Research Article

Maëline Le Lay*

Facing Disaster: Ordinary Fictions, Resilience, and the Demand for Recognition in Eastern DR Congo

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Abstract: In DR Congo, there is a proliferation of fictions and spoken word texts that addresses aspects of the on-going conflict. Fiction in Congo does not concern itself with the rules of literary orthodoxy (verisimilitude, linguistic correctness, references), nor does it rely on the existence of a literary and editorial system that is structured and operating to guarantee a predetermined readership. Its main objective is to express emotions in an aesthetic way that touches the hearts of readers and spectators. However, the primary motivation for these proliferating literary initiatives is to resonate in the social space of the place from which they originate. In this respect, the productions examined here are ordinary aesthetic creations distilled through the alembic of everyday existence. Beginning with the observation of a profusion of love stories in the literature produced in the Congo during the last quarter-century, I demonstrate how the particular orientation of these contemporary love fictions responds to societal objectives regarding social cohesion and crisis management, particularly the call for resilience. I then analyse how the issues involved in this injunction are related to *care*, which is presented as the only possible, acceptable, and even desirable path in this context of violence.

Keywords: care, resilience, vulnerability, ordinary fictions, love stories

"We cannot make sense of war if we are unable or unwilling to pay attention to the sensual experiences of those affected."[1] This quotation expresses in several respects what it means to think about literature produced in a context of the latent war in the East of the DRC through the prism of theories of *care* and the ordinary. First, the dominant discursive framework of literary production in the region needs to be interrogated to determine how exactly it can be considered as *care*, and second, how the choice of a specific theme in narrative and theatrical fiction (in this case, love stories) reflects a concern for care. Finally, this quotation also suggests the importance of paying attention to the expression of emotions of my interlocutors (in this case, mainly literary people). Although these emotions are not necessarily those expected in a context of war (such as bitterness, hatred, or despair), paying attention to their expressiveness means trying to perceive how literature is forged by writers as a place where a link is established between individuals and a moral sense is exercised, which is urgently needed in a context of very high political tensions. This Congolese society is fractured by deep divisions and deeply marked by a feeling of chronic insecurity, as well as by resentment that has sedimented into mistrust and hatred, with their corollary of violence.

1 Thomas and Åhäll, "Introduction: Mapping Emotions, Politics and War," 7.

* **Corresponding author: Maëline Le Lay,** CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique)/THALIM (Théorie et Histoire des Arts et des Littératures de la Modernité), CNRS, Paris, France, e-mail: maeline.le-lay@cnrs.fr

Fiction – whether narrative or theatrical – like Slam poetry, does not concern itself with the rules of literary orthodoxy (verisimilitude, linguistic correctness, and references) in the Congo, nor does it rely on the existence of a literary and editorial system that is structured and operating to guarantee a predetermined readership. Its main objective is to express emotions in an aesthetic way that touches the hearts of readers and spectators. However, the primary motivation for these proliferating literary initiatives is to resonate in the social space of the place from which they originate. In this respect, the productions examined here are ordinary aesthetic creations distilled through the alembic of everyday existence.

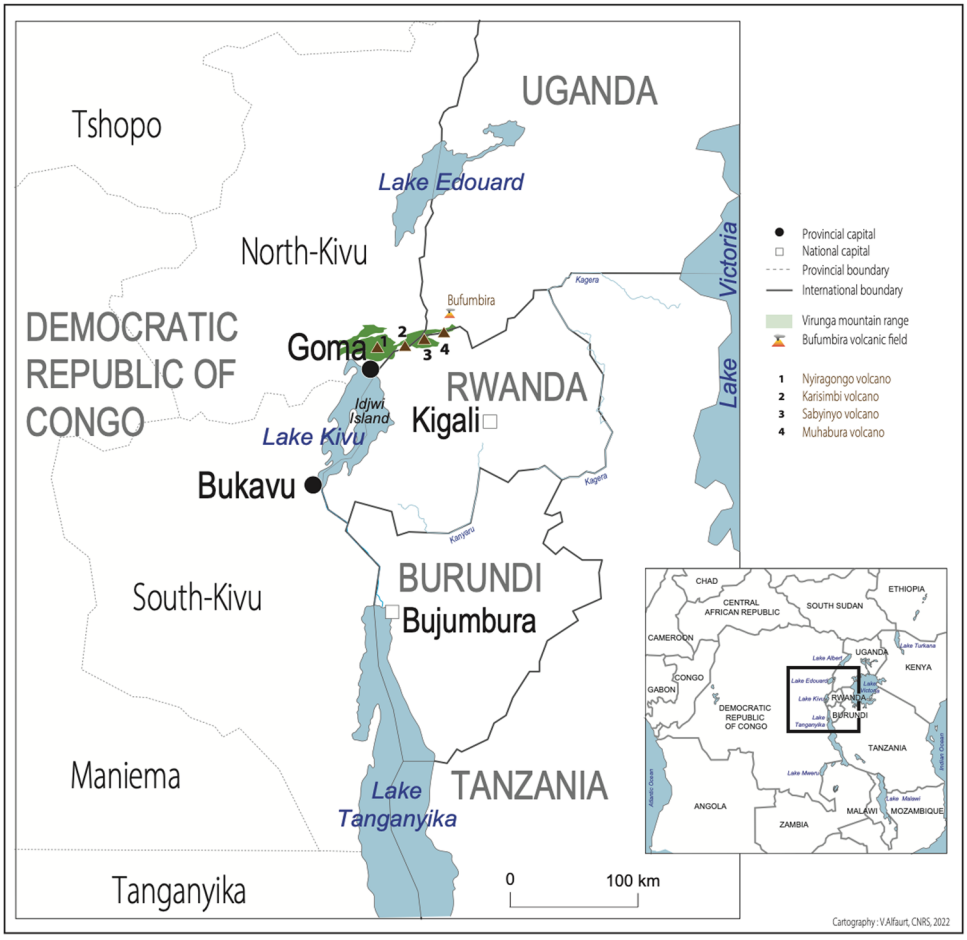

Figure 1: Map of Africa's Great Lakes Region.

The history of the continuous violence in the DR Congo over the past 30 years is generally known, but at the same time misunderstood; it suffers from an often-simplistic presentation. Whether in the international media, NGO reports, or diaspora activist associations, the war in the east of the country is most often described as being solely derived from the illegal exploitation of minerals by armed groups manipulated by neighbouring countries in this region of Africa's Great Lakes (Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi) and, above them, by foreign, European and American, interests. Far from being a fallacious version of the facts, it would be wrong to settle for this as the only geopolitical factor to explain the persistent and endemic nature of the conflict. In a powerful article, "Dangerous Tales: Dominant narratives about the Congo and the unexpected consequences," Séverine Autesserre convincingly shows that the roots of the conflict are plural, deep, and complex, making them less directly accessible to a wider audience. They are considered to have less impact on public opinion

and are more often kept quiet, downplayed, or even ignored.[2] The bristling (even polemical) nature of the discursive and critical field dealing with the conflict in the eastern DRC and in the Great Lakes region makes the exercise of exposing its genesis, tenants, and tracing a satisfactory chronology a thorny task. Therefore, sharing the regret of historian Gillian Mathys that history is generally used in academic work on the Great Lakes region of Africa as a mere "backdrop in the introduction, rather than an analysis of how historical processes continue to have an impact today,"[3] I will not venture further into a preliminary historical account to introduce my remarks and will simply refer the reader to reference works on the subject.[4]

Still, to frame the subject of this discussion, it is important to state that over the past 20 years, political scientists and journalists have defined the eastern region of the DRC as a post-conflict or conflict zone, depending on the frequency and intensity of the violent episodes, often referred to as "atrocities,"[5] that regularly strike the territories of Rutshuru, Masisi, and Walikale in North Kivu, as well as the territories of Fizi, Walungu, Kalehe, or Uvira in South Kivu. The entire Kivus area, including North Kivu (Goma) and South Kivu (Bukavu), as well as Ituri further north, has been plagued by chronic insecurity since the official end of the conflicts in 2003. Despite the state of siege introduced in May 2021, the region has experienced a series of abuses, attacks, and regular massacres for decades with no improvement in the situation. These events, along with their historical and political connections, allow us to see them as different episodes of an on-going "war that doesn't say its name"[6] that has been devastating the region for more than 25 years.

