): There are no quotes from fellow writers, for instance, praising their work

on the covers of their books. In fact, both of them funded the publication of their books themselves. This makes their texts rougher, but also less constrained by the usual pressures of the publishing process. These books are nevertheless sold on Amazon.com, and are therefore widely available. Because of their "freer" status, the books theoretically have more ideological and methodological leverage to reshape, re-think, and reject existing Congo discourses. A final criterion for the selection of these two works is that they are epistemic opposites: The modernist work of Makelele contrasts sharply with the postmodernist approach assumed by the Ngwalas.

Makelele and the Ngwalas are mediocre writers: Neither of their books are easy reads. Makelele starts off his memoirs with an imaginative road trip through his home town of Stanleyville in 1944. This trip is, as Makelele confesses on the cover of his book, an "arduous" start for the "uninitiated" (2008: n.p.). "There are numerous reference to some rather esoteric and indigenous names and terminologies," the author explains, "purposely laid down for recording" (ibid). Indeed this is the case; Makelele's quirky compilation of historical, academic, and personal narrative is difficult to get through at times. The Ngwala brothers, in turn, wrote a historic novel whose main narrator is, at least in theory, Susan Baily Dawson, a 100-year-old English abolitionist, whose youth in the Congo is related. In practice, however, Dawson's life story only loosely frames the mélange of "native" Congolese and Euro-American stories. Working on the novel on "many late nights and weekends" (2012: n.p.), as the Ngwalas' acknowledgments state, does have an effect on the overall presentation, and turns the novel into a text that struggles to maintain a consistent narrative focus.

Difficult or unpleasant to read as it may be, Makelele's memoir does intriguing things with the Congo. To be sure, this is the life story of a perfectly assimilated Black middle-class Congolese American. As in many previous generations of the Black bourgeoisie, the issues of a stable family life, a fruitful career, and an excellent American education (courtesy of a scholarship) are discussed and celebrated, crowned by a large selection of family pictures in which the Makeleles present themselves as middle-class subjects in much the same vein as past generations of African American intellectuals. The pictures show Albert as a well-dressed, well-to-do, proud pater familias who presides over a large family of well-groomed children and grandchildren, while not forgetting to have fun as well (there are holiday pictures of Albert, for instance).

Despite this bourgeois self-fashioning, oppositional stances come to the fore in Makelele's work. He is well aware, for instance, of the "negative notions" (Makelele 2008: 170) surrounding the Congo, as well as the "prejudices" and the aspects

of "doom and gloom" (ibid) which cast "an abject and base affront to the very humanity of the African considered" (ibid). Makelele applies a number of strategies to avoid reproducing Congoist clichés. He renders his own knowledge of the Congo relative, for instance, by reducing his eyewitness authority to local phenomena and local insights (which does not mean that he cuts out the global altogether, as we will see). Being Congo-born does not give him the license to talk about the whole, vast country (this is in contrast to many Black and white Euro-American journalists; cf. the Conclusion of this book). Makelele focuses on his hometown of Stanleyville (Kisangani in postcolonial times) and refrains from making sweeping statements, at least at the start of the book. But even on Kisangani, a place which "could not be traded in with any other places anywhere on this planet" (ibid: 74), Makelele has no universal knowledge claims to make. This goes not only for himself, but for those surrounding him.

Makelele begins his account in 1944, when he actively began "knowing the city of Kisangani" (ibid). Watching his father work as a longshoreman, he witnessed how the "wealth of the Congo float[ed] down the river to destinations unbeknown to me, at the age of five or six" (ibid: 75). The issue of "not knowing" frequently returns in Makelele's account, as, for instance, when he comes to the issue of the colonial economy of the Congo. Information regarding trade relations between the Congo and South Africa was "not readily available to the average Congolese" (ibid: 5), thus turning the rubber economy activity into an activity that was hardly understood. The same goes for the exportation of animals. Makelele admits that "no one had a precise answer" as to where to all the animals were shipped (ibid: 76): Makelele states, "One's guess was as good as another's" (ibid). Makelele thus hints at the limitations of Congolese accounts of historical topics, which are not very well understood by many European or American travelers who interview Congolese on their voyages (cf. the Conclusion).

Makelele's book highlights the textuality of Congolese eyewitness accounts, too. Congolese like himself had to read up on historical topics to make sense of what had happened around them. Although he is aware of evoking the trope of the "happy native" (ibid: 77), Makelele insists on discussing the bulk of Congolese as politically ignorant, as they "cared less concerning what was happening outside the country and around the world, be it for lack of political awareness or simply pure ignorance, whatever the case might be" (ibid). Makelele thus considers Congolese knowledgeable only if they possess the possibilities of knowing accurately by virtue of their geographical proximity or through archival experience. It therefore follows that Congolese can err in their evaluation of the accuracy of what they're saying. Every so often, the subaltern who draws his social and historical capital from his

perceived identity as a Congolese is just plain uninformed or wrong, Makelele suggests.

