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Emerging Voices:
How Transitional Justice Can Transform the Congolese Diaspora
into Agents of Change

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ABSTRACT

Congo-Brazzaville is a small West African country with the economic potential for every citizen to live in comfortable wealth, but its current political context reads like a Hobbesian, dystopian novel. The United Nations lists the country at 137 on the Human Development Index. The irony is that the Congolese voice is missing or “disappeared” from most human rights coverage, academic literature and social research.

This thesis therefore rests keenly on the logic of qualitative research. The Congolese diaspora seemed a trigger point, a way of contending with this disappearance and awakening the “voices from below”. By working with a small sample of the local diaspora, focusing on their stories and experiences, the work seeks to bring clarity and in-depth understanding to their metaphysical hijack.¹

Surprisingly, what emerged were the false, dominant narratives that keep the Congolese psychologically, politically, and economically suppressed. Namely, 1) Congo is a poor nation, 2) colonialism is dead, 3) ethnic conflict is the cause of war, and 4) Congo has no future. This work shows how and why transitional justice can dismantle and transform these narratives, and offer a moment of reckoning.

Key words: Congo-Brazzaville, diaspora, qualitative research, colonialism, ethnic conflict, narrative, emerging voices, transitional justice

Chapter 1: Why Congo?

1.1 Primary Concerns

“Congo is the poor guy sitting on a bag of gold, doesn’t know how rich he is.”² This is the metaphor of the Congolese identity in a perpetual existential crisis. When the Congolese tell their own story, more astonishing than their country’s unfortunate condition, is the poverty of identity and the ironic disposition of someone who does not know who he is, or what he has. This small West African country of approximately 5.2 million³ has the economic potential for every citizen to live in comfortable wealth, but the current political context reads like a Hobbesian, dystopian novel with many dark chapters and multiple antagonists. Violence is of a different kind: a metaphysical hijack, an economic slavery. Today even civil servants are not getting their paychecks. Some have no clean water. Families take turns eating lunch and dinner because there’s not enough for everyone at each meal.⁴ The United Nations (UN) lists Congo-Brazzaville at 137 on its Human Development Index to give “snapshots of current conditions as well as long-term trends”⁵ and yet this lack of basic human rights standards is a side effect of a much deeper illness.

This country is situated within a broad narrative of powerful international actors, critical political turning points, recurring themes of endemic corruption and human rights violations. Need-based theories of conflict imply that when the basic human needs of the people are not being met, more conflict is inevitable.⁶

UN stats do not reflect the deeper reality of why or how the current authoritarian regime has an unsustainable business model. Though facts are startling in their macro compression (as they should be), they do not give a full picture of the existential crisis of

the Congolese people or situate them in a specific colonial history. If we follow Foucault's logic, it is necessary to investigate "how truth is constructed, who has the right to speak what counts as the truth, and who interpretations of reality are ignored, marginalized forgotten or disqualified as anecdotal or unscientific."⁷ Most of the narratives in news headlines, humanitarian reports, international NGO memos, or UN documents are not expressed by Congolese persons or groups. The Congolese voice is not heard, or felt, in these spaces. This enables the contradiction with which Jean Paul Sartre charged colonialism: "laying claim to and denying the human condition at the same time".⁸

In light of this contradiction, the purpose of this work is to make the Congolese voice primary, give it resonance, and amplify it by using the methodology similar to a human rights investigator or researcher in a truth commission. It seemed necessary to ask the questions of the Congolese that no one was asking, and tell the stories of Congo that no one was telling.

It cannot be said that voice does not matter, or that it is without power, otherwise an authoritarian regime would not be intent on crushing it. How I was telling the story of the Congolese diaspora therefore became a primary concern; the choice was intentional not to appropriate a distant academic or clinical voice, but to be keenly aware of my own voice, and to be sensitive to how I was telling this history, and why. My mother was the first of her family among twelve children to come to the United States from Congo, and she quickly became a gatekeeper to those in the Congolese community seeking asylum and refuge. Our home was filled with Congolese people whose lives were in transit. In the late 1990s, when violence erupted in Brazzaville, my 60-something-year-old

grandmother fled into Congo's impenetrable Forest and subsisted on leaves, herbs, and bugs for months and months. Fear so ravaged the country that it was said the hair of children turned white. The shock of her survival: she arrived to the United States as a refugee, and I stared at what the odyssey had done to her feet.⁹

As a half-Congolese, with an insider-outsider perspective, there was something meaningful at stake, and I wanted to approach it with the same urgency as Armenian poet Peter Balakian, when he conducted research on the Armenian genocide and the history of its denial: "There are moments in the shape of the narrative and the drive of the history when opportunities present themselves, when you must resist the expository voice that is first instinct to those trained in purely academic ways. Those opportunities often revolve around a character, or an event that has expansive possibilities, a place connected to that event, a place you can inhabit with images of locale, narrative detail, voice, and dialogue."¹⁰ These considerations have been a long-time personal and academic preoccupation, and in assuming this auto-ethnographic posture, the research was therefore urgent and primal.