To further situate the discussion, it is also important to outline the methodology that governs this work. Drawing from fragmented but long-term fieldwork in the Great Lakes region (totalling 12 months spent between Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC between 2018 and 2021), particularly in Eastern Congo, I aim to combine literary analysis of texts encountered during long-term participant observation with theoretical reflection on *care* derived from ethnographic observations on the subject.

Beginning with the observation of a profusion of love stories in the literature produced in the Congo during the last quarter-century, I demonstrate how the particular orientation of these contemporary love fictions responds to societal objectives regarding social cohesion and crisis management, particularly the call for resilience. I then analyse how the issues involved in this injunction are related to *care*, which is presented as the only possible, acceptable, and even desirable path in this context of violence. In response to Roxani Krystalli and Philipp Schulz's questions in their article "Taking Love & Care Seriously: An Emergent Research Agenda for Remaking Worlds in the Wake of Violence" – where they ask "How does taking the practices of love and care seriously illuminate different pathways for understanding the remaking of worlds in the wake of violence?"[7] – I adopt the concept developed by Veena Das, Arthur Kleinemann, Margaret Lock, Ramphele Mamphela, and Pamela Reynolds to define my thesis. In their collective work, these authors point to the importance of love and care for "remaking a world in the wake of violence."[8] For these anthropologists, the

2 She points in particular to the importance of land conflicts in the Kivus region (and, for that matter, in Rwanda), but also to "poverty, corruption, political and social antagonisms, and hostile relations between state authorities (especially the police and security forces), and the general population." See Autesserre, "Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives on the Congo and Their Unintended Consequences", 205.

3 Mathys, "Bringing History Back in: Past, Present, and Conflict in Rwanda and the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo", 466.

4 See Van Reybrouck, *Congo. Une histoire* [2010], especially the last four chapters. For a more synthetic summary, see: Trapido, "Africa's Leaky Giant."

5 The recurrent use – in contemporary period by various activist groups and think tanks (such as the Kivu Security Tracker) – of this term, historically used to describe the abuses committed by officers of the Congo Leopolden (the Independent State of Congo), shows the sedimented nature of the war and its colonial ramifications. This is the reason for Charlotte Mertens, Stephanie Perrazzone, and David Mwambari, drawing on the work of Ndaliko (*Necessary Noise. Music, Film and Charitable Imperialism in the Eastern Congo*), state that the Great Lakes region is "also the site of a war over history: the question of which histories and knowledges come to be known and accepted as truth is deeply implicated in colonial processes" (Mertens, Perazzone and Mwambari, "Fatal misconceptions: colonial durabilities, violence and epistemicide in Africa's Great Lakes Region").

6 Stearns, *The War that Doesn't Say Its Name. The Unending Conflict in the Congo*.

7 Krystalli and Schulz, "Taking Love & Care Seriously: An Emergent Research Agenda for Remaking Worlds in the Wake of Violence", 3.

8 Das, Kleinemann, Lock, Mamphela and Reynolds, *Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering, and Recovery*. Quoted in Krystalli & Schulz.

processes of "remaking a world," "center around how communities 'read, endure, work through, break apart under, transcend'[9] violence and other forms of social suffering."[10]

In other words, my objective is to examine how, in the Congo, literature, specifically love stories, functions as a space where a different and necessarily desirable world is remade and reinvented in the face of the disaster of fear, wounds, and loss. The aim is to understand what is at stake in these texts, which are disseminated through publishing (often self-publishing) and on stage.

1 Love Stories to Heal the Wounds of War?

Given the proliferation of romantic love stories in narrative texts and performances in the Congo since approximately 2000, which coincides with the peak of the conflict, it is worth asking whether this generic phenomenon expresses the need to "remake a world," as Veena Das et al. put it, on the ruins of a world rife with the violence of war.[11] A review of literature featuring love stories, in Africa and the Congo in particular, allows us to situate the genre within a broader historical perspective and consequently gain a more comprehensive understanding of the social and political implications of the contemporary trend.

Most of the texts of the corpus were encountered in various ways while I was doing a literary and theatrical fieldwork about writing and performing in a context of (post)-conflict and post-genocide in the Great Lakes Region in 2018–2021. Some of them (Jive's novel, *Chanzu ma belle*) were published by Médiaspaul publishers and available in their bookshop in Goma, Librairie Mediaspaul, being the "historical" and the only chain of bookshops in DR Congo, ruled by the Saint-Paul Congregation. Others, home-published, were given or sold to me by the authors themselves I met during cultural events or via personal connections (Sabwe's *L'uranium de Shinkolobwe*, Kulimushi's *Lumoo, fils du Kivu*). Lastly, there are fictional texts that I encountered while they were still in process, either of writing (Matita, Mathekis) or of publishing (Katsh M'Bika Katende's *L'Arbre tombe…*). For some of them (Matita's "Nuée d'amour, pluie de sang"), I edited it and published it together with a colleague in a collection of short stories by writers from the Great Lakes Region.[12]

1.1 Love in Africa

In the introduction to their eponymous book, historian Jennifer Cole and anthropologist Lynn Thomas draw attention to the difference between the treatment of love in the writings of European and North American authors and those of African authors (including songwriters), based in Africa. While the former, intended for a Western readership, tend to avoid making love a subject, focusing instead on more sensationalist themes,[13] the latter abound in the subject while remaining the least visible.

9 Ibid., 3.

10 Krystalli and Schulz, 4 (part "Conceptual Dilemmas: Remaking a World, Love and Care")

11 This part of the article was originally developed in my paper for a symposium bringing together mainly anthropologists and historians, organised by Altaïr Després and Marta Amico in December 2019 at Stonetown University in Zanzibar: "The Power(s) of Love. New Insights on Intimacy in Africa" (https://imaf.cnrs.fr/spip.php?article3500). My paper, entitled "Love in the Time of Conflict. An Insight on Africa's Great Lakes Literature," owes a lot to the organisers of the conference as well as to the participants, who opened up a fascinating topic to me through their remarks and the contributions of their own work.

12 I explained my methodology and discussed the fruitful inputs and the ethics problems of the researcher's implication in building texts (s)he studies with the writers (s)he mets (what can be called *co-texts*) (Le Lay, "Du chiffonnier à l'anthropologue. Statut du texte et positionnement du chercheur sur un terrain littéraire et théâtral").

13 This is a reflection inspired by Kenyan writer Wainaina's satirical pamphlet *How to Write about Africa?* which opens their introduction: "Taboo subjects: ordinary domestic scenes, love between Africans (unless a death is involved)" (Cole and Thomas, *Love in Africa*, 1).

