Theatre and photography as new contentious repertoires of Congolese women in the diaspora: towards another politics of representation of rape

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ABSTRACT: The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and in particular the East of the country, is characterized by a protracted conflict situation and is home to some of the world's most horrific documented cases of sexual violence against women. For many years now Congolese women in the diaspora have been engaged in initiatives to raise awareness of the sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) of Congolese women back home, addressing the root causes of the conflict and promoting specific peace and conflict resolutions. This article examines ways of protesting using art as a political tool in addressing SGBV in the DRC. In doing so, it highlights two politico-artistic projects by Congolese women activists living in Belgium: *Hearth of a mother*, a theatre piece and *Stand up my mother*, a photographic exhibition. This article aims to analyse these particular projects in terms of Tilly's 'repertoires of contention' as used by activists of the Congolese diaspora in order to make their voices heard.

Keywords: Congolese diaspora, diasporic engagement, art, sexual violence against women

Introduction

The protracted conflict situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (hereafter DRC) has caused one of the greatest humanitarian disasters in the contemporary world. It is often characterised as the most deadly conflict since World War II with an estimated 5.4 million deaths (Coghlan *et al.*, 2004, p.iii). Within this conflict, hundreds of thousands of women and girls have been victims of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) with violations still being committed by different armed forces on a daily basis (Peterman, Palermo and Bredenkamp, 2011). As a result, rape in the DRC has been characterised as 'rape with extreme violence' against women (Mukwege and Nangini, 2009). The Rwandan genocide is often considered as the turning point in the emergence of a certain type of SGBV against Congolese women in a war context (Kirby, 2012; Braeckman, 2012). However, it was not until the Human Rights Watch report in 2002 entitled 'The War Within The War: Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in eastern Congo' that people started to pay attention to the issue. It then became a matter of international concern with the visit of Hillary Clinton (then Secretary of State) to Eastern Congo in 2009, as well as the visit soon after by Margot Wallström (then Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict) and who described the DRC as the 'rape capital of the world'.[1] In mainstream media and humanitarian narratives, the complex root causes of violence are often being ignored and SGBV is mainly framed as a consequence of war and/or as an 'unfortunate by-product of war' (Niarchos, 1995, p.651).

Whereas for a long time migrant women were not considered as proper political actors in the field of migration and diaspora studies (Al-Ali, 2007), this article looks at Congolese women activists in the diaspora as 'diasporic political agents'. There is a growing field of study that applies social movement scholarship to diaspora politics (Adamson 2012; Koinova, 2011; Sökefeld, 2006). However, the majority of them have been looking at the role played by political opportunity structures as well as mobilizing structures. By contrast, the framing approach has seldom been exploited in the literature on diaspora politics. This article looks at the 'framing' (Benford and Snow, 2000) used by Congolese women in their political mobilisation process in order to address some of the root causes of the conflict, to bypass stereotypical framing of rape and sexual violence in the DRC as well as to promote specific peace and conflict resolutions. Two forms of 'contentious repertoires' (Tilly, 2006) as tactics

[1] BBC News (2010). UN official calls DRC 'rape capital of the world' (28 April). Available from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8650112.stm. [Last accessed: 25 August 2016].

employed by people for making claims against powerful others will be studied: an advocacy theatre project and a photography project (blurring the lines between vernacular and humanitarian photography). Both of these step up to offer an alternative politics of rape representation as well as of the Congolese protracted conflict situation. As mentioned by Teune (2005, p.2): "political innovations in terms of repertoire of contention are either seen as a product of minimal transformation at the margin (Tilly, 1995, p.28) or as occurring in "moments of madness" (Tarrow, 1995) when crisis allows for completely new concepts of political action". It will be shown here that adopting innovative contentious repertoires must be understood as a way to change the nature of social interactions (and the underlying representations) between Congolese women in the DRC, those in the diaspora and a Western audience.

The article is divided into four parts. The first part provides the reader with some contextual elements about the protracted conflict situation in the DRC and how the war has specifically targeted women and girls with the use of SGBV. It will then depict how rape in the DRC has been framed mainly through the use of two dominant narratives: a 'humanitarian narrative' and through a 'security narrative' with rape used as a weapon of war. These two dominant narratives have led to several interrelated shortcomings: to considering Congolese women as victims only in need of protection, to the implementation of a peace-conflict resolution agenda that needs to be applied from the top to the bottom taking away the agency of Congolese women as potential political actors (both back home and in the diaspora), and finally, to the perpetuation of the perpetual "Other" in need of help through colonial references. The second part of the article will depict the biographies of two Congolese women activists in the diaspora highlighting the continuities in their trajectories from their country of origin to their country of destination, thereby explaining why they present themselves as being the legitimate 'voice of the voiceless' compared with other actors. The third part looks at two creative activist projects: a theatrical performance *Heart of a Mother* (*Coeur de mère*) performed by Stella Kitoga among Congolese women activist circles and a photographic exhibition *Stand up my mother* (*Debout ma mère*) by Mado Chideka. The last section of the article will discuss how the political artistic content of their work (several scenes from the play and several photographs) portray a series of counter- or alternative narratives in order to pledge for another political representation of Congolese women in the conflict as well as in a post-conflict situation.