Makelele's position of talking and knowing is a humble one, as he understands the limits of lived historical experience – this only starts to make sense to him in combination with profound archival knowledge. The transnational links between Congolese and African Americans, for instance, are made clear to him through the archive. Makelele can only make sense of his first contact with African Americans in the 40s through his research in libraries. Three Black Americans had visited his school in Kisangani, and the author recalls the Americans having an "intriguing, mystical effect on us [...] we were taken by an inner compulsion to touching them as to find out whether they were for real" (ibid: 69); the Americans, in turn, are said to have been "benignly looking at and scrutinizing one then the other" (ibid: 18). The second encounter took place a few years later, when "a group" of Black Americans (ibid) were sent to his home town by the Rockefeller Research group, "investigating all that was rumored about the Congo and its fabulous wealth" (ibid). After they left, corporate investments – in colonial collaboration with Americans and Belgians – followed, of which Makelele provides a short list. Makelele can provide this information, not because he experienced this first hand, but because he went looking for knowledge in the archive.

Makelele's stories, which are produced through textual and experiential knowledge, underpin the tension between the author and the Black American visitors, who are depicted as cultural or economic proxies of colonialism. Underlying these stories is a divide between Makelele and African Americans as a whole, which surfaces in passages that express the alienation Makelele feels. As soon as Makelele arrived in the U.S., for instance, he found out "how uniformly and consistently across the board American Blacks long ago had fixated ideas regarding Africans in general" (ibid: 108). On a more general level, Makelele's archival research shrewdly points out the "decades of bombardments by newspapers, poetry, novels, radio, movies and television" that have preconditioned Americans in "thinking negative, disassociate them from or just hold lukewarm sentiment, at best, towards matters African" (ibid: 110). Makelele therefore sees a "deep gulf of mass ignorance and misinformation" regarding Africa in general and the Congo in particular (ibid: 111). This, according to the author, has created a chasm between Africans and African Americans. His own attempts to counter the many stereotypes "fell on deaf ears or rather should I say that I was listened to with a strain of a benign disbelief" (ibid: 109). Makelele thus found what this book has also unearthed: a long and rich tradition of the defaming of the Congo in the African American archive.

Does Makelele's recognition of a long history of denigrating the Congo help him to avoid it himself? It does for large stretches of his work. However, in his self-fashioning, Makelele at times slips into a paternalistic, moralistic attitude towards contemporary Congolese. In the harshest Congoist fashion, Makelele condemns his fellow countrymen for supposedly living in a "fanciful, imaginary fairy world" (ibid: 166), especially in terms of "the process of production, acquisition and accumulation of material and consumer goods, the creation of wealth" (ibid: 166). The solution for the all-pervading "passive, receptive attitudes [...] towards life" must be, according to Makelele, "mass education of the people, including adult education" (ibid: 168). On top of that, Congolese must be "taught that production (i.e. hard work and labor) is what brings the wealth of the nation" (ibid: 166). Appealing to young Congolese to start the "great task of the great march forward" (ibid: 169), Makelele slips into the well-known framework of evolutionary progress, turning once again to Congoist stereotypes.

"It will be a great tragedy for Africans not to be thinkers, writers and Universalists," Makelele asserts, "given the resounding magnitude of backwardness at the arduous race toward world modernism [...] they remain without recourse in their ability to help themselves" (ibid: 174). In the same Congoist vein, Makelele concludes that all these bad Congolese qualities are particularly saddening, given the Congo's resources. It is a point of irony that he cannot fail to be amazed by (e.g. ibid: 174-175), as the Congo-as-Resource topos demands. The Congoist orientation is rounded off by a rather uncritical usage of Stanley's and Conrad's texts, of which the latter is quoted to underline the timeless quality of Congolese poverty – today's misery is "nothing much different from the days of Joseph Conrad's voyage on the river boat when he noticed the exact same thing" (ibid: 174).

Makelele's hope for the Westernization of the Congo leads to him advocating that the Congo adopt Euro-American recipes for success: He highlights the need for free enterprise and an expanding market, secularism, and a pluralist electoral democracy. This prescription silently assumes the superiority of the capitalist system, which, however, is never addressed. If there are problems in the Congo, these are, as far as Makelele is concerned, home-grown. The Congolese are thus made responsible for their own condition and are not viewed as part of a larger economic system that depends on external factors to succeed. Samir Amin is right in that it is "futile to speak of the decisive role of internal factors" in light of dominant external ones (ibid: 183), which are decisive in the history of capitalism. This will return in the concluding part of this book, too.