Several critics, including Bodil Folke Frederiksen, Stephanie Newell, and Alain Ricard,[14] have documented the expansion of the genre of *pink* literature and self-help literature in African metropolises during the twentieth century, such as Nairobi for B. Folke Frederiksen; Lagos, Ibadan, and Accra for S. Newell; Lomé for Alain Ricard. They demonstrate that these fictions and prescriptive works, which circulate in the form of pamphlets in certain West African (Nigeria, Ghana) and East African (Kenya) countries, are correlated with the phenomenon of increasing urbanisation and globalisation,[15] which are vectors of social upheaval, particularly in interpersonal and family relations. In the Congo, literary texts (novels, short stories, theatre) dealing with the difficult management of marital issues linked to changes in urban lifestyles have also been numerous since the 1970s–1980s.[16] However, episodes of conflict or violence have given rise to the production of love stories built on alternative frameworks reflecting the tensions at work in these charged political contexts. Transactional love is one such framework; the impossible union with a tragic outcome is another.

Transactional love, characterised by the exchange of love or sex for something in return, is often found in the many intrigues around marriage and dowry. In the literature produced in Eastern Congo, transactional relationships are common and often mirror strategic alliances and dangerous unions amid enmity and predatory behaviour. These alliances may not always be about material gain, but about controlling the partner or extracting secrets. Women are frequently portrayed as manipulating men to get what they need, such as sensitive information, often of a political nature, or to steer them away from a course that is contrary to the interests of the woman and her associates. Most of the time (not to say systematically), men are presented as the victims of women's schemes and perversions, designed to get them what they need: money, financial security (mainly through marriage), or even sensitive secrets. This is the case in the novel *Chanzu ma belle* by José Mufula Jive, a writer from Kivu, who was formerly a child soldier in the *kadogo* army (meaning "little ones" in Swahili, i.e. child soldiers) led by Laurent-Désiré Kabila, who overthrew Marshal Mobutu in 2000, marching from the Tanzanian maquis to the capital Kinshasa during the so-called "war of liberation."[17] Jive is now a member of parliament for the Goma-Ville constituency.

Drawing on the archetypal character, common in crime novels and films, of the spy hidden under the veil of the dangerous seductress, Jive uses the highly codified genre of the spy novel to sketch out narratives of his country's political life and international relations. In his novel, the irresistible female spy is a foreigner who plays on her exoticism, a mixture of the unknown and the mysterious, to arouse the desire of the male protagonist. Because she serves interests alien to the nation on whose behalf the male protagonist works, it is through the games of love, such as seduction, and sexuality, that she will neutralise her victim. In Congolese novels, the exotic seductress spy appears as a metonym of foreign aggression aimed at enslaving a people and as a woman motivated by the racist and imperialist interests of her people, which can cost the hero his life and result in the loss of an entire nation. In this novel, as well as others featuring a foreign spy character,[18] otherness is exaggerated insofar as it is presented in its most repulsive limits. The character is defined by her insensitivity, which is presented as congenital to both whites and Rwandans, the two most recurrent categories of foreignness in Congolese novels. This is evident in the excerpt from *Chanzu ma belle*, in which the Rwandan spy's mother teaches her to be insensitive and cunning in her approach to the Congolese general she is ordered to trap:

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14 Frederiksen, "Joe, the Sweetest Reading in Africa: Documentation & Discussion of a Popular Magazine in Kenya"; Newel, Ghanaian Popular Fiction. Thrilling Discoveries in Conjugal Lives and Other Tales; Ricard, "Félix Couchoro: Pioneer of Popular Writing in West Africa?"

15 Newell, *Ghanaian Popular Fiction. Thrilling Discoveries in Conjugal Lives and Other Tales*, 5–6.

16 For the theatre, let us quote, as an example, two authors who have signified themselves: Katende Katsh, *L'Arbre tombe*; Tandundu Bisikisi, *Quand les Afriques s'affrontent*; and Tandundu Bisikisi, *L'Affrontement des Afriques*.

17 Mufula Jive, *Enfant de guerre. Les souvenirs d'un ex-kadogo*.

18 See also: Sabwe, *L'uranium de Shinkolobwe*. The book was the winner of the Makomi Literature Prize (awarded by the European Union in the DRC), with the character of the (white) British Jewish woman, in the service of Mossad.

> My daughter, you must tame your heart. The heart of flesh never pays in our world. Your heart of stone has a priceless price in the future and especially in the history of our future Empire. … Cunning and docility must guide your life. … You must also learn to manage your tears like a faucet. Open it when necessary and close it tightly even in front of the lifeless body of the general you believe to be your father. He may love you but know that in the end he is a possible enemy of our royal project.[19]

In this novel by a Kivutian writer, a former child soldier and now a politician with knowledge of martial transactions and other political negotiations in conflict areas, the love relationship appears as a relationship that crystallises the enmity between one group and another, or the magma of mistrust and hatred that often hampers relationships to the point of impossibility.

The impossible union with a tragic outcome is a common theme in the literature produced in the east and south of the country. From 1992 to 1994, Katanga, the northern province of the DRC, experienced a phenomenon of ethnic segregation that was both violent and little known, modestly described as the "*refoulement*" of Kasaians from Katanga into the province of Kasai. These so-called "non-natives" were second-generation immigrants to Katanga province, their parents having migrated to the mining province in the early 1920s and 1930s for economic reasons. Because they were mostly well-established in the social and professional hierarchy, they became the target of bitter criticism that turned into violent attacks against any alleged national of the neighbouring province, due to the severe economic crisis that hit the country plagued by corruption and rampant inflation during the last years of Mobutu's reign. Katsh M'Bika Katende, a prolific playwright, experienced this firsthand and was the first (and only) to write about it. *La Joue droite (The Right Cheek)*, the first play in his series on "refoulement," features a "mixed" family (a "Kasaian" father and a Katangese mother) grappling with the turmoil of the immediate pre-expulsion period, when social tensions were reverberating through families.[20] The wife's father approves of the stigmatisation of the Kasaian people, even though his sons-in-law are Kasaian, and encourages his daughter, Marie-Jeanne, to claim her rightful place as a "native" in the company where she works. Marie-Jeanne, aware of the danger to her husband Charles and their children, initially decides to accompany them to Kasai. However, she is ultimately convinced by her father and, in turn, tries to convince her husband to stay in Katanga. Their daughter, who is in love with one of the leaders of the "nativists" protest, refuses to leave, while their son Kazadi is a pro-Baluba Kasai activist who wants to return to the land of their ancestors. After much discussion, Charles is convinced by Marie-Jeanne and lets her attend the ceremony of the nativists' "mutual society," which will make his wife's promotion official. While he is away, he is killed and Marie-Jeanne, distraught, decides to leave for Kasai with her children.

In this context, reminiscent of the Rwandan pre-genocide environment and concomitant with it, union becomes impossible due to the force of political events. And being undesirable, it collapses, often through crime. This is precisely the framework that Bukavu author Yannick Matita depicts in his novel, *Nuée d'amour, pluie de sang,* 2019 featuring a "mixed" couple, where she is Tutsi and he is Hutu, who disagree on what to do on the eve of the genocide and struggle with family pressures on both sides. Their relationship also has a fatal outcome, as she is hunted down by the genocidaires and he is summoned by them to collaborate with "his own" and is faced with a tragic dilemma.

Like other texts written in Eastern Congo that explore transactional "love" relationships, fictions that revolve around an impossible union with a tragic ending become the echo chamber of the extent of political violence and its effects on interpersonal relationships.

1.2 "Remaking a World"

While up to the 1990s, texts presenting an impossible union usually had tragic endings, the decade of the 2000s saw a shift in this trend, with some fictions offering miraculous endings, where obstacles are suddenly and unexpectedly swept away, and the union is finally made possible.

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19 Mufula Jive, *Chanzu ma belle*, 89–90.