The Congolese diaspora seemed to me a trigger point, a way of awakening "voices from below" and exploring the potential of suppressed people to rise up. What is the agency of people in repressed cultures? What are their hopes? What did they suffer? What voices were emerging? People who have suffered aggravated psychological, emotional, physical, and economic duress, need a moment of reckoning.

1.2 Defining The Diaspora

I was part of the community, and yet at a distance from certain experiences of suffering in the troubled history of Congo.¹¹ In search of first-generation diaspora more connected to this history, I was leaning on a robust definition: “What is at stake is the potential for diaspora to continue to be an enabling and productive critical term that connects histories of displacements with questions of power, identification, race/ethnicity, and citizenship (among others).”¹²

In “problematizing history and creating interpretive perspectives”¹³ by focusing on this local community, I was led by a few questions: What are their preoccupations? What helps them to form a *We the People*? These questions brought me to the first shock – there was no “we”. The Congolese diaspora did not gather around a specific guiding principle, or philosophy, or even identify as a close-knit community. My first misconception was that there was a unified, coherent diaspora.

One Congolese man was quite disconcerted at my mention of “*the diaspora*”. He asked for clarification: *Which diaspora? What do you mean?* And thereby quickly corrected me: “There is not *one* diaspora, there are *two* diasporas.” The two diasporas, two competing histories, are created by one divisive political structure. Power dynamics are reflected in the internal social conflicts and tensions within this group.

I was looking for metaphors, images and ideas that bind the diaspora together; what I discovered were the dominant narratives that keep them divided and traumatized. To explore these new dimensions, it was critical to do two important things simultaneously. First, to keep hold of the human interest in the situation: portray people in their fullness, granting them their pasts, their futures, memories, hopes, opinions, and,

most especially, contradictions. And then second, engage the context analytically and honestly.¹⁴ In a suppressed community, identity is a framework that can be psychologically skewed or seemingly incongruent. Qualitative approaches to the how, why, and who, maintains a dialogue that is open to the contradictions, inconsistencies, and subversive patterns.

The Congolese are shrewd, deeply analytical, taking nothing at face value. Their country has experienced abrupt levels of change, and in other ways, long seasons of stagnation. The changing rate of political regimes, and economic structures, is enough to confound even the most informed and vigilant citizen. A particular moment of implosion in the 1990s – a bloody coup – interrupted Congo’s first and final attempt at democracy. Framing this moment as a “civil war” implies that there were two groups within the population fighting, but this was not the case. The violence was an armed conflict among political elites, two opposing camps who occupied the capital city in a struggle for power.¹⁵ The civilians contained between the two camps suffered grave human rights abuses: from 1997-1998, there were losses of more than 14,000 people¹⁶ and internal displacement of 80,000.¹⁷ Different organizations report different numbers death tolls and displacements, but the Congolese diaspora find these numbers to be suspect, and claim that there were thousands, thousands more fatalities and IDPs.

What has happened to the country after this implosion? What collapsed in the process? What was there, what was lost, where are we now? One group ran for their lives into exile. The common denominator among these escapees was that they were mostly from the South, the region where President Pascal Lissouba was from. The man staging the coup against this President was Denis Sassou Nguesso from the North. The uprisings

were not random acts of violence but occurred at a strategic point in Congo-Brazzaville's history, when the hope and potential for democracy was ripe. Lissouba had won the first democratic election in the country, and a major tenet of his campaign was to secure economic freedom by making sure that the Congo kept a higher percentage of profits from oil markets in its agreements with France. Hannah Arendt argues that these kind of historic moments not only "immediately attract the potential or actual intervention of the superpowers, but their very conflicts, or at least the timing of their outbreaks, are suspect of having been manipulated or directly cause by interests and maneuvers that have nothing whatsoever to do with the conflicts and interests at stake in the region itself."¹⁸ The coup was a moment of implosion when all the subterranean elements came to the surface: Sassou succeeded in overthrowing President Lissouba and then declared himself President. It was the moment that halted Congo's democracy in its infancy.