The novel by the Ngwalas, Congo: Spirit of Darkness, might be considered the polar opposite of Makelele's modernist work. In the acknowledgments, the authors

claim that "truth and fiction have been merged harmoniously" (2012: n.p.), thus aligning themselves with a long tradition of writers of postmodern fiction[37] (and postmodern historians, as was discussed above). Fictionalizing the Congo and its inhabitants within a "genuine" academic setting (however problematic this claim may be in light of my hypothesis of the existence of academic Congoism) has the advantage of enabling the reader to imagine a certain "progressiveness". The Ngwalas' novel presents the zenith of imaginative possibilities, taking the reader on board a pirate ship whose captain is a Django-like former Congolese slave who attacks one of Leopold II's ships (named Spirit of Darkness La Caprice). The Congolese revenger does this for profit, but also, as he states, to avoid seeing "more of my people killed" (ibid: 232). He himself has created a human laboratory for racial equality on his ship: "My crew is made up of free men. I welcome Europeans and Africans as equals on my craft [...] I teach my crew to become sailors without turning them into slaves. This is the way of my world [...] we are pirates, blind to colour" (ibid: 234). This self-determined Congolese pirate is the militant counterweight to the frightened and victimized Congolese women and children who are whipped into slavery throughout the rest of the novel. In contrast to the pirate, they "could do nothing but watch, helplessly wailing in terror" (ibid: 117).

In addition to the Congolese captain, there is plenty more progressive characterization to be found in the novel, some of which borders on pure fantasy. For instance, on board Leopold's ship is a German academic who transcends the racism of his days by questioning the "ill-speak of the Dark Continent" (ibid: 211). That same academic explains African witchcraft to the journalist Dawson, the main character of the book (ibid: 207), as an understandable social act. Dawson, in turn, takes up the defense of the "natives" by revealing that colonialism leads to nothing but "excellent servants and slaves" (197). Given the list of secondary literature at the end of the book, the novel suggests that a Congolese pirate, an anti-racist German scientist, and an abolitionist female journalist could have existed, could have met,

37 Exemplary here are the first lines of Barbara Kingsolver's bestselling novel The Poisonwood Bible: "This is a work of fiction. Its principal characters are pure inventions with no relations on this earth, as far as I know. But the Congo in which I placed them is genuine" (1999: ix). Oddly enough, the "genuineness" of the Congo that Kingsolver proclaimed is based on academic works of history, a list of which is published in a long bibliography at the end of the book. This is done in Michael Crichton's Congo, too, and is alluded to in Ronan Bennett's The Catastrophist: A Novel (the latter, however, does not explicitly catalogue the literature he used, but merely acknowledges the "debt I owe it", 1997: n.p.). It is in this tradition that the Ngwalas published their book, including a long list of secondary literature at the end to attest to the genuineness of their account.

or could have least developed stances as progressive as those portrayed in the novel. This must, however, be questioned. If one takes seriously what is known about the period in question (the late 19th century, that is), it is unlikely that things could have unfolded in this way or been discussed in the terms presented by the book. As was shown in the previous chapter, there were hardly any deviant opinions among Black and white European or American intellectuals in the late 19th century on the issue of Africa and the Congo. Thus, the passages in question emerge as anachronistic, echoing today's hopes instead of the past's possibilities.

The impression of fantasy gone wild becomes more acute if one takes a closer look at the bibliography. One finds strange bedfellows there, which make the historical characterization of the pirate and the scientist even more unlikely and ill-founded. The list of literature places academic texts (e.g. from the well-known Africanist Basil Davidson) alongside scholarship written for a broader audience (e.g. Adam Hochschild's work on the Congo Free State). In the same vein, the novel links children's literature (e.g. Taplin's Pirate's Handbook) to the travelogues of Stanley and Schweinfurth. The overall effect of this hodgepodge makes it appear as if these texts should all be taken equally seriously. Although the Ngwalas are certainly not the only ones in the history of Congo writing to use faulty information, this seldom occurs so blatantly.

The Ngwalas have attempted to write a historical novel in the postmodern tradition. The list of heterogeneous texts in their bibliography avoids any privileging, allowing all of the texts to be read as if they were merely literature, each producing their own truths in their respective intellectual circles (Butler 2002: 24). None of these texts, it is suggested, have a unique or reliable relation to the world, nor any certain correspondence with reality: "They are just another form of fiction" (ibid: 15).