20 Katende, *La joue droite*.

This paradigm shift seems to reflect the demands of an era marked by the war that raged in the Congo in the 1990s and into the early 2000s.[21] The end of the "great African world war," as Gérard Prunier (2009) has called it, brought a proliferation of peace-building NGOs that specialise in "peaceful conflict resolution," "reconciliation," or the treatment of trauma caused by conflict, mass violence, and their corollaries, in the country and more particularly in the East, including the Kivus region in the Great Lakes. Some of these NGOs have built a pool of writers and actors dedicated to spreading their messages through the airwaves or in the public space, and many of these artists actively participate in the literary scene of the cities where they are based. While this market does not concern the majority of writers, far from it, the massive and growing presence of NGOs (this includes emergency NGOs during significant crises such as Ebola outbreaks, wars, or volcanic eruptions, but above all *peace-building* and development NGOs) in the Congo over the last two decades, especially in the East and the Kivus region, has had a lasting impact on the Congolese (and Kivutians in particular), shaping their imaginary world. Since the major challenge in the East of the country is the peaceful resolution of conflicts and reconciliation between different groups torn apart by ethnic conflicts, the rhetoric of the NGOs has spread to artistic creation, especially since the Kivus economy is largely based on the humanitarian industry. The professional world is therefore entirely structured around the reference frameworks of humanitarian aid.[22]

I hypothesise that this paradigm shift in the love story reflects the influence of the thought and praxis of *care* transmitted by these NGOs, which are globally dedicated to repairing a damaged social bond. Love stories speak of the way people relate to each other in a given society, allowing us to apprehend what makes up the social bond and, perhaps, what remains of it. Their literary treatment tells us about the relationship with the other – a crucial social fact to understand when working in a region of conflict – but also, in the case of love stories with a miraculous resolution, about the relationship with oneself and a societal ideal to be achieved. Vincent Kulimushi, a doctor working in the rural areas of North Kivu, which are particularly affected by conflict, explains to his fellow writers that it was his meetings with patients and with a Dutch colleague who asked him questions about the region that made him more sensitive to the experiences of the inhabitants of these areas and prompted him to write his novel in order to pass on the testimonies he received.[23]

Kulimushi's *Lumoo, fils du Kivu* (2018) is inspired by the recent history of Eastern Congo, characterised by the successive periods of social tension linked to the flow of Rwandan refugees into North Kivu since the genocide and them being perceived by most Congolese as dangerous invaders. Nationalities and tribes are never mentioned, but readers familiar with the region will immediately identify Lumoo's girlfriend as a Rwandan refugee.

They declare their love for each other after confiding in each other their traumas linked to the political history of the region: Lumoo tells how he witnessed the gang rape and murder of his mother; Nzigi tells how she became the only survivor of her family, living in refugee camps for many years. It is the power of their inherited trauma from the war zone that will seal their love:

> - Oh, sighed Lumoo, we've all been through terrible things, we still have that in common, noting that Nzigi, who came from the Northern Kingdoms, had experienced the same anguish of war.
>
> - Yes, it must make us strong, Nzigi said to Lumoo, who felt free from the shackles of a secret he didn't want to tell anyone.

21 Conflicts have not stopped, or at least there is a causal link between today's deadly events and the wars of the past that have scarred the region: in 1996–1998, 2000, and 2003.

22 This is especially true for Goma, which was just a large village in 1994 during the humanitarian Operation Turquoise deployed by France supposedly to stop the genocide in neighbouring Rwanda. The humanitarian industry has never left Goma and the city now vies with Kisangani for the status of the third largest city in the republic, after its capital Kinshasa, and the mining capital in Katanga, Lubumbashi. See: Büscher and Vlassenroot, "Humanitarian Presence and Urban Development: New Opportunities and Contrasts in Goma (DRC)."

23 Field diary: remarks made during the focus on the author during the Goma Slam Session at the Journée de la Francophonie, Wednesday 20 March 2019, Institut français de Goma.

> The war had left a mark on their hearts, which gave them valour and healed their wounds; it was love that led and drove them. The sun was already on the western side, the daylight was softening. The day was giving way to dusk (…) But they found it difficult to leave the forest that day, so the elements entrusted to the protection of Virunga National Park came to help them to get out. … They no longer needed a sacrifice to wear the clothes of Romeo and Juliet, but rather a small, romantic and painful journey into each other's past to find out when they would need consolation. This was the beginning of their relationship.[24]

The story has a miraculous ending, as Nzigi's family members are finally convinced and decide to allow the marriage to help cement the unity of the society:

> At that time there was an appalling inflation of killings between the inhabitants of Butimbika and the northerners who were fighting in several villages. They were tired of the violence, stupor and cruelty engendered by the enmity that had found its ease between these two peoples. So they chose to give and perpetuate some happiness to their daughter. They had agreed to defile whatever society told them, as long as Nzigi was happy.[25]

The highly improbable outcome of this novel not only reflects the strong aspiration for peace, but also reveals the dream or even the fantasy of being able to contribute to the advent of peace through literature. It is here, at the micro-social level of the couple, of the family in the making, that this aspiration is woven through the intimate relationship: peace *can* come about through the loving union of two people who have been separated by history and politics. Here, the recognition of the union by the family is thus a performative act of social cohesion, beyond violence and conflict.

2 Resilience and Demand for Recognition

2.1 The Wealth of the Notion of Resilience in the Congo

In addition to the recurrent notions of reconciliation, repairing the social bond, suturing wounds, and the call for peaceful cohabitation or peaceful resolution of conflicts, which are reflected in the growing tendency towards miraculous narrative resolutions, there is another linked concept flourishing in the social discourse in the DRC, particularly in the Kivus: that of "resilience." Echoing Marc Angenot, by "social discourse" I mean the discourse on the political and social situation in the Congo, whether in the media, political discourse, the discourse of NGOs (local and international), the discourse of international (bilateral) cooperation personnel, the discourse of association leaders, or the discourse of artists. This discourse is sometimes saturated with injunctions to resilience or with the celebration of the resilience of the Congolese people. It would be tedious to list all the occurrences of resilience in social discourse in the Congo, but for those interested in the country's current affairs, the importance of this notion will be immediately apparent in the headlines of the press, the words of interviewees, and so on.

In the literature, calls for resilience or the celebration of the legendary resilience of the Congolese and Kivutians are found in slam poetry, theatre, and narrative fiction. One example is this excerpt from the slam by DePaul Bakulu, a slammer from the Goma Slam Session collective,[26] "Hakuna Congo Bila Beni" (There is no Congo without Beni):[27]

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24 Kulimushi, *Lumoo, fils du Kivu*, 123–124.

25 Ibid, 132.

26 On the Goma Slam Session collective, see: Le Lay, "'L'art est mon arme'. Slam et activisme politique à Goma (RDC)."

27 Beni is the name of a town in North Kivu, which is infamous for being a regular target of deadly attacks. At the beginning of 2019, a hashtag #Beni circulated widely on social networks, and numerous mobilisations were organised in the republic to protest against the repeated violence in this martyred town. The events of those bloody months inspired several slams. See also *Anthologie du slam à Goma*. Spoken word texts collected and edited by Goma Slam Session and Maëline Le Lay (Kigali, Izuba éditions, forthcoming in Fall 2023).

> While these verse green the earth soaked in blood
> Let them cry out for justice [for] lives innocently taken
> That they wake up our incessantly sleeping consciences
>
> That they break the silence and indifference
> Let them arm us with resilience
> Re Re Re Re … Resilience

This slam, written by a very active LUCHA activist, was chanted in unison with fist in the air by the Goma Slam Session collective in 2019 on the main stage of the international music festival Amani ("peace" in Swahili) in Goma, where it aroused strong collective emotion among the audience.