For the past twenty-five years now, the Congolese have since had the same leader, who after he changed the Constitution to extend his term limits, became their President-for-life. It is more proof for their resignation that nothing changes and that everything stays the same. The current government is a predatory structure that does not protect human rights or uphold dignity of the people. In fact, it is actually the most persistent abuser of human rights, and the people need to be protected from it.

"Today if you go start challenging Sassou Nguesso, you only have two options: you get killed, or they arrest you and put you in jail," said Hugo, who survived the conflict during the coup in 1997, and escaped Congo in 2001. He is still amazed that he lived to tell the story.¹⁹ "They own the economy. They own the army. They own the justice. So, Sassou Nguesso, normally, he is like the King of Congo. Even though the

Congo is a republic, but it's being run as a kingdom. Because Sassou Nguesso decides who lives, who dies, who gets nominated, you know, in the leadership of the country.”

Generations have spread their wings under these the two diasporas. You have 1) the diaspora who had to flee for their lives during the coup, and 2) the diaspora who maintain their livelihood from the current government administration. Power inequalities are sustained, not reversed, because of this schism. Such hierarchies inherently bring with it the nature of distrust, complicity, and corruption. For example, if you introduce yourself and share your family name with another Congolese person, they can usually distinguish your tribe, clan, what languages you speak, whether you are from the North or South, and potentially, your political affiliations. Common wisdom warns: *Be aware of the difference. Know whom you are speaking to.* The long-term effect of the staged coup was the collapse of trust within the Congolese community, and from that also emerged their deep pessimism of authority figures and political systems. The Congolese do not separate or compartmentalize the political from the personal. Politics is deeply personal.

This is one reason that the Congolese remain guarded—the fear of being discovered by contending tribes, or by those in the community with opposing political views. Trust is on the reserve. It takes time to build equity in this community. It seemed, at first, that the diaspora were interested in conversation about Congo, but the moment they realized what the discussion would involve – politics, voicing their opinions, signing a document, the option of being audio recorded – they became scarce and difficult to reach. This was an important discovery: what I thought would be a simple process of finding and enrolling Congolese participants to share their story and voice their struggle, actually presented itself as a challenge.²⁰

Cyr²¹ surprised me with his questions at our meeting: *Do you work for the Congolese government?* He watched me closely when I answered. Then: *Will you send this to the Congolese government?* Again, he studied me. His visible agitation about audio recording is something that was common with scheduling interviews. He declined to be recorded but shared deeply of his story.

Cyr had participated in a protest against a sham Presidential election in Congo. For that, he spent four days in jail. At the time he had an internship with the Police Chief, and his political activity scared his boss, who did not offer him a long-term job. His father told him, *You cannot stay here, it's not safe.* He came to United States in 2012 and then eventually submitted himself to the Survivors of Torture program at NYU's Bellevue Hospital, where he shared his story with lawyers. He waited and waited and waited, and while he did so, he learned English, moved from job to job, worked in a restaurant, at a car wash, in a bakery, as an Uber driver. He joined a local association that gathers monthly called Africans United. Five-and-half years later he was granted asylum. He has not seen his wife or daughter in eight years.

One might think that distance would allow for a vibrant intellectual and social space to express and encourage identity, but in some ways the diaspora is still in the grip of subversive elements. A conflict that began among political elites has deeply divided the civilian population, even the diaspora living outside of the country's borders. The reason we do not hear a Greek chorus rising in protest as one voice is because they are not a people who are united, and they are without a grounded, conceptual framework of *We the People*. Within these social barriers, and power hierarchies, there appeared to be a very subdued civil society.

“You have to know why they hurt,” said David, a Congolese man who came alone to the United States at eighteen years old.²² “People are hurting.” David’s father was a pilot in the army and his mother was secretary in the army, both under the leadership of President Lissouba. He cannot return to the Congo, because of his last name, and because he resembles his father in appearance. “I don’t know where they buried my brother until today. It’s the feeling that is there...”

The memory of the coup is enough to keep people subdued: “a fundamental difference between modern dictatorships and all other tyrannies of the past is that terror is no longer used as a means to exterminate and frighten opponents, but as an instrument to rule masses of people who are perfectly obedient.”²³ The regime has succeeded in dividing the people – so that they are without a vibrant civil society.