Dominant narratives about SGBV in the DRC

A short review of the literature has led us to identity at least two main narratives in regard to SGBV – and in particular rape – in the DRC that are being portrayed by different actors (i.e. humanitarian agencies, the UN, NGOs, media and academics, among others): the 'humanitarian narrative' and the 'security narrative' with 'rape used as a weapon of war'. Each narrative implies a specific 'politics of rape representation' (Jean-Charles, 2014) of Congolese women. These will be briefly discussed here in order to understand better how Congolese women in the diaspora position themselves in relation to such dominant discourses.

It was during the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) held in 1995 that the issue of sexual violence in times of war was formally addressed. As discussed by Ticktin (2011, p.253), the act of rape in armed conflict has also played an important role in the recognition of SGBV in conflicts. In particular, the conflicts in Yugoslavia (1992-1995) and Rwanda (1994) saw rape recognised as a war crime and crime against humanity with *ad hoc* tribunals put in place. Since then, it has been established in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The year 2000 marked another turning point in international policy with the UN adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (Cockburn, 2007). There are three principal strands in this resolution: 'protection' of women and girls from gender-based violence and impunity for these crimes; 'participation' in order to reaffirm the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building; and the 'insertion' of a gender perspective into UN peacekeeping operations (Cockburn, 2007, p.139). Since then, further UN resolutions have been adopted such as SCR 1820 in 2008 which explicitly recognised sexual violence as a tactic of war and a threat to international peace and security allowing the use of military intervention under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. As highlighted by True (2012, p.119), these resolutions (1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009) and 1960 (2010)) – which mainly focus on the protection scheme of the UNSCR 1325 – led to a UN securitisation framework on sexual violence in conflicts, which was first and foremost considered as a threat to security and an impediment to peace. However, as Meger argues (2012), instead of considering sexual violence as a threat to women's security as well as to all individuals, it has framed sexual violence mainly as a security issue for states.

The dominant narrative of 'rape as a weapon of war' is therefore based on a universalised typology of wartime rape and its subjects (e.g. victims and perpetrators), which has become self-explanatory, ignoring the more complex picture on the ground (Eriksson Baaz and Stern, 2013, p.2). Within this dominant narrative, all forms of SGBV fall under this singular banner of 'rape used as a weapon of war' and as a consequence, few distinctions are made between different types of 'perpetrators', but also between different types of 'victims' and other forms of violence. Lastly, the focus within the framework on women, peace and security on protection and 'rape used as a weapon of war' tends to represent women "in a narrow essentialist definition that allows male decision-makers to keep them in the subordinated position of victim, thus removing their agency" (Puechguirbal, 2010, p.173). Women in that framework are not expected to play a major role in terms of peace-building and conflict resolution. As will be shown, while it is important to understand the logic of 'rape as a weapon of war' in the DRC context, the reality seems to be more complex than this mainstream narrative extensively promoted by the international community.

The second narrative is called the 'medical humanitarian narrative' and is linked to the first narrative as it reflects the shift from a legal category to a medical condition. Ticktin (2011) connects this narrative with stereotypes of women as always in need of protection and which often have a primary focus on the injury. This particular dominant narrative of rape implies a direct and simple answer to the problems of sexual violence, namely to provide medical care to the victims. This is what Ticktin describes as "a politics of humanity that focuses on care and rescue" (2011, p.251), and which tends to depoliticise the conflict by focusing only on its 'consequences'. In this way, framing SGBV in the DRC within a 'politics of the body' rather than within a politics of social justice or redistribution (Ticktin, 2011, p. 255) has been facilitated by the wider international community. With rape perceived only as an epidemic disease, it can be healed through medical humanitarian assistance. There is no need to address the root causes (such as gender power systems of inequalities at the local but also at the national, transnational and global level). The issue here is not that it stresses the need for medical care, which is urgently needed, but that it addresses only the medical and fails to consider other types of changes that lead to social justice in the context of gender as well as failing to address the root causes of the conflict.

As argued by Autesserre (2012, p.74) the fact that rape has been one of the highlights of Western responses to the conflict in the DRC can be explained by the emotional impact

generated by sexual violence affecting the most vulnerable women and girls, but also by a racialisation of violence resulting from widespread stereotypes of Congolese people as savage. As will be shown, Congolese women in the diaspora adopt different discursive strategies to deconstruct these two dominant narratives but they also develop innovative mobilising strategies that reach beyond the Congolese diasporic public sphere.

Reflecting Congolese women's voices in the diaspora while avoiding speaking about or on their behalf

In a seminal essay Gayatri Spivak (1988) asked, "Can the subaltern speak?". The term 'voices' is a challenging one, as it seems quite difficult to speak about Congolese women's voices without reproducing acts of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1984). The issue of who can speak on behalf of whom and how not concerns deeply Congolese women in the diaspora in relation to the media, the international community and NGOs, but also the research community, including myself as a 'white Belgian woman researcher'. As a result, this article does not aim to speak for or represent Congolese women in the diaspora, a position that has been challenged so many times by women regarding 'expert' social actors, in particular the so-called Belgian experts on the Congo (Demart and Bodeux, 2013). Considering my interviewees as subjects with whom I can produce collaborative knowledge, I also consider my field of study as a 'place where theory is produced', a location of collective thinking and praxis for social change (Phillips and Cole, 2013, p.ix). Therefore, instead of 'speaking about' or 'speaking for' Congolese women, I have tried to position the voices of Congolese women next to mine, 'speaking nearby' my voice (Chen, 1992, p.96). The approach has been based on dialogical exchanges that have shaped intellectual conversations and contributions (between 2010 and 2015 during the time of my PhD dissertation). I have tried 'to learn from below' (Spivak, 2004, quoted in Kapoor, 2004, p.642) and to do so I have adopted a 'transnational feminist praxis', defined by Swarr and Nagar (2010) as "being critically aware of its own historical, geographical, and political locations, even as it is invested in alliances that are created and sustained through deeply dialogic and critically self-reflexive processes of knowledge production and dissemination" (p.3). This article is therefore the result of a 'collaborative praxis' between Mado Chideka, Stella Kitoga and myself. I am therefore very thankful for the time they both took in explaining to me the essence of every scene of *Heart of a Mother* and every photograph in *Stand up my mother*. Both accounts have been reviewed by Stella Kitoga and Mado Chideka several times in order for the knowledge produced to be