Resilience is so widely mobilised because it is seen as a means to achieve the societal goals of reconciliation and peaceful conflict resolution, or trauma reparation. Being resilient in the face of crises and disasters of conflict or natural disasters such as the volcanic eruption of 2021 means not letting oneself be defeated, but rather being resolute in action, determination, hope, and reconstruction. The tenors of the call for resilience believe that it is only through this attitude that social cohesion can be strengthened and the wounds caused by conflict can be healed.

The link between resilience and trauma repair is clear in this excerpt from *Cranium fragmented by tribal hatred*, a play by Goma-based author, playwright, poet, and slammer, Ghislain Kabuyaya, aka Coeur Tam-Tam:[28]

> ACT III
>
> *(FATUMA was a brave woman. She was able to follow all the doctors' instructions. She regained good mental and physical health despite the difficulties she had faced. The centre for vulnerable women retained her as a sensitiser and moralizer for vulnerable people. After obtaining this position, she was able to refine her writings from the exercise that the doctor had advised her to do. She was able to produce a booklet entitled 'Skull fragmented by the tribal axe'. In it she describes in detail her life, her macabre past, even the secrets she kept hidden for so many years and the strategies she used to overcome the challenges she faced. One day, she and Dr MULISEO decided to organise a conference attended by several desperate women (vulnerable women), experts in trauma, especially doctors. During this event, she told her story without holding back and the lessons to be learnt from it. The scene takes place in a conference room).*

This barbarity must stop. In anger, the rebel leader took it upon himself to slap me and then said:

> "Little girl, you want to thunder at me, no one gives me orders here; besides you are cruel, when you were planning our death with that adventurer, why did that enchant you?"
>
> *(He slapped me once more)* … "You are in front of the lion, do not think that I am in front of a little girl that I am courting to flatter her. I am decreasing my terror as you have an attractive physical form but that does not prevent me from exercising my power over you." So he forcibly undressed me, I resisted, he whipped me. As soon as I was down, he raped me fiercely. After satisfying his desires, he laughed like hell and said "the poor thing is moaning with joy" in a whining tone. Language that hurt me.
>
> Every day, raping me became a regular occurrence, despite my resilience.

The inflationary use of stage directions in this play reflects the effort to show in detail the medical–psychological context of the play, namely the trauma clinic. Pathologising suffering serves as one way of fully recognising it and giving full importance to the concept of resilience. Thus, this notion allows us to give hope and perhaps to find meaning in the ordeals we have been through. Ghislain Kabuyaya never ceases to mobilise it and chooses various genres and plural intonations to do so. In a "stage talk" following his vaudevillian play *Peau de caméléon*, he expressed himself as follows: "Many people ask me why I talk about love when we are going through a period of atrocities, why I like to make people laugh. Because we are in a

28 This text, dating from 2018, was staged by Faustin Biyoga, the same year, at the Foyer culturel de Goma, but has not been published. I thank its author for sharing it with me.

post-traumatic period, we need love and humour. And because we should not forget that there are people who love each other in Goma!"[29]

However, the omnipresence of the concept of resilience in social and literary discourse raises questions. The over-investment in the use of the concept of resilience to describe the way societies react to various difficulties concerns more broadly the field of international aid, as analysed by Benoît Lallau, Perrine Laissus-Benoît, and Emmanuel Mbetid-Bessane in their introduction to the special issue "Resilience in Practices."[30] The main mission of NGOs and international development agencies is to help and care for populations that have been weakened by various phenomena so that they can rebuild or consolidate their foundations for living in society, or to find decent living conditions (at least as defined by NGOs and development agencies). Emphasising that over the last 10 years, resilience has tended to orientate, and even define, their development policies, the authors present it in these terms:

> Defined as the capacity of communities and systems to cope with shocks, but also to prepare for them, or even to avoid them and adapt to them in the long term, it has a strong ambition, even more than the fight against poverty and vulnerability. At the same time, it is presented as a paradigm shift in the field of development (Chandler, 2012). It would be a means of better linking the temporalities of emergency and development, of better coordinating support, and of taking better account of local representations and practices (Olwig, 2012). Ultimately, therefore, it can increase the cost-benefit ratio and the sustainability of the effects of an intervention (Venton et al., 2012). Adorned with all these virtues, it departed from the academic sphere under the impetus of USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and DFID (Department for International Development), and then the European Union in 2012. All international institutions and, as a result, many non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as national governments, are now proposing their approach to resilience. (Lallau, Laissus-Benoist, Mbétid-Bessane 2018: 9)

It is as if, by a curious epistemic sleight of hand, resilience has become both a goal to be achieved *and* a *sine qua non* for successful, effective, and therefore desirable aid.

This polysemy, which reflects the invasion of the concept of resilience into the discourse of international aid and dictates the policies carried out in its name, is far from immune to criticism. Its detractors or critics, such as Thierry Ribault and Eva Ilouz and Edgar Cabanas[31] take issue with its neo-liberal postulate, which assumes that individuals are always capable of coping with and fulfilling their potential regardless of the difficulties they face. This reasoning has the obvious effect of making individuals feel guilty for not succeeding while downplaying the role of large collective structures, such as the state, in a given situation.[32]

It is noteworthy to probe the reasons for the successful implementation of the concept of resilience in Congo, particularly in the eastern part of the country, which houses a wide variety of NGOs. Goma, the capital of North Kivu, developed around and through the humanitarian industry following the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and the subsequent French Operation Turquoise which brought in hundreds of humanitarian workers. The Congo wars that followed the genocide in 1996, 1998, 2000, and 2003 and the various attacks that the city and its surroundings have suffered since then officially justify the maintenance of MONUSCO[33] and a variety of other NGOs engaged in peace building, food survival, aid to refugees and displaced persons, and development.[34]

The sociologist Nicolas Maquis offers a critical analysis of the reception of the works of Boris Cyrulnik, champion of "French-style" resilience, in French-speaking Europe, noting that it is all the more interesting to examine France, Belgium, and Switzerland as a case study of this reception, as these countries have not been immersed "in an environment that celebrates the potential of individuals and the need for them to free themselves from a series of social constraints": "[T]hese societies … are historically organised on the basis

29 Ghislain Kabuyaya, stage talk after his play *Peau de caméléon*, Foyer des jeunes de Goma, 23 March 2019.

30 Lallau, Laissus-Benoist, Mbétid-Bessane, "La résilience en pratiques", *Revue internationale des études du développement*. 235.

31 Ribault, *Contre la résilience*; Ilouz & Cabanas, *Happycratie*.

32 See: Gefen, "Résilience, vous avez dit résilience?;" Le Lay, "Literature in the Great Lakes Region. Between Resistance and Resilience" In the former, Gefen reacted to the repeated call for resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the latter, I examined the use of the concept of resilience in Africa's Great Lakes region in the context of resistance, as well as the use of the concept in the Congo during the COVID-19 pandemic.