The regime does not tolerate contrary opinions. Consider the threat of retaliation for an offhand remark: the regime is known for snuffing out dissidents, arbitrary arrests, disappearances, and even sudden death. It has even been suggested that the regime has intelligence operatives working all over the world. It was not until later in our conversation that David revealed that he was actually a nephew to President Lissouba. (This seemed to be a metaphor for Congo. Everyone is somebody’s uncle. Congo seems like a village where everyone knows each other, where everyone is related.) After the success of the coup, the males in his family immediately became primary targets to the newly, self-asserted regime – even after they escaped Congo. He said, “Because my uncle, my father, they killed them outside of the country. It’s not that they was in the country. They followed them outside of the country because they knew those people could one day go back and get the power back. So. It’s painful. That’s why children of

those people, we are not talking. We are closing our voice because we still got pain inside us.” Whether the administration’s capacity to do so is true, or not, it has succeeded in making a diaspora community *believe* that it is possible, and in fact, probable.

The fear of current regime has grown to mythic proportions. These dominant narratives ultimately dilute, diminish or delete the potential of emerging voices or rising leaders. Confronted with the overwhelming sense of proportions in these narratives, one is disoriented. That is the true purpose of such narratives – fear, speechlessness, submission.

1.3 The Roadmap

History has always involved very strong power relations (victor/loser, oppressor/oppressed, narrator/pawn), especially concerning critiques about who is reading, writing, and living it.²⁴ This work attempts to “explode clichés and break apart simplifying and misleading frames” of Congo’s recent history.²⁵ Essential considerations include looking at the dominant narratives²⁶ and “the unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting”²⁷ them. What are the dominant narratives? Why are they present? What are they hiding? These narratives succeed in keeping the Congolese both psychologically, politically, and economically suppressed. These need to be confronted²⁸ and this will focus on deconstructing the following dominant narratives:

1. Congo is a poor nation
2. Colonialism is dead
3. Ethnic conflict is the cause of war
4. Congo has no future

The above will serve as an analytical roadmap to arrive at why transitional justice will be a critical vehicle of the Congolese voices confronting these narratives.

“Attention needs to focus on how truth is refracted through other priorities and agendas”²⁹ as these dominant narratives have an architecture that ultimately serve a purpose. These “enabling fictions”³⁰ (to borrow the phrase from the scholar Joseph Slaughter) in their conception and performance are intentional. This suggests that the behavior of the current regime in Congo is not mere ineptitude on behalf of its leaders, but is actually part of a long-term strategy in which powerful international actors receive the benefits, and the Congolese people suffer. It is important to do an analysis of these enabling partners, and this means taking a look at who is in power? Who, after certain events, or turning points, is growing in power? And finally, this dares to interrogate those agents of power that often go unchallenged.

This work will pivot around these dominant narratives to arrive at why transitional justice is so critical to this conversation about Congo and the diaspora. Such a mechanism directly approaches the dominant narratives in order to dismantle them.

1.4 Why Transitional Justice?

Transitional justice presents both dilemmas and opportunities. The questions unfold – what is the mechanism within this field that is unapologetic about dealing with difficult questions? Unafraid to confront systemic corruption? Deals with hope for the future? According to Priscilla Hayner in her book *Unspeakable Truths*, truth commissions are the “official bodies set up to investigate and report on a pattern of past human rights abuses.”³¹ “Transitional justice asks the most difficult questions imaginable about law and politics”³² and doesn’t run from complexity. Truth commissions explore

“the difficult underside of these questions” in order to understand “how states and individuals might reckon with horrible abuses of the past”.³³

The urgency of this discussion comes at a moment of two great reveals, of which the Congolese diaspora have been aware of for many years. *The Guardian*³⁴ exposed President Sassou Nguesso’s son of stealing \$50 million from Congo’s treasury and hiding the funds in private accounts, and the Corruption Investigations Team at *Global Witness*³⁵ did an in-depth investigation into the lucrative spending habits of the Presidential family and his administration. Organizations such as *Global Witness* approach the questions publicly that the diaspora have wondered in private: Where has all of Congo’s money gone?³⁶ If Congo has no money, what are these recent discoveries of multi-million-dollar accounts? The diaspora claim that they were made to believe that Congo has no money. But they suspect that millions and millions of dollars from Congo have been siphoned to different parts of the globe.

Perhaps the most crucial element of a truth commission: “The official and public recognition of past abuses serves to effectively un-silence a topic that might otherwise be spoken of only in hushed tones, long considered too dangerous for general conversation, rarely reported honestly in the press, and certainly out of bounds of the official history taught in schools. In effect, the report of a truth commission reclaims a country’s history and opens it for public review.”³⁷

A truth commission may offer a moment of reckoning for the Congolese diaspora. As a mechanism that can adapt to different situations or regions, the diaspora can occupy this space in creative and innovative ways, and bring the Congolese voice onto a public platform. A commission of inquiry, particularly examining the democratic implosion in

the 1990s and the repressive administration that asserted itself since that historic fallout, might give Congo the agility and resilience needed to guide its future.