This opens up enormous space for the free play of the imagination. The knowledge value of this strategy, however, is probably negligible to none. What do the lengthy conversations in Congo: Spirit of Darkness between "natives" of "the untarnished heart of Central Africa" (2012: 2) bespeak in the end? The question becomes especially relevant if these conversations sound as if they are produced by contemporary American suburbanites (with a primitive edge), who discuss their lives as American middle-class subjects might, "absorbed by their work and the stories of the day" (ibid: 4). The most noticeable difference between the Congolese and the middle-class Americans, however, is the former's attention to and belief in the world of spirits, witchcraft, sorcerers, and voodoo (a belief Euro-American characters in the book share, emphasizing how true this belief must be). This again can be understood as a postmodern wink, upgrading the "irrational" in the struggle

with one's own despair regarding the "Enlightenment-derived public functions of reason" (Butler 2002: 9). In the Ngwalas' novel, if villagers had listened to the sorcerer Ndoki's warning to run as "the devil lures [...] take your children" (Ngwali 2012: 3), they would have been spared enslavement and death. Thus the assumption that a sorcerer's powers are nothing more than meaningless superstition (as we have encountered many times in the African American archive) is actively countered.

Despite its progressive quality, the postmodernist method comes with its drawbacks. The infatuation with the "surreal" deprives the Congo of its history of all-too-rational colonial exploitation: Again, Central West Africa becomes an unknowable place of mysterious forces and similarly strange peoples. Everything is possible in such a place, including Black pirate avengers or, as is the case in Crichton's Congo, killer apes who violently protect the lost city of Zinj in the jungles of Central West Africa against Euro-American capitalists and explorers. In a Euro-American archive filled with so much nonsense, one should ask whether the Congo is an appropriate template for giving reign to one's own epistemic infatuations.

CONGOISM, CLASS, CREATIVITY: A CONCLUSION

This chapter has addressed the novel ways in which 20th-century African American intellectuals began to approach the Congo. None of these attempts has been entirely free of Congoist tendencies, however. Confident female Congolese voices were shown to have been promising opponents of Congoism, but also at times its reproducers. Works of history, journalistic texts, and theater plays proved equally unsuccessful in countering Congoism. Class was revealed as far more than background in this chapter because of the urgency with which this issue was attended to by proponents of Black Power. Wallerstein reminds us, "I know of no serious historical interpretation of this modern world of ours in which the concept of the bourgeoisie, or alternatively of the middle classes, is absent" (1988: 98). It would have, indeed, been difficult to tell the story of intellectual Congo discourses in African America without outing its main protagonist, the Black bourgeoisie.

However, class remains, as bell hooks asserts in her reflections in Where We Stand: Class Matters, a much-neglected perspective in explaining African American communities (cf. the Introduction): "Collectively, black folks in the United States have never wanted to highlight the issue of class and class exploitation, even though there have always been diverse caste and class groups among African-Americans" (2000: 89). For bell hooks, the reason why "it has been difficult for black folks to talk about class" is this (ibid: 8): "Acknowledging class difference destabilizes the

notion that racism affects us all in equal ways. It disturbs the illusion of racial solidarity among Blacks, used by those individuals with class power to ensure that their class interests will be protected even as they transcend race behind the scenes" (ibid).

Texts that pushed back against the intellectual authority of Black bourgeois subjects tended to go far in their critique of Congoism, too. Anti-Congoist creative practice has always existed on the periphery of existing class hegemonies. While this creativity developed within existing hegemonic discourses (and had to in order to be understood), it also attempts to alter the hegemonic discourse "by shifting the borders and by creating new (contrasting) forms of consciousness; it produces 'supplements' to what is already in the 'archive', so to speak" (Blommaert 2005: 106). The center of this process can be located in "the individual agent, a subject often living with idiosyncratic ideas and concepts, fantasies and nightmares, who out of his/her own personal experience in society starts to feel that dominant understandings do no longer work" (ibid). One of the central anti-hegemonic agents in this chapter was Malcolm X. In the discussion of the man and select heirs to Black Power, the extremely classed nature of Congoism emerges more clearly. X's focus on and advocacy on behalf of the lower strata of the African American community highlighted the impetus behind the Black bourgeoisie's creation of a "homogeneous Other" (Spivak 1988: 84). Furthermore, X allowed the Congo to shift from an entity that was utterly dismissed (the bourgeois version of the Congo) to one of admiration and humanity (the anti-bourgeois version). In the end, X, too, struggled to overcome the long history of Congoism, as he took up strategies of the past to idealize the region.