33 United Nations Mission in Congo, the largest UN peacekeeping mission to date.

34 Büscher and Vlassenroot, "Humanitarian Presence and Urban Development: New Opportunities and Contrasts in Goma (DRC)".

of a welfare state that tends to insist on the one hand on the responsibility of the community for the misfortunes that individuals may experience and on the other hand on the duty of each member of the group to be a good citizen."[35]

The Congo is certainly a French-speaking world that has inherited the structures of the European (more precisely, Belgian) nation-state, but in which Protestant thought is well established (at least more so than in France, Belgium, and Switzerland), particularly with the multiplication, not to say proliferation, of Protestant churches, including the so-called evangelical "churches of revival," which attract crowds of self-proclaimed prophets and pastors. Additionally, the Congolese are immersed in a cultural environment, which is infused with the rhetorical universe and the spirit of self-help, likely influenced by English-speaking neighbours such as Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, and the dissemination of *ad hoc* media: manuals and other self-help books circulating from one country to another, sold in the "bookstores on the ground," or conferences by "experts" offering advice illustrated by success stories.[36]

This repeated emphasis on resilience also guides political ethics, attributing responsibility for the well-being or even survival of society to the individual. However, this transference of authority suits those truly responsible parties, such as the rulers, who can then tacitly offload their responsibilities and continue inaction or criminal policies. In this sense, Thierry Ribault's definition of resilience as a "technology of consent"[37] is, at the very least, a new call for resignation, the same one endorsed by the Church, which calls on the faithful to accept their fate and work for the salvation of their soul.

In the face of political scandals responsible for intolerable human situations that flout human dignity in the face of abysmal disasters, these sometimes *ad nauseam* calls for resilience can lead us to ask, as Sandra Laugier does (although she focuses on the ethic of *care*, I borrow her words to question resilience): "What possibilities remain open to human beings in situations of extreme vulnerability that accumulate various vulnerabilities?"[38]; in other words, what is possible in terms of resilience?

Resilience appears to be a kind of magic formula, a mantra, or even an incantation that acknowledges human value and creates a new identity (that of a resilient people) bringing a sense of support and strength as a member of a chosen group: those who have been made stronger by adversity. Celebrating resilience thus can have the effect of a healing balm that relieves and comforts while also valorising and growing.

2.2 Demand for Recognition

It seems that the success of resilience in Congo stems from a major existential issue, widely shared by the inhabitants of Eastern Congo, which is the need for recognition.

To speak of one's resilience, to carry it as a banner or to exhort one's fellow human beings to be resilient, is, in a way, to speak of one's pain. Celebrating resilience allows us to speak out about the violence we have suffered (whether as a direct victim or as a witness), but in an oblique way: without going into the details of the violence, and without dwelling on the harm suffered. Celebrating resilience is a way of being already in the aftermath, in what must inevitably come to triumph following traumatic episodes: life, the living. Singing about resilience is therefore also a way of dealing with pain in a low-key way; it proves to be an appropriate language for recognising – for oneself first of all – the weight and seriousness of the pain, and thus being able to make a demand for recognition, to make it public.

The stakes involved in the recognition of their pain by the Congolese are colossal.[39] The pain linked to the semi-permanent state of war, far from being decontextualised in discourse or reified, is also that of injustice.

35 Marquis, "La résilience comme attitude face au malheur: succès et usages des ouvrages de Boris Cyrulnik".

36 Newell, "Corresponding with the City: Self Help Literature in Urban West Africa" ; Rimke, "Governing Citizens through Self Help Literature".

37 Ribault, *Contre la résilience*.

38 Laugier, "La vulnérabilité des formes de vie", 66.

39 This is evidenced by the number of very active groups on social networks (Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.) that have come together to recognise the damage suffered by the Congo and the Congolese: memorialdrc, Debout Congolaises, Genocost.

The feeling of injustice is a powerful lever of public expression in the Congo, particularly in the form of militant demands (by civil society pressure groups such as LUCHA[40]), but not only. Writers, and artists in general, make a point of relaying through their art this feeling of injustice born of impunity in the face of war criminals who are not prosecuted, and their supposed barons, powerful politicians and foreign governments. The denunciation of injustice thus takes on militant overtones, and art, which then merges with political activism, is sometimes spurred on by an imperative of resistance rather than by the watchword of resilience.[41] However, it is interesting to highlight the fact that this demand for recognition is voiced by singular individuals (mostly artists and activists) in the public space and not necessarily by common/mundane people in the ordinary life. Indeed, as brilliantly demonstrated by Clara Han reading Veena Das about silence as a gesture towards dignity, on her fieldwork in an urban poor neighbourhood in Chile, what matters most in everyday social interactions is to maintain one's and others' dignity by pretending to ignore their neighbours' difficulties, hence by keeping silent as an act of care.[42]

However, here, the need for recognition goes beyond the demand for recognition of the pain caused by the war and is rooted in a deeper ground. The Congolese, wounded by the negative, even disastrous, imagery of their country beyond its borders,[43] are also demanding recognition of their humanity and their creative capacities, of the beauty of their country and their culture. The whole country, especially the eastern region, is crying out for recognition. Voices that challenge the macabre and apocalyptic image of the Congo are being heard everywhere in artistic expression, including literature, music and slam performances, theatre, and film. These artistic and literary productions are driven by an energy of reclaiming an imaginary world and regenerating narratives.[44] For example, the recently created podcast "The Change of the Congolese Narrative" by a Gomatracian communication agency whose motto is "empowering through storytelling"[45] contains numerous accounts of the creations of artists from the region committed to this cause, served by an entrepreneurial rhetoric whose assertion translates into a desire to emancipate oneself from the habitus specific to the humanitarian industry dominating this city. This is also reflected in the two recent films, released concurrently in 2020, *Stop filming us!* and *Ukweli* (Truth, in Swahili), which express the almost existential need to counter this image and contradict these damning representations of the city and the region by writing other narratives.[46]

In his article on the contemporary understanding of resilience based on the reception of Boris Cyrulnik's work, Nicolas Marquis also makes the link between the claim to resilience (or the call for resilience), which implies expressing prior pain, and the demand for recognition. He states, "We can consider with Veena Das that the expression of pain is always at the same time a demand for its recognition by others, which implies that it borrows from shared language games."[47]

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40 La LUCHA, Lutte pour le Changement, is the leading civil society organisation in terms of political strength. See the film by Marlène Rabaud, *Congo Lucha*, (Rabaud 2018); and the comic book by Justine Brabant and Annick Kamgang, *LUCHA. Chronique d'une révolution sans armes au Congo* (Brabant and Kamgang 2018).

41 Le Lay, "'L'art est mon arme'. Slam et activisme politique à Goma (RDC)."

42 "[…] How words have the potential to destroy the delicate concealment crucial to enduring the critical moment, an essential aspect of 'living with dignity'. Such silence to achieve a living with dignity recalls 's (2007: 92) attending to men's and women's 'obstinate turn towards the ordinary' in relations of life itself: that ethnography might attend to the 'extreme hesitation' of putting that which violated the 'whole principle of life… back into words' and thus the 'deep moral energy' not to speak of that which so violated life itself. Considering the gift in everyday life likewise helps us attend to the deep moral energy in silence, but within the ordinary itself. Thus, pretending helps us attend to a quiet moral striving that happens every day but is almost imperceptible – an achieving of illusion" (Han, The Difficulty of Kindness: Boundaries, Time and the Ordinary. In *The Ground Between. Anthropologists Engage Philosophy*, 84–5).

43 Dunn, *Imagining the Congo. The International Relations of Identity*; Andersen, *The Dark Continent? Images of Africa In European Narratives about the Congo*.

44 This personal observation is corroborated by the work of other researchers working on and in the Kivus region: Ndaliko, *Necessary Noise. Music, Film and Charitable Imperialism in the Eastern Congo*; Graham, "One Hundred Years of Suffering? Humanitarian Crisis Photography and Self-Representation in the Democratic Republic of Congo"; Graham, "Pictures and Politics. Using Co-Creative Portraits to Explore the Social Dynamics of the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo."