Transitional justice has confronted some of the most authoritarian regimes, defunct political systems, and abysmal human rights conditions. Its versatility has the potential to dismantle dominant narratives, unearth suppressed voices, and offer creative paths forward for Congo, and her diaspora. Truth-seeking, or fact-finding, processes of human rights violations by non-judicial bodies can take many shapes and forms, but often they look at events holistically, both their causes and impacts.³⁸ The function and purpose of transitional justice is that the dominant narrative, often the voice of the oppressor, is flipped, reversed, interrupted, to reveal a hidden narrative that has been historically suppressed.

Chapter 2: Colonialism and the Poverty Narrative

2.1 Is Colonialism Dead?

The Leviathan of dominant narratives in the Congo is that colonialism is dead. This is a primary contention that needs to be addressed, according to the diaspora. It is a topic that came up in virtually every conversation concerning Congo's politics. The diaspora say: *France was our colonizer. They are still present in Brazza. Anything happens, France knows. We cannot really talk about the political freedom or independence.*³⁹ This perception tunnels through these Congolese voices to challenge dominant narratives and explore why they exist. The dominant narratives do well to hide a subversive reality – they not only obscure meaningful subtext and voices, but are a source of harm; or in the words of G.K. Chesterton, “everything is prolonging its existence by denying it exists”.⁴⁰

It is therefore critical to disrupt this dominant narrative by bringing attention to power hierarchies. The most pressing and urgent hierarchy to approach is Congo's colonial history and the “lingering forms of colonial authority”.⁴¹ Postcolonial theory claims that “the world we inhabit is impossible to understand except in relationship to the history of imperialism and colonial rule.”⁴² This means that it is impossible to conceive of Congo-Brazzaville's current state of fragility, structural inertia, monstrous debt, and endemic corruption, in the absence of France's colonial encounters and oppression.⁴³ Without this kind of analysis, the danger is in managing the symptoms of the Congolese problem, and never striking a deathblow at the root.

1960 is often celebrated as the “Year of Africa” and on August 15 of that year, Congo took a quantum leap forward in proclaiming its independence, but tethered this

leap by signing agreements for continued defense and cooperation with France.⁴⁴ This association between France and her former African colonies is known as *Françafrique*: a term coined to maintain a subversive continuity.⁴⁵ More than 50 years after independence, this continuity is still surprisingly alive and vibrant, “accepted by and acceptable to both France and the Francophone Africa.”⁴⁶

The language itself is revealing. *Françafrique* is French wordplay for Francophone Africa, but it also sounds like the phrase *France à fric*, which literally means *France on the take for cash*.⁴⁷ In an article by the same title, scholar Ian Taylor suggests that this rhetoric is no accident. His research shows that “of all the former colonial powers in Africa, France has retained the most intense political, social, economic and culturally intense ties after independence, early on recognized as being neocolonial in nature.”⁴⁸ In this hierarchy, France is the writer of the Congolese story, and the shaper of its culture, politics, and economy, to guarantee easy access to rich natural resources and lucrative markets in Africa.⁴⁹ “French don’t produce for themselves – don’t have the materials to build up everything in the country,” said David. “They set up politics that bring them what they need.”

This work is a counter-narrative to the notion that France is an “ideological scapegoat”⁵⁰ for Congo-Brazzaville and its concerns. Quite the contrary, according to the diaspora, most problems and troubling questions stem from this point of origin. This critique is in an attempt at decolonizing such dominant frameworks; to confront and deconstruct this meta-narrative of *Françafrique*; that is to say, neocolonialism does not only operate in economics, politics, infrastructure, but operates in who is writing history,

who is telling it, and how people conceptualize the problem of Congo or the Congolese question.

2.2 The CFA

Françafrique markets itself as a “special relationship”⁵¹ – a mutually beneficial agreement that is sophisticated, stable and desirable by both France and Africa. The notion of Congo’s independence is fiercely contested by the diaspora. They contend that their economy is in “intensive care” and has been for many years, and that, in reality, Congo is a particular kind of slave. One of the clearest expressions of this slavery is Congo *vis-à-vis* the CFA currency⁵² – the monetary policy that France has used to anchor itself in African zones post-independence. The special relationship subverts the fact that the genesis of the CFA is colonial⁵³ and “that the French ruling elites never equated decolonization with retreat, nor fully accepted the idea of African independence”.⁵⁴ Neocolonialism hides itself in the very marrow of this special relationship.