'validated' (Hunter, 2002, p.128). This collaborative process of knowledge production has provided 'a way to radically rethink existing approaches to subalternity, voice, authorship, and representation' (Swarr and Nagar, 2010). However, the responsibility for any errors or misconceptions is entirely my own.

Stella Kitoga Bitondo: From the DRC to Belgium, a long history of political engagement

Stella Kitoga is a native of Mwenga (South Kivu). She migrated to Kinshasa at a very young age and trained at the National Institute of Arts (INA) where she graduated in 1986 as the third student with the scenic realization option. She then taught for 13 years as a professor of Dramatic Art and co-founded in 1998, the Corporation of Congolese Women Artists (CORFAC). In 1998, when the Second Congo War, also called the 'War of Aggression' started (Prunier, 2009), Kitoga was asked by the then Minister of Gender to create a play entitled *Women: Instruments of Peace*, which was performed within CORFAC. At that time, Stella Kitoga was also one of the co-founders of the female branch of the Centre for the Study and Dissemination of the Arts (FCEDAR) that INA created in 1997 and which was directed by Mavesse Moanda. This branch aims to awaken community building by promoting on one hand, the involvement of women in society and advocating on the other hand, the elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against women (Musengeshi, Art.19, 2003).

Stella Kitoga's political engagement also took place in the Catholic networks of Kinshasa, where she was since 1987, the cultural and artistic adviser and director of the Archdiocese of Kinshasa. In 2000, at the request of the missionary congregation (called the Congrégation du Cœur Immaculé de Marie), she was asked to create a theatre piece from the text 'Mary, Mother of Sorrows, Mother of Defiance' written by the marianist Peter Daino (Orbis Books, 1993) and translated in French by Robert Witwicki (Ed. L'Epiphanie, Kinshasa, 1998) with the title 'Mary, the woman who said No!'[2] She chose to interpret this text with a provocative title because as she explained to me: "the image that we have of Mary, it's a bit of the woman who said "Yes", not the one who said "No!". By saying yes, it is as if it were a woman resigned."[3]

[2] More information on the book can be found on this website: https://www.nacms.org/resources/what-marianist-spirituality-me-and-how-it-works [Last accessed: 15th August 2016].
[3] Interview with Stella Kitoga (November 2014) (on file with the author and translated by the author)

However, as Stella Kitoga explained, the author of the book chooses to give another reading of the episode of the massacre of the Innocents as related in the Gospel of Matthew. In this story, Herod sent soldiers in the Bethlehem area to kill all boys under 2 years old. The author then gives an interpretation of the Bible in which Mary refuses to leave, avoiding the risk to let other children die for her son. It is the women of her entourage who then managed to convince her to run away, while saving her son so that he could one day "testify". Through this passage, a symbolic parallel can be made between the women of the diaspora and those of the DRC: "Women in the diaspora must speak out for those left behind".[4]

In 2002, Stella Kitoga decided to leave the DRC to go to Belgium to join her husband along with her four children. She was then confronted with the Belgian administration and its refusal to recognise her diplomas. After several years of struggling, recognition of her talent first came from Congolese women activist circles. Thus her art was called to serve the cause of Congolese women as they (Congolese women's groups) were looking for innovative ways of raising awareness as they were challenging the idea that sexual violence against women committed by combatant forces was mainly a cultural trait (Godin, 2015).[5] In 2011, she received the honorary title of "Woman of Peace" for her political engagement through theatre and in particular with the play "Hearth of a Mother" about SGBV against Congolese women and in promoting a peaceful solution to the conflict. This title was awarded by the Belgian platform "National Action Plan for 1325", created in September 2009 by the *Nederlandstalige Vrouwenraad* (Dutch-Speaking Council Of Women Of Belgium)) within the framework of resolution 1325 of the United Nations "Women, Peace and Security" (2000).

This short biography indicates that the development of Congolese women has always been the centre of Stella Kitoga's political commitment before her arrival in Europe. She also considers herself part of the Congolese women's movement that developed in the wake of Congolese independence (Bolya et al., 2013, p.102).

[4] See footnote 3, Ibid.
[5] In this regard, as both Mado Chideka and Stella Kitoga mentioned to me, it is important to note that the term 'rape' did not exist *per se* in local languages. It is only recently that the term found an equivalent in Swahili, namely *kubaka*. (Interview held in 2013, 2014, on file with the author and translated by the author).

Mado Chideka: part of the young generation of Congolese women activists in the East of the DRC

Mado Chideka is a Congolese native of Bukavu (South Kivu Province) who has been rallying for more than a decade on the issue of violence against women during armed conflict. She arrived in Belgium at the age of 20 to join her family. In 1996, she witnessed the First Congo War (also called the 'War of liberation') overthrowing the Mobutu regime. She was at that time a student at the Faculty of Law at the Free University of the Great Lakes (*Université Libre des Pays des Grands-Lacs-ULPGL*). Living in Goma, she was very active in a group of young students who organised debates on peace, justice and freedom. Her commitment towards social justice has been present for many years and growing up in South Kivu is, according to her, linked to this strong desire for change.