45 https://www.mnkfcreatives.com/mnkfstories/nnppodcast-le-changement-du-narratif-congolais

46 Ram *Ukweli* [film]; Postema and Buroko, *Stop Filming Us!* [film]

47 Marquis, "La résilience comme attitude face au malheur: succès et usages des ouvrages de Boris Cyrulnik".

Literary creation, through its dissemination to an audience and the mediation it provokes, enables a sharing between the writer and the reader or the spectator. This sharing of text allows for a demand for recognition by others, and the expected result. Writing love stories of a miraculous nature expresses a state of extreme vulnerability, since summoning a miracle reveals the extent of one's disarray in the face of a critical situation that can only be resolved through extraordinary means.

This demand for recognition, born from the expression of pain and injustice that reflects a state of extreme vulnerability, solicits, at *the very least*, the reader's moral praxis. However, according to Veena Das, analysing the need for recognition expressed by people in situations of extreme vulnerability reveals a deeper and more involved level than moral praxis. She suggests that there is an expectation of incorporation of one's pain by others, stating that "From then on, we can begin to think of pain as the demand for recognition; the denial of another's pain is not so much a defeat of reason as a defeat of the soul. In the register of the imaginary, the pain of the other does not only demand to be at home in language, but also seeks a dwelling in the body ready to receive it."[48]

In other words, the empathy of the reader, in the act of reading or receiving, creates recognition of pain even more than morality does. Similarly, it is the empathy of those who receive a testimony, particularly when it is given on stage, that brings it fully to life in all its performative and perlocutionary dimensions. This is exemplified by the powerful testimonies of Yolande in the renowned Groupov show, "*Rwanda 94*"[49] and Rebecca Kabugho, a LUCHA activist, in Yves Mwamba's show, "*Voix intérieures (manifeste)*." The purpose of these testimonies of violence is to strike the mind and heart with a single arrow, to create awareness, and to move the audience to trigger empathy.

Acknowledging the pain of others, the harm suffered as a result of violence, or more simply their vulnerability, is not only a moral attitude, but also a powerful gesture of personal commitment through empathy. In this sense, it is a gesture of *care*.

It can thus be considered that the "disaster" literature in the DR Congo is entirely driven by a deliberate intention of *care* that is embodied in a double gesture of *care*: on the one hand, in the production of discourse, the act of writers giving voice to the extremely vulnerable condition of their fellow human beings can be seen as a gesture of *care*. On the other hand, the act of readers, who are expected to exercise their moral skills by showing empathy, is also a gesture of *care.*

Charly Mathekis' text, *Une rose au pays des portes défoncées. Une jeune fille dans la tourmente,* offers an eloquent vignette of this conception of literature as a gesture of *care*.

3 *Une Rose au Pays des Portes Défoncées/Une Jeune Fille dans la Tourmente* by Charly Mathekis: In the Face of Disaster, the Eulogy of Care and Literature

Charly Mathekis, or Mathe Kisughu, is a dynamic and prolific writer[50] based in Butembo, a medium-sized town in North Kivu close to the Ugandan border, which is particularly exposed to attacks and violence; a town which is also quite isolated. Mathekis is a secondary school French teacher and organizer of numerous literary and artistic events in his town. His writings are mainly inspired by the situation of latent war punctuated by regular attacks, which constitutes his daily life.

Une rose au pays des portes défoncées is a story that the author published with L'Harmattan in October 2021 and concomitantly adapted for the theatre (with a new title, *Une jeune fille dans la tourmente)*, with the

48 Das, *Voix de l'ordinaire. L'anthropologue face à la violence*, 63–64.

49 GROUPOV, *Rwanda 94*.

50 See: Mathekis *Chroniques du Graben, Du sang sur les neiges du Ruwenzori, Une rose au pays des portes défoncées*. The author has also published several short stories in collective works and numerous poems on the blog Po-aimer.

performance on 27 October 2021 at the Katwa Institute in Butembo where the author teaches.[51] The story features a character, Le Cavalier (the author's double, a narrative technique he often uses), who by chance meets Jolie Tantine, a young girl who has been orphaned by the massacre of her entire family and was forced to prostitute herself to make ends meet, and who tries to seduce him in the hope of luring a new client. But Le Cavalier, touched by the girl's plight, insists on getting her off the streets with dignity and offers her start-up capital and protection. In the meantime, they are attacked by a bandit named JJS, who turns out to be Jolie Tantine's cousin. Believing her and her family to be dead, the two cousins embrace and JJS explains how he became a bandit, driven by poverty and abandonment. Le Cavalier helps him financially as well and leaves them together, returning home. While she waits for Le Cavalier to exchange the prospects he offers her, Jolie Tantine is kidnapped and taken to the commander of a militia who, bereaved by the recent loss of his wife, entrusts his child to her for adoption (he asks her to "give life" to his child). Jolie Tantine then returns to Le Cavalier, with the child in her arms, and a dialogue ensues about the state of war in the region with the "provincial attaché," a character representing the state. Their debate is interrupted by an attack on the town during which Jolie Tantine and Le Cavalier are taken prisoner. They are taken to the leader of the attacking militia who is none other than JJS, the famous bandit cousin from the beginning. There follows another debate on the meaning of their martial action, which is interrupted by another attack. The last scene takes place in the hospital where the two protagonists have been taken; we learn that this latest attack is blamed on the regular army, which had attempted to dismantle the militia camp.

In this torrent of attacks and rather improbable twists and turns, the characters never cease to care for each other. The two main characters in particular show particular attention to the vulnerability of situations and beings, with the plot opening with Le Cavalier's commitment and perseverance in caring for Jolie Tantine and the second part of the plot revolving around Jolie Tantine's adoption of the child. The plot is characterised by the constant valorisation of care for others and the attention paid to vulnerability. This recognition of the dependence of human beings, and their interdependence, is embodied in the relationship to the entrusted child who requires care. Remarkably, the care for the child appears as a metaphor for the care for the region:

> The commander. When it is all over, when we have finally given the people back the dignity they deserve, then you will know who I am … *[The commander asks her to change the child]* (*In a flash, she changes the child, who looks as if he hasn't been changed for a long time. As soon as the child has been cared for, he falls into a restful sleep on Jolie Tantine's lap*).
>
> JOLIE TANTINE: Here we are, the nappies have already been changed… How cute this child is! … But what does Destiny have in store for him? What will happen to the whole region?... Will this child survive? And me, what is my destiny? Ah, heavenly light, illuminate the land where the doors are broken down, be the guide of those who are thrown on the roads of the region, without hope of arriving to a haven of peace![…]

The child thus personifies the region that should be welcomed and held close for care and protection. This clearly expresses the idea that taking care of the region means restoring its dignity, and this is the major challenge of the constant mobilisation of the concept of resilience in the Congo.

Politically, despite the didacticism of his text, as is often the case with Mathekis, the message is ambiguous. Indeed, throughout the play, Le Cavalier (and to a lesser extent Jolie Tantine) laments the constant state of war that is plaguing the region, blaming it on the belligerents of the two "camps": on the one hand, the State, which is largely responsible for the economic and social disaster that forces the inhabitants to survive and plunges them into poverty, which in turn provokes banditry and insecurity; on the other hand, the militias who sow terror with the motive of taking justice into their own hands and avenging the people oppressed by a failing, corrupt, and criminal state. They share their accusations with those on either side. But twice – in the middle and at the end of the play – Le Cavalier places the responsibility for the transformative action on everyone:

> Le Cavalier *[addressing the provincial attaché]*: And if the global response was the recognition of responsibility in our action, if the response remained in the recognition of our wrong, of the resolution to listen to each other. … I hope that this will change, if everyone takes this initiative to recognise the responsibility in the construction of the well-being of all […]

51 I am grateful to the author for entrusting me with the typescript of this theatrical adaptation on which I base my argument.