Patrice⁵⁵ is a Congolese man who served as a junior advisor to the prime minister of Congo in the late 1980s before moving to the United States. He knows Congo’s internal machinery, the mentality behind its government leaders, and has seen both the hope and the dark side of politics. He has kept a keen, steadfast gaze on the Congo from abroad for more than 30 years. His experiences working in government reinforce that the CFA is subservient in many forms, and that the real buying power is in the French universe. “Francophone African countries are not totally in control of their own currencies,” he said. He cites examples that illustrate that the CFA is a blatant example of functioning neocolonialism and an intentional tool to keep Congo underdeveloped.⁵⁶ For example: 1) CFA money is made and printed in France. 2) The currency itself is

impotent. 3) CFA operates exactly the same way the Nazis operated economic systems. The diaspora use strong language in to describe Congo's situation, because they live within the subtext that no one is reading. News articles have also referred to the CFA as "monetary Nazism"⁵⁷ in which Congo is "*de jure* independent" but in reality deeply constrained through economic policy directed by France.⁵⁸ Patrice said, "If you are an independent country, how would you explain that? You know, that another country would keep some of your money?"

Congo was bringing in the rich supply of her resources to French institutions. In particular, Patrice noted that during his civil service term, the French kept one-third of the revenues from the Congolese treasury during oil, wood, and mineral deals. "It is not for you to make the final decision," Patrice said about Congo's dealings with France. "It is for them to make the final decision on what you can buy or not." Others from the diaspora have shared that when the time comes to make executive decisions, Congo must ask preliminary questions: *Can we do this? Will it have an impact on French interests?* That is to say, France has veto power.⁵⁹ The subliminal message is that France brings stability and economic force, and that Congo would never be able to operate without France. The diaspora claim it is a false independence because France guides everything remotely.

How does France get away with it? It is a central question that scholars like Tamar Golan (among other international journalists and African dissidents) have been asking for more than 30 years. Golan cites an important tenet of how *Françafrique* works: most of the former French colonies are states are relatively small and have populations never exceeding five million, as in Congo.⁶⁰ She emphasizes that "the French political system,

which was transplanted to its African colonies, is a centralized system which has not tolerated the separate development of its ethnic components.”⁶¹

Patrice explains that Congo develops French industry to its own detriment, and that true cost of these transactions is the erosion of Congolese culture and identity. “They always say that it’s important to know who you are. You know, your identity,” he said. “And I believe that one of the things that have caused many of us in, especially in Francophone Africa, to completely lose our way, is also because we have lost what our true identity is.”

“In the case of the Congo, for example, we literally have destroyed our own country. And that has to do with the fact that, you know, in the late 60s, you know, we became a revolutionary country. I mean, we joined, you know, the revolutionary movements of a lot of communist countries, and many things like that. And leaders used that culture to really take control of the economy, the political arena and even the culture... You had to identify – literally renounce to your own culture – and identify as the culture of the moment.”

“Majority of Congolese today, are people, really I can say, they are like naked culturally, you know, and that also has an impact on the way they behave, you know, on what they believe in.”

Patrice is skeptical of the notion of rising voices as way to respond to this kind of tyranny. Are voices enough? A greater impact, he suggests, would be for African expats who own big companies to can make a political protest by potentially paralyzing a sector of the economy. “What is missing in the Congolese economy is free enterprise,” he said. He admits this is difficult to navigate because the current regime has a firm grip in every

sector in the society. People have to struggle their way through many obstacles. “There’s nothing to encourage people to invest into the private sector to become business owners.” His point: France pays attention to the economy, and it will pay attention to anything that can destabilize it.

2.3 Complicity

Once again, how does France get away with it? It would be erroneous to deny the complicity of Congolese leadership. Given the insecurity of most African regimes where survival is key,⁶² the role of the African elites perpetuating dependency with France cannot be underestimated.⁶³ Such networks can only be thoroughly administered with the help of insiders, which is ultimately counter to the interest of their own countries and their own people.⁶⁴ The irony is that even Congolese elites become victims in the context of neocolonialism.