As she mentioned to me, the DRC has one of the highest numbers of women's organisations of any country in Africa. The economic, political and social crises of recent decades led the local population to mobilise in order to substitute for the weak and absent state in certain sectors such as health, infrastructure and education. The higher education system in Zaire (as it was then called) in the 1970s and early 1980s produced highly skilled graduates with few employment prospects who – seeking to utilise their skills and change Congolese society – often created local activist NGOs. In this context, Congolese women became strongly mobilised. One striking example is the creation of the Congolese Women's Caucus which gathered together a group of women's representatives during the Inter-Congolese Dialogue in 2002 in order to draw up an official declaration and create a plan of action that would contribute to implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Their work contributed to raising awareness of the major role that Congolese women could play for the benefit of society and encouraged many women to mobilise (Godin and Chideka, 2010). Concerning specifically the East of the DRC, Rugusha (2005, p.71) writes that there is a tradition of struggle by the people of South Kivu due, in many respects, to traditional leaders but also oppressed populations forced to live in protracted conflict situations and therefore obliged to develop strategies of survival and resistance. As such, during our conversations, Mado Chideka liked to acknowledge the work of several women from civil society in the Kivus such as: the work achieved by Mathilde Muhindo Mwamini, director of Olame Centre[6] (established in 1959), a welfare agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Bukavu (South Kivu).

[6] Available from: http://www.olame.org/ [Last accessed: 10 July 2016]

The centre provides support to women victims of sexual violence, to actions of peace-building at the local level and to many poverty reduction programmes. Mado Chideka also stresses that it is not surprising that the Catholic University of Louvain (Ucl) has in recent years created the honorary award of Doctor Honoris Causa to women from civil society in the Kivus. In 2010 Venantie Bisimwa Nabintu,[7] then executive secretary of Women's Network for Justice and Peace, received the award for her work in denouncing sexual abuse against women in armed conflict. In 2012, the prize was awarded to Solange Lusiku,[8] editor of the newspaper *Le Souverain*, a free and independent South Kivu general information newspaper, recognised as an effective tool in fighting for democracy and women's rights. During the interview on her advocacy work, Mado Chideka explained that recognition of women's work within civil society goes far beyond Belgium's borders such as with the award in 2009 of the Knights International Journalism Award to Chouchou Namegabe Nabintu, founder of the Association of Women Media South Kivu (AFEM)[9] in recognition of her reports broadcast by local radio on violence against women in the DRC. Mado Chideka knows these women quite well (some of them are family acquaintances whereas others are new relationships she has been building through her back and forth travels between Belgium and the DRC) and she has collaborated with a few of them in some of the development projects she has been involved in back home. With close family ties with the Eastern DRC she made several trips regularly between the two countries, particularly during the events of 1996. But in 2003, she had a brainwave and decided to commit to the cause. In the following excerpt, she tells us how her project to meet with the women of Mwenga (Province of South Kivu) was born:

> "The idea of going to Mwenga came in 2003. I met someone through a family relationship. My parents were pharmacists and had little pharmacies in the province. This person worked for my parents. I met him in Bukavu and he was the one who told me the story of the women buried alive in Mwenga. On my return, the idea began to mature. I started doing research, and at that time, it was really hard because nobody was talking about it. And then in 2007, my ideas became clearer and I started to tell to

[7] The speech of Venantie Bisimwa Nabintu when she received her honorary doctorate can be read at the following address: https://www.uclouvain.be/308411.html [Last accessed: 10 July 2016]
[8] In 2014 Solange Lusiku Nsimire was awarded the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) Courage in Journalism Award. (More on Solange Lusiku Nsimire can be found here: http://www.iwmf.org/solange-lusiku-nsimire/) [Last accessed: 10 July 2016]
[9] Available from: http://www2.afemsk.org/ [Last accessed: 10 July 2016]

myself, if we remain in fear, then we will never know what happened there. [Mado, in her thirties, in Belgium since 1997, Brussels, 2014].

In 2010, she also received the award 'Woman of Peace' for her advocacy work, particularly with the exhibition 'Stand up my mother' in Belgium, and in raising awareness about UN resolution 1325 and in the remote areas of Eastern Congo. Reconsidering the concept of *social remittances,* Levitt and Lamba-Nieves argue that "people's experiences before migrating strongly influence what they do in the countries where they settle; this, in turn, affects what they remit back to their homelands" (2011, p.2). The next sections will look respectively at two new political repertoires with on one hand, a theatre piece and on the other a photographic project.

Hearth of a Mother **as a one-woman show to denounce SGBV**

Kitoga describes *Heart of a Mother* as a one-woman show composed of different 'scenes' that blend testimonies of women with poems and stories written mostly by authors from the Congolese diaspora (both men and women). Each scene (which incorporates song, music and dance) carries a message that challenges and questions sexual violence perpetrated against women in the protracted conflict of DRC. In the tradition of the theatre of the oppressed developed by Augusto Boal (2000) in the 1960s, the artist invites the audience to discuss the performance as a mean of promoting social and political change.