The ethic of *care*, which until now has consisted of valuing the bonds of dependence in a society whose social fabric has been torn apart by state interference and state and militia violence, thus seems to be diluted into a responsibility shared by all. While from an exogenous point of view this could be seen as a regrettable, or at least surprising, flattening of the political, in reality this dilution suggests precisely the plasticity of the boundaries between "them" and "us." Indeed, as the play shows, one can quickly find oneself in the good graces of an official, or even cozy up to the brass, just as it is not uncommon to count in one's close circle a person enlisted in a local militia, out of idleness, despair, a quest for identity, a thirst for power, or simply out of a need to exist. In other words, what this story suggests is precisely the power of the ties that bind individuals together, both in a *caring* and, conversely, in a destructive way.

Finally, what is remarkable about this piece is the very graphic and romantic way in which it illustrates the power of action conferred on literature, in other words, its performativity, but an exclusively virtuous performativity. In several of his texts, Mathekis stages the figure of the writer who always finds himself at a given moment in a scene (or several) where he must defend his peaceful position, in retreat from the battlefield, and exhort his interlocutor to reason, wisdom, and peaceful cohabitation. Particularly eloquently, the play closes with a literary sublimation of the life of Tantine, a vulnerable character par excellence:

> THE DOCTOR: Oh, but of course, Jolie. Reading enriches the mind. And if we all read healthy literature, I know the face of the earth would change! See you later, Tantine.
>
> JOLIE TANTINE: See you later, Doctor.
>
> *(The Doctor leaves.)*
>
> JOLIE TANTINE: Ah, what a story, mine and that of my region! Fate threw me into the arms of a city where I was just a leaf in the wind. I was stranded in a cabaret where a man pointed out to me an opening to brighter horizons. I called him Le Cavalier. What a handsome father! … I understood that his love of Belles-lettres is what dictates his humanism without measure … What a noble heart. He had to overcome the temptation to let me fall … He had to weigh the risks of letting me go to his house, that night we met… We are friends, his wife and I … Will the ex-son of the Commander, have the possibility to live a dignified life, that I swore to give him, the day his father asked me to do it? It is possible … Yes, it is possible: may I deserve this service to the sick that the Hospital has just asked me to give my child a good education … (*After a careful glance at a page of the book, exclaiming*): What? Isn't it my story, mine, that is told in this book, by Le Cavalier? (*After a silent reading*): I have the distinct impression that it is my story, mine, that is being told: how Le Cavalier met me, how he found his house vandalised, how he spent time brooding, at the Casino Joli Rêve, the scene of the meeting … The names, however, and the places are different… In any case, I must read without getting tired until the end … From this reading, I will be a new person… Without a doubt, I will be better informed about the human heart and the way to transform this wasteland into a good place to live … (*She sits down and starts to read.*)
>
> THE VOICE: It is evening. Sleep, rock this sleeping man. Let his dream so that the hillsides of our ancestral land are beautiful encourage tomorrow's readers! Look at Jolie Tantine soothed. May her life no longer be that of a wandering life. May her life no longer be that of wandering … May a life of stress disappear in this country … Sleep, may a life of stress disappear in this country. Frogs, crickets, and you night birds, sing, sing loudly, compete in ardour, challenge the songs of death that must not have the last word on the song of life!

4 Conclusion

In political contexts of violence or post-violence characterised by extreme collective vulnerability and a constant state of tension, concern for others is embodied in ways that places what Veena Das calls "the denial of the human voice" at the centre of our concerns.[52] Therefore, literature has a predominant role to play in this enterprise of *care*. The poetic or fictional expression of one's own pain or that of others, of collective misfortune, allows for the necessary recognition of one's vulnerability and/or of the harm suffered. As a result, resilience is summoned for the purposes of reparation or reconciliation.

52 Das, *Voix de l'ordinaire. L'anthropologue face à la violence*, 24.

However, this rhetorical and ideological orientation dominating the social discourse and the artistic field is not without risk and ambiguity in a region where the state is failing.[53] NGOs compensate for the abysmal deficiencies of the government in the form of bricolage rather than coordinated planning. This is especially true in a region dominated by the conceptual framework of North American evangelicalism forged by liberal thought. While I agree with Pascale Molinier's statement that "the *care* perspective is an excellent conceptual and semantic support for not allowing oneself to be carried away by the sirens of excellence or performance,"[54] I would like to add "except when it sets itself the teleological objective *and the main condition* for achieving resilience, thought of and experienced as individual responsibility."

The fact remains that the leitmotif of resilience in social discourse, as well as in literary texts, reflects a strong need for recognition of pain and prejudice that is deeply rooted in the social and political context of contemporary Congo. The region is prey to a never-ending war "that does not say its name,"[55] as well as to mismanagement and corruption at the top of the state, which seems to worsen from one regime to another. In this sense, the ordinary fictions articulated around stories of love and the re-creation of filial ties, as in *Une rose au pays des portes défoncées*, appear as the expression of singular forms of life and as registers of expressiveness that are highly significant in the Congolese context. Indeed, what an anthropological approach allows one to understand from a given singular context *and* to capture as blatantly significant by means of philosophy is recalled by Stanley Cavell reading Wittgenstein:

> We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that we will make, and understand the same projections. That on the whole what we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humor and of significance and of fulfillment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation - all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls 'forms of life'. Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less than this.[56]

If the call for and the acknowledgment of resilience is a register of expressiveness so embedded in public speech delivered in stories, books, performances, as in mundane conversations in DR Congo, it might be because resilience relies on the temporality of the potential, on a future that is but conditional to our deeds and behaviour, and to the Will of Fortune, a highly Christian paradigm that is of great help to cope with a context of violence. As Veena Das explains, in such violent contexts characterised by a constant fear, potentiality encapsulates the very sense of everyday life:

> It is not only violence experienced on one's body in these cases but also the sense that one's access to context is lost that constitutes a sense of being violated. The fragility of the social becomes embedded in a temporality of anticipation since one ceases to trust that context is in place. The affect produced on the registers of the virtual and the potential, of fear that is real but not necessarily actualized in events, comes to constitute the ecology of fear in everyday life. Potentiality here does not have the sense of something that is waiting at the door of reality to make an appearance as it were, but rather as that which is already present.[57]

Thus, love stories written in Eastern DRC offer a singular form of life displaying a regime of potentiality, as a way to cope with a climate of fear and violence that has characterised the region for more than two decades.

Acknowledgments: The title of the article references in part the title of a remarkable collective work co-authored by Sandra Laugier, Veena Das, Anne Lovell, and Stefania Pandolfo, *Face aux désastres. Une conversation à quatre voix sur la folie, le* care *et les grandes détresses collectives* (2013). That work greatly inspired my thinking for the original presentation given at the "Caring Lit'" conference (organised in Paris on October, 25–27, 2021 by Alexandre Gefen, Sandra Laugier, and Andrea Oberhuber). The first version of this article was

53 Joe Trapido refers to the Congo as the largest "failed state in the world" (Trapido, "Africa's Leaky Giant," 7).

54 Molinier, "Les écuries d'Augias: mythe de la performance et déni de vulnérabilité". In "Grammaires de la vulnérabilité".

55 Stearns, *The War That Doesn't Say Its Name. The Unending Conflict in Congo*.

56 Cavell in Fassin, "The Parallel Lives of Philosophy and Anthropology", 69.

57 Das, *Life and Words. Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, 9.

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