This topic of complicity is salient in a very sensitive market in Congo – oil production. The story goes that in West African oil zones, “*economics is politics*”.⁶⁵ Congo-Brazzaville is the fourth largest producer of oil in the African continent⁶⁶ and “oil has pumped steadily through decolonization, nationalizations, Marxism-Leninism, coups and civil wars since it was discovered in the 1950s.”⁶⁷ Omar Bongo, the former President of Gabon, the neighboring oil-rich African country in the CFA zone, has said: “Africa without France is a car without a driver. France without Africa is a car without petrol.”⁶⁸

The oil market is a haven for corruption:⁶⁹ “The huge complexity of energy markets, and the benefits that market participants can derive from their secrecy, partly explain why it is so hard to bring about transparency in the oil industry.”⁷⁰ It lacks proper

governance; it experiences high levels of capital flight; tracking systems are ephemeral; lines of legality are blurry. For more than 30 years, historians have taken note that “the vastly increased royalties flowing into the treasury have been squandered by corruption, embezzlement and the erection of a large inefficient, deficitary State sector.”⁷¹ The bottom-line: nobody knows exactly where the oil money is going.⁷²

“All the problems in Congo is the mismanagement of resources,” said Maurice,⁷³ a Congolese man who has fifteen years of experience as a Professor of Economics at a state university in the U.S. After the coup in the late-1990s, he requested asylum because his middle name put him on the blacklist with the regime in power. He speaks not only of the economic failures that produce poverty, but also of a systemic moral failure in the society. Who benefits from this dysfunction? What power do they have? He said, it is an autocratic system where one person is king, and the President, his family, and their supporters control the finance sector. “Anyone who is Chief of Department is corrupt,” he said. “They use this money for their own benefit.” These failures are not isolated events in economy, politics, or civil society. That is to say, corruption is a way of life.

Before he came to the United States in the 1990s, Roland⁷⁴ was hired as an engineer by the mammoth French oil company called Elf in Congo. He tells the story of how he was a witness to their practices: “It’s highly, highly painful, and actually that is one of the reasons why I couldn’t stay there.”

“I was working at the French company that is actually responsible of, you know, basically, taking over the Congolese oil...” Roland said. “My job was two times a month, I will go in high sea and go stay on a tanker, you know, the oil tanker? It’s a huge, huge, huge boat that come over from Europe and then we declared the pipe. For three days they

pull the oil and put it to the tanker and leave. So, my job will be to go to the – on that tanker when they arrive – and I got a laptop, and basically, I put up my laptop to the pipe so I, you know, I'm going to get how much oil they are – you know – they are pumping.”

“So, when you see all those riches, and when you go back on land, and you see how much the population suffering, and then you see all these French people that are your colleagues, how rich, how much money they have, and how much it doesn't profit the society.” Roland stayed with Elf for one year before moving to the States and work as a computer engineer. He chose not to go to France where there was, and still is, a vibrant Congolese community.

As a witness to the underdevelopment, the lack of infrastructure, and the weak institutions in Congo, in comparison to the veritable wealth of oil markets, Roland implies that you can see something is wrong with the system, that they have no respect or consideration for the Congolese people. One Congolese man used a French term to describe the system – *escroquerie* – that speaks to the various kinds of subversive methods used by someone who wants to steal from you. The diaspora believe that Elf had a lot of influence, it could even topple governments. Others have written: “Elf is not just an oil company but a parallel diplomacy to control certain African states.”⁷⁵

Hence the diaspora have a deep suspicion and distrust of leadership in most of its forms. They argue that because France still exercises a lot of power in economy and politics, by that logic, the Head of States in all of the former colonies are subservient to France in one way or another. They say: France supports the current political leadership, and if France did not, those persons would not be in leadership. The troubling subtext is that France enables authoritarian regimes to maintain their posts.

These systems claim to be a source of stability, but inevitably become an external force that causes Congo's internal organs to dysfunction.

“The Congolese people do not know much about how much our country receives from this black gold, and even less about how the revenues are managed,” Congolese church leaders wrote in an open letter. “What it does know is that the price of oil is measured not in barrels or dollars, but in suffering, misery, successive wars, blood, displacement of people, exile, unemployment.”⁷⁶

Connecting the dots between natural resources and political power suggests that these dynamics create a space that allows for major human rights concerns. The repercussions are bifurcated extremes: lucrative wealth for a small margin of Congolese elites and extreme poverty for the masses.

2.4 The Poverty Narrative

The Congolese people are never the recipients of the oil or natural resource markets in the country. Here we arrive at the second dominant narrative – that of Congo's poverty – met with irony by her diaspora. The diaspora say: *If profits were as evenly distributed, everybody would be like a small Kuwait. If it was a well-managed country, the Congo could be just like Dubai.* They challenge the narrative of Congo as a poor nation. They claim that Congo is a *poorly managed* nation. Who, then, benefits from the poverty narrative? Why is it convincing? What does it protect? According to the diaspora, there should have been a line of questioning about this narrative: If oil markets are lucrative, why are people without water in the country? Why is there no infrastructure? Why are civil servants delayed six months of salary?