One of the main scenes is a reflection about a testimony of a woman from Shabunda (one of the largest of the eight territories of South Kivu). To address the issue of rape used as a weapon of war, Kitoga creates her own story based on a testimony by the medical humanitarian organisation *Médecins Sans Frontières*. Stella Kitoga aims to question the politics of testimony and the practice of gathering evidence, whether by NGOs, researchers or judiciary actors, in a way which pushes women to speak publicly about the violence, in particular rape, to which they are subjected (Godin, 2015, p.28). The way some of the media has treated the subject of violence against women in the DRC has been qualified by Stearns (2009) as producing a 'pornography of violence' characterised by an escalation of scenarios all more sordid than the others. This situation, according to the author, leads to a form of 'rape tourism' in Bukavu and Goma where women may be interviewed more than a dozen times by journalists but also by researchers about the violence they have endured. As discussed by Malkki, who is interested in the figure of refugees in regimes of representation, there is in this abundance of testimonies a process of depersonalisation taking place, one that

leads to the production of an 'anonymous corporeality' (Feldman, 1994, in Malkki, 1996: 388). Those represented in this way come to be reduced only to their 'body'. No contextual element in the life of the person is given, nor are their culture, language, name, history, past, aspirations, etc. detailed. The image that is retained is one of a woman who needs help, a woman without a voice on whose behalf we must speak. The raped woman becomes a generic face rooted in silence. Instead of perpetuating the silence, Stella Kitoga shares, based on a sense of 'diasporic belonging', her own knowledge of the field providing biographical elements (though fictional) in her history. In so doing she re-historicises the mother's body by giving her a name, a process that can be called 'named corporality'.

Another central passage of the theatre performance is a tribute to the 15 women buried alive in Mwenga 1999 (UN Mapping Report, 2010, p.185). The scene is a tribute to these women and is based on a free interpretation of Catherine Tshefu's poem *To my fifteen martyred sisters* (*À mes quinze soeurs martyrs*)[10] (see Figure 1). Before singing, the author invites the audience (mostly women) to come to dance, via the intermediary of a song dedicated to the martyrs of the war by the Congolese musician Vianney Kazembe Musombwa. These dances are an opportunity for each to symbolically participate in a ritual of mourning to honour the memory of those women who could not be buried in accordance with tradition. This is according to the author directly inspired by playwright Yoka Lye Mudaba (when he was a professor at the National Institute for the arts). His play *Tshira* (or the Dance of Shadows and Masks) performed in 1978, was an exploration of ritual theatre, drawing its substance from the living matter of tradition (Kadima-Nzuji, 2012, p.87). The women who are part of the audience are invited to dance in the room and become entirely part of the scene. This performance is part of a wider process of exorcising the pain of the women buried alive but also the pain of those who survived the massacres (Godin, 2015, p.34). In doing so, Stella Kitoga invites all women to become witnesses and collectively denounce this crime against humanity and seek justice. Dancing with the audience, she begins to declaim:

Rest in peace, you who departed without our prayers.
May the ancestors welcome you, martyred souls,
May the raped earth of Congo rest lightly on you,
And may your spilled blood water our hopes.
May our mouths cry out for justice.

[10] The poem was written by Catherine Tshefu in French and was translated by Karen Bouwer (PhD. Professor and Coordinator of African studies, University of San Francisco). The full poem can be read on the following website: http://fpsquaregnon.skynetblogs.be/archive/2010/12/03/25-novembre-journee-internationale-pour-l-elimination-de-la.html [Last accessed: 10 October 2016].

Justice for our tortured sisters!

Stella Kitoga has been asked to perform this scene in several women's political mobilisations within the diaspora in Belgium, Britain, France and Norway but also Mwenga in the DRC during the third action of the World March of Women (WMW) held in Bukavu in October 2010. In doing so, she created a scheme in which the performance has become an act of transnational protest (Tarrow, 2005) reminding the Congolese state but also the international community of their obligations with regard to justice and reparation. Through the performance, she creates the opportunity for women embedded in two different localities (in Belgium and in the DRC) to link with one another in a novel way. This body experience aims to create new geographical as well as symbolic social bonds with 'Others' that are far from home. In the scholarship on diaspora politics (Adamson, 2012; Koinova, 2011; Sokefeld, 2006), the focus has mainly been on the building of diasporic networks and the creation of a diasporic identity to explain political mobilisation. The shortcoming in this approach is that it still considers diasporic groups as separate from society and as homogenous. Stella Kitoga's way of engaging diasporically shows the need to look at the interactions and connections between diasporic versus non-diasporic social fields at different levels (at the global/transnational/national/local level) and locations (across multiple nation states). In doing so, Congolese women in the diaspora have managed to increase their voice in a multiplicity of public spheres with people outside the diasporic group.

Figure 1. Stele in honour of the women buried alive in Mwenga (Photo: Stella Kitoga 2010).

Lastly, Stella Kitoga in *Hearth of a mother* does not offer a single reading of the question of SGBV; it addresses different aspects of violence against women. In doing so, the activist and playwright offers a more nuanced reading of violence against women. For instance, in the scene of a stick named *Mapendo*, the author aims to show the tenuous links that may exist between specific war-related violence and violence against women in a protracted conflict situation (before, during and after the conflict). The first part depicts a woman who tells her niece how her uncle mistreated her. As she sings, one discovers an angry woman, who no longer tolerates violence perpetrated against her: *Musa weye ni mubaya sana, Ukinywa pombe waninywea mimi, ulipo nioa Sula yangu haikua na hata alama moja* ("Musa, you're wrong, your drunkenness pushes you to beat me. When you married me, I had no scars" (Swahili song from Tanzania). The woman managed to take the stick named *Mapendo* (term in Swahili which means "love") with which her husband used to beat her and broke it in half. That evening, however, her husband does not come home having been forcibly recruited by armed groups. Gunshots ring out reminding the audience that war is never far away but life must carry on. The second part of the scene continues with the attack of a child soldier she manages to disarm. Here too, it is with a popular song that the author decides to narrate the story inspired by a funeral lament sung by the Lunda tribe in Katanga; she begins to hum: *Nalelalela ee balunda, lelo nasala boni* (I cry, I cry. My friends, what should I do?).