What can we learn from Black intellectuals in terms of undermining Congoism? As shown, an important aspect has been the need for historical, archival, and personal meta-reflection. The example of Malcolm X illustrated that rejection and negation of the Congoist standard began with an epistemic awareness of historical truth production and of the historical Congo archive. X openly discussed, condemned, refuted, and re-framed this tradition of denigrating the Congo; he therefore overturned the image of the Congo as a place of cannibalism and savagery and made it a place as humane as any other, populated by good and bad Congolese (exemplified by Lumumba and Tshombe). This kind of socio-political "creativity" – a concept I use in Csikszentmihalyi's sense of introducing a socially relevant new idea that "changes some aspects of the culture" (1997: 25) – requires that individuals master the historical field and see patterns within it. This is precisely what Malcolm X, as a passionate autodidact, did; he studied African and American history

continuously and critically (cf. Manning 2012) and was thus able to introduce variations on it.

The tactic of meta-reflection also proves helpful in positioning authors ideologically and intellectually with regard to others who discuss the Congo. X harshly criticized Martin Luther King and others for their take on the Congo. Through his classed perspective, X recognized Civil Rights advocates as the executors of, in the words of bell hooks, "a class-based [...] struggle whose ultimate goal was to acquire more freedom for those black folks who already had a degree of class privilege, however relative" (2000: 92). This recognition of significant political others, including their reasons for writing on the Congo (or not writing at all), is a prerequisite to countering Congoism. It calls attention to the "geo-political determinations" of those talking about the Congo, as Spivak terms it (1988: 66), and highlights their "complicity" with, and dependence on, Congoism. This is especially true if those engaged in reflection also include themselves in this practice. X questioned the Congo discourse of others, but hardly cast any doubt on his own engagement with the Congo. His own complicity remained unaddressed, and this became a manner by which to evade it. What is more, by stressing his own factuality, X put himself outside history and inside Congoist discourse.

The truly creative person (X in this case) attempts to convince his "constituency" of the truthfulness and importance of the discovered novelty, that is, to provide a fresh perspective on the Congo, as Csikszentmihalyi describes it (1997: 28). Once this is achieved, this "constituency" will then subsequently incorporate this novelty into its own writing, thinking, and orating: "The next generation will encounter this novelty as part of the domain they are exposed to, and if they are creative, they in turn will change it further" (ibid). This kind of socially transmitted, cumulative, and challenging creativity occurred to some extent in the Black Power scene of the 60s and 70s. This scene took up X's rhetoric of Congolese "brotherhood", which led ultimately to Elridge Cleaver's voyage to Central West Africa. Cleaver might be considered the next stage of development in X's philosophy of American-Congolese brotherhood – moving from X's abstract brotherhood to a more concrete version of it. X's multi-leveled criticism and creativity has been passed down to a generational base much broader base than that of the Black Power scene. While rejecting Black Power politics, liberal Civil Rights-oriented journalists, such as Howard French, took up some of X's critical stances and motivations.

Anti-Congoist activity also depends on the genre in which it appears. "Never believe what you read in the newspapers [...] the truth isn't in them. Not when it comes to the Congo" (1970d: 135), X stated in the early 60s, openly challenging the authority of the media and questioning their ability to change their dispositions.

Drawing on Csikszentmihalyi once again, the level of creativity of individuals depends on "how well suited the respective domains and fields are to the recognition and diffusion of novel ideas" (1997: 31). As shown throughout this chapter, journalists struggle to produce innovative discourse. The self-serving political economy behind the corporate press inevitably leads to, amongst other things, an "if it bleeds, it leads" approach to the Congo (Van Hove 2010). This does not preclude the emergence of critical utterances on the role of the press by those who are part of the guild. Critical voices are numerous. Mostly, however, these utterances are meaningless, as those who communicate them do not follow up on their own critique. Critique in this sense is a way to continue what intellectuals have been doing all along, minus a number of cosmetic changes, predominantly on the level of language.

Finally, this chapter has shown that the "female" and "postmodern" perspectives on the Congo do not inevitably lead to creatively novel results. Nottage's "sexed" reading falls short because it is not postmodern (or "gendered") enough. Writing the Congo in a mode that is too postmodern, however, does not lead to immediately novel results either, as was discussed in relation to the Ngwala brothers. In the end, it becomes clear that the pursuit of knowledge of the Congo still takes place in an epistemic minefield. This raises the question of whether one should (or can) write about the Congo in any meaningful manner at all. How one might speak about a Congo that has "a lot of baggage" (cf. Kapoor 2008: 42) will be dealt with in the Conclusion of this book. In this final section, the potential non-narratability of the Congo will be debated, as will the misguided expectation that it can be fully comprehended.