These two short stories capture the coexistence of several forms of violence: specific ones, directly related to the war with rape used as a weapon of war as well as intimate partner violence which occurs before, during and after the conflict. This scene recalls that sexual violence in the DRC is not only committed by armed groups but can also be committed by intimate partners in their own homes (Peterman et al., 2011; Kelly et al., 2011; Douma and Hilhorst, 2012; Myers Tlapek, 2015). Several studies, such as the one undertaken by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI, 2010) found a huge increase in the number of civilian-perpetrated rapes between 2004 and 2008. These findings indicate a kind of 'normalisation' of sexual violence among the community as a result of widespread rape during the conflict (HHI, 2010, p.39). Such an analysis blurs the lines between the popular image of the perpetrators (as armed rebels) and victims (as women only) (Smith and Cruz, 2011). To confine the understanding of rape to its existence as 'a weapon of war' does not allow for alternative explanations of sexual violence that may relate to broader gender dynamics in a war-torn eastern DRC. In fact, the connection between conflict-related violence and domestic violence is made impossible in the current UN conceptualisation of 'rape as a weapon of war'

and undermines the ripple effects of SGBV and the conflict more broadly which produces disenfranchised men, domestic abuse and destabilised families and vulnerable children (Kelly et al., 2011). Within this narrative, there is no prospect to look at SGBV as part of the continuum of violence that women, girls but also men and young boys can experience in times of insecurity (before, during and after conflict) (Meger, 2012).

The name given to the stick Mapendo, reveals a certain ambivalence of women who continue to love their husbands despite the violence they are subjected to. However, far from showing the image of a woman being resigned, the woman eventually overthrows the role assigned to her. By breaking the stick, she breaks the silence. This reversal of roles (which takes place in the two stories told) goes against the image of a passive woman. On the contrary, women become stronger, transcend the violence and are active agents of change. It is this strength of women to fight together that the author intends to show in her performance by inviting other women to join her in her advocacy work. After the play, when discussing the type of assistance women need, Stella Kitoga often criticises the curative approach to sexual violence (Douma and Hilhorst**,** 2012) that is derived from the two dominant narratives, both the humanitarian and 'rape as a weapon of war'. One of the alternative solutions the author stresses is the importance of including both men and women around the table when speaking about women's issues as men are the ones committing such acts of violence.

The exhibition: 'Stand up my mother'

The exhibition 'Stand up my mother' is the result of several trips Mado Chideka undertook in order to denounce sexual violence against women in a way that was more respectful of local women. Before speaking on their behalf, she wanted to meet some of the women. In the official presentation of the exhibition, she writes: "Thousands of women and girls were raped by combatant forces during armed conflict in eastern DRC (Kivu, Ituri, Maniema...). This exhibition is first of all a real encounter with women victims, but also with the people who support them every day...another way of testifying! Without intrusion into the privacy of all these women, the photos show their courage, but also communicate the suffering during armed conflict. These women did not give up despite the abuses they suffered, they continue to work the land, they are early to the fields, fishponds, markets for the survival of the entire community" [Mado, in her 30s, in Belgium since 1997, Brussels, 2014]. Among the 30 photographs on display, three of them will be discussed in this article as they illustrate best the spirit of the exhibition.

Figure 1. Women of the parish of Mwenga. (Photo: Mado Chideka 2007).

In her book, *Image Matters: Archive, Photography and the African Diaspora in Europe* (2012), Campt argues that it is important to understand the social life of the photo (2012, p.6) which includes both the intentions of the person who takes the photograph and of those who are being photographed. It also means thinking about what these people aspire to be, how they want to be seen, what they have sought to represent and articulate through them, and what they have tried to display. Campt's photographs focus on diaspora-as-staying-put or becoming part of 'here' whereas Mado Chideka's photographs refer to another presence of diasporas: diaspora-as-mobility (Rosenhaft, 2013). With this exhibition, Mado Chideka offers another representation of Congolese women living in a protracted conflict situation, seen through the eyes of a woman located in the diaspora but who travels back and forth. She therefore engages in what Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004) called a 'transnational way of belonging' which refers to practices that signal or enact identities which demonstrate a conscious connection to a particular group, here the women living in Mwenga territory. The first photo was taken in 2007 in Mwenga and this is what she told us about it:

> "I remember all the women in the parish of Mwenga. There was a woman, a gatekeeper of the community, who had been using her microphone around to call everyone…it is just by word of mouth over there…When we arrived, it was 3pm. The road had been very difficult; we only did 138km but it took us 5 hours [...]. We started talking with

> women; they talked about their experiences in relation to the rebellion, about the successive conflicts, the death of Kabila's father and then his son; it was a kind of melting pot; they were re-visiting their history. [Mado, in her 30s, in Belgium since 1997, Brussels, 2013].

While taking a walk in the village, she met several women returning from fishponds to sell their tilapia – a farmed fish of major economic importance in the DRC – on the local market. The woman standing at the right edge of the photograph was the one chosen to represent the exhibition poster. She, as explained by Mado Chideka, has: "a look that wears off, a proud and dignified look that takes us away from the usual images of women victims of sexual violence".[11] As Puechguirbal points out: "The war provided Congolese women with opportunities as well as burdens. They took over leadership positions and revived local networks. They were not mere victims as they fought for their survival" (2003, p.1274). This scholarly article resonates perfectly with the poetic and political legend attached to the photo: "Woe to you if you are born woman said my mother. You'll have to take care of the children and the elderly, fetching water, collecting firewood, preparing meals, ensuring crops and conservation. Our men are gone or dead and we are alone. We carry life and death. We carry on our backs bent our heavy crops on steep paths to the market. I bend under the weight, but I'm standing my mother! I only fear rape on roads on the way to the market." In her study of humanitarian crisis photography and self-representation in the DRC, Graham (2014) analyses how textual narratives are being used by humanitarian agencies 'to connect photographic subjects to broader trends of humanitarian suffering' (p.150). Captions are used in order to guide the audience to give donations to the organisation in order to treat the symptoms. By adopting such a process, "the photograph with text, the image, its excess and its own resonance, is quieted if not silence" (Ibid, p.151). Here, in the exhibition *Stand Up My Mother*, the same technique from visual humanitarian photography is used; however, the reaction the photographer/activist is looking for has nothing to do with alleviating women's suffering. Instead, the poetic prose alongside the picture invites the audience to enter into an imaginary dialogue with the women of Mwenga and walk with them to learn from their struggles. Far from the humanitarian and security narratives, Congolese women engage in a battle for social citizenship relying on a 'political motherhood narrative' in which they position themselves as protectors of the family as well as of the nation subverting gender roles while at the same time fighting for their economic and political independence (Werbner,

[11] Interview with Mado Chideka (November 2013) (on file with the author and translated by the author)

1999). The second image (Figure 3) portrays women from the village of Miti (South Kivu) and was taken in 2008. These women are part of the local association Sisterhood (Association Solidarités Féminines).

Figure 3. Members of the organisation called Sisterhood in the village of Miti (South Kivu) (Photo: Mado Chideka 2008).

As Mado Chideka describes it, women are "dressed in their finest clothes that come from the bottom of their suitcase (typically a wax), that they usually wear on Lord's Day, women did not, however hide the harshness of their experiences on their face. So it is a mixed picture they wish to present of themselves: one that is looking forward without forgetting".[12] These photographs show women living their lives and emphasises their political, economic, social and cultural roles. They invite the audience to experience other modes of identification with Congolese women presented not as mere victims but as actors in their own lives, taking care of their vulnerabilities; as mothers; as heads of families; as cultivators; and as heads of households who fulfil and honour a variety of responsibilities and duties despite difficult surroundings. Mado Chideka as an activist plays the role of a 'social broker' (Diani, 2003) connecting individuals who hold different stances and worldviews through the use of photography. New encounters through the medium of photography can then lead to new forms of political convergence between women in the DRC and those in Belgium pushed to decolonise their minds and go beyond the victimisation of Congolese women's bodies.

[12] Interview with Mado Chideka (November 2013) (on file with the author and translated by the author)

These collective portraits reveal one of the mutual resistance strategies that women use in order to reduce their vulnerabilities and increase their communal security. Women appear to have chosen to be on the move, running their own businesses in order to survive. These photographs depict women as "subjects to become" (close to Stuart Hall's conception of identity, both as one becoming and as one being; Campt (2012, p.17)) and in that sense establish a connection with vernacular photography. What Mado Chideka has been trying to do is establish a relationship that is more egalitarian among those being photographed and the photographer giving priority to the agency of the subjects. In doing so, her project stands at the intersection between vernacular photography and humanitarian photography as the familiarity found in the photographs invite to some kind of resonance with the world of Congolese women, offering to the audience a mode of mutual identification based on the similarities between women rather than an "us-versus-them" mindset based on essentialising differences. The images go against the practice of showing the body as seriously injured, a practice that, as Sontag (2003) argues, has been common for the past couple of centuries and in which Africans have been staged like zoo animals in world exhibitions. Congolese women in the Western media often appear as 'different', as women who are there 'to be seen' (Sontag, 2003, in Baaz and Stern 2013, p.92) rather than as persons ('like us') 'who also see' (Sontag, 2003). Today, they are almost exclusively represented through dominant narratives (the security and the humanitarian narratives) reactivating – and this is especially true regarding the DRC under the colonial legacy – the white saviour complex to save black women from black men ('white wo/man's burden to save brown women from brown men', Spivak 1989, p.297 in Baaz and Stern 2013, p.92). Congolese women choose not to focus on the most spectacular features of the conflict but on the most mundane aspects of daily life. Rather than staging the chaos, they choose to show the order that they are recreating every day. It is the daily life of women within war that is portrayed, which goes against what is often portrayed: an image of a raped woman, without past or future, reduced to the act which has stained her. Finally, the photographs are printed on large-format canvases. The size of the subjects is almost equivalent to those of the people who come to view the exhibition. This choice further confirms the idea underlying the project of creating a symbolic space for people to meet and share common aspirations, namely aspiring to a better life and to live in peace.

The third and last picture of the exhibition shows a monument depicting a woman who has been profaned, which was inaugurated in the capital of the province of North Kivu in Goma in March 2009 (to end women's month).

Figure 4. Sculpture dedicated to the victims of sexual violence, Goma (Photo: Mado Chideka 2009).

Figure 4 shows the statue of a naked woman trampled by the boots of her persecutors. The monument is about 3 metres high and was erected in the grounds of the Metanoia Institute of the Free University of the Great Lakes Country in Goma (ULPGL), where (as mentioned previously) Mado Chideka conducted part of her studies. This also shows, as does Stella Kitoga's account, that 'experiences before migrating strongly influence what they do in the countries where they settle' (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011, p.2) and in particular how they choose to represent Congolese women. In selecting this photograph, she also establishes the links between her past and her present, providing her with some legitimacy in speaking about, and even more in speaking for, the women in the DRC. The face of the woman is scarred by all the forms of violence from which she suffered. The sculptor of the work wanted those who look at the monument to say: never again. It represents the rape of Congolese women but also the rape of an entire nation. It is not only the body of the woman that is represented but, metaphorically, the Congo (Alma Mater), trampled by various rebellions, massacres and the plunder of its resources. The angle chosen in this photograph is far from insignificant. Behind the boot of the gunman in the foreground lies a lamb. But in hiding the lamb, the artist wishes to draw attention to the fact that change will come mainly from the action of

men and women. It draws attention to the responsibility of everyone to participate to end the impunity of those who commit violence. She also wants the audience to see the problems Congolese women face that go far beyond sexual violence to which women are often reduced and sometimes even push women to act as sexual violence victims in order to have access to aid (Douma and Hilhorst, 2012; Heaton, 2014). Mado Chideka invites the audience to consider other types of violence affecting women and girls and to reflect on all violations of women's human rights (economic, social, civil, political and cultural) in the DRC.

Dismantling dominant political representations of SGBV through the use of art

Both *Heart of a Mother* and *Stand up my mother* address the issue of SGBV in the DRC in a more nuanced way than in some of the dominant narratives used in the Western media, within the international community or in existing scholarship (Baaz and Stern, 2013). Through these two projects combining art and activism in diasporic politics, it is observed that women in the diaspora play a crucial role in the manufacture of new postcolonial social interactions between women here and women there. As pointed out by Saada (2000), the sociologist Sayad (1999, p.37) "identifies a spatial contradiction that he calls "the double absence." On the one hand, the immigrant is always an emigrant – absent from the society of origin, and increasingly distant from it in cultural and psychological terms. On the other hand, the immigrant remains an outsider in the host society, subject to a residency status that is always conditional and revocable, and prevented from participating in civil society." This temporal contradiction was developed at a time when nation/state/society were considered as the natural social and political form of the modern world, an assumption designated by Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002, p.302) as methodological nationalism. The trajectories of transnational political engagement of both Stella Kitoga and Mado Chideka, reveal on the contrary 'a multi-presence'. Both of them, through their transnational advocacy work, have re-affirmed their connections to their homelands (either in involving local women's songs such as in the play or through images that connect her personal history to the Congolese women's lives back home) but also within the hostland (in performing the play as well as showing the exhibition in several settings). In doing so, they manage to suggest another politics of representation of Congolese women affected by the conflict. In using these new repertoires of contention, Congolese women activists suggest another way to relate to the 'Other': to sow the seeds of a genuine solidarity, collaboration and social responsibility between women (and men to a lesser extent) in the DRC, Belgium and beyond. Through art (here theatre and photography), they attempt to change the political imaginaries on which

humanitarian responsibility is often based and attempt to restructure post-colonial relations of domination and subordination. The theatre performance as well as the photography exhibition, both as new forms of political aesthetics of power, aim to generate a form of 'cosmopolitan responsibility' transgressing traditional notions of bounded communities (such as families, tribes, or nations) (Black, 2013, p.104). Through their advocacy work, they both engage and invite others (especially women) to engage with them in what is called a 'transversal political dialogue' (Yuval-Davis, 2006) as opposed to 'identity politics'. They invite the audience to consider a new alternative model of humanitarian responsibility where: "the vulnerable other should be portrayed as an historical agent—someone who actively strives to manage her life, yet under conditions severely constraint [*sic*] by structures of injustice, global and local" (Chouliaraki 2011, p.375).

However, whereas Congolese women artivists criticize the discourse of those meditating/appropriating/instrumentalising and dehumanising the voices of Congolese women, one may still wonder if what they suggest can remedy the lack of agency of the latter. Congolese women activists in the diaspora position themselves directly among the legitimate political interlocutors calling, as Dayley states it (2006), for the inclusion of the masses in the political community (p.314). Their activism aims to include more grassroots women's perspectives in the diaspora and back home in the analysis of the conflict and its solutions. In doing so, they emphasise as much as they can the participation component of UN resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security which has been undermined by the two main narratives on SGBV in the DRC: the humanitarian narrative and the security narrative with 'rape as a weapon of war'.

In addition, through their advocacy work they want to go beyond the white complex saviour complex by portraying a more complex picture of the issue of SGBV but also by inviting other women (in this case in Belgium but also beyond their own activist circles) to support them. As they both mentioned to me during our numerous encounters (Stella Kitoga and Mado Chideka): "what is done for us [Congolese women] without us, is done against us." Women in the Congolese diaspora take part in the debate surrounding the contemporary politics of framing sexual violence in war and as 'subaltern voices' – often being marginalised and instrumentalised by more powerful social actors – they thereby manage to speak through innovative contentious repertoires.

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