The diaspora claim that the state of Congo is not the result of mere incompetence, but the result of very shrewd leaders making corrupt decisions in a cycle of broken systems. Patrice said, “That’s also by design because the more people are uneducated, the more they are followers. They have no way of reasoning on their own and reflecting on their conditions.” The logic of this narrative trajectory suggests that Congo requires third-party intervention from outside of its borders, that it needs a colonial authority to lift it out of the depths of poverty. A deeper analysis reveals that France is in large part responsible for the instability and insecurity. The economic climate and lack of basic human rights standards is but evidence of these political realities.

The reality of Congo’s wealth is obscured by the fiction of her poverty. This is not an attempt to deny the existence of poverty among the Congolese people, but to bring attention its true cause, and to illuminate that the Congolese experience is paradoxical in relationship to Congo’s wealth streams. The scholarship around this subject of corruption and mismanagement gives it a name: the “paradox of plenty” or the “resource curse”. The dominant narrative is that poverty in its “open-endedness, ambiguity, and non-resolution”⁷⁷ is Congo’s identity, predilection, and destiny. These dominant narratives are damaging to the way the Congolese person and the outsider orient themselves toward problem solving; the subversion of the real problem obscures the path to its resolution. The Congolese diaspora must contend with these narratives, whether they are true or otherwise. These narratives are how they are identified, by which they suffer, and to which they have succumbed in one way or another. They shrink the perspective of what is possible for Congo and offer no clear vision for her tomorrows.

Chapter 3: The Distortion of Ethnic Conflict

3.1 Tribes and Culture

The Kingdom of Congo was a well-organized region in six provinces before the Europeans came and scrambled it, said Hubert.⁷⁸ There is not much written history about the origin of the Congo, but its people are walking history books. They carry stories, knowledge, history, myths, and culture through oral traditions passed through generations. Through these traditions you can track the animating cultural metaphors and how they create meaning in the telling and re-telling of their stories. Hubert, for example, is from the Bakuni tribe in the South, also the same name for its tribal language. Bakuni means farmer, a connotation that refers to an intensely dynamic link to the earth. The verb form, *kukuna*, means the planter. Bakikila is the name of his clan, which refers to the organization of one or more tribes. There are more than fifty dialects in the Congo.⁷⁹ Though Hubert has been living in New York since the 1990s, he speaks multiple dialects such as Bakuni, Kikongo, Lingala, Balumbu, Babwisi, as well European languages such as Romanian, French, and English. “I know where I come from,” he said. “I know where we stand.”

“The clan determines your legacy,” said Hubert. “This river belongs to you, this forest belongs to me. Each clan knows how to respect what belongs to the other clan. For example, you cannot hunt in my forest without my permission.” His cultural knowledge and experiences challenge the notion of pre-existing divisions. Knowing who you are, where you come from, and where you stand is a critical part of the cultural currency. This is a cultural version of human rights language – the concept of respect – respecting the dignity and rights of the neighboring tribe. Congo is a land rich in natural resources,

minerals, oil, timber, and fertile soil. It hosts various landscapes, plains and mountains and valleys, the sea at its western border, the rainforest along its eastern border, the Congo River curves alongside its capital, Brazzaville. The land was divided in such a way that there was a fundamental equilibrium among tribes. At its essence was respect, not a competition for power. Their knowledge of the country's origin, history and culture point to the notion that the "ethnicities in and of themselves are not problematic".⁸⁰

Tunneling through the stories of the diaspora, this work argues that the framing of Congo's violence in 1997 as a "civil war" is a major pivot point for false narratives, corrupt data, and egregious human rights abuses in the country. This event, and the re-telling of it as an internal ethnic conflict, damaged the reality of peacefully abiding tribes. The civilian population took the brunt of violence – physical, emotional, psychological and financial – and the diaspora are living proof of "how much a difficult past was still unresolved, both emotionally and factually."⁸¹

3.2 Inside the Coup

Pascal Lissouba was elected President by the majority of the Congolese population in the first-ever democratic election in 1992, a moment of great hope after many years of socialism. He was considered, David said, "someone that was a type of Gandhi for our country, a Nelson Mandela for our country." For a majority of the population, he represented something bigger than themselves, a way of re-imagining Congo and building the country for the benefit of the people. Congo had been steeped in militant communism and single-party government for the thirty years preceding Lissouba's presidency from 1992-1996. The country's next democratic election was scheduled for 1997.

Denis Sassou Nguesso, whose Marxist politics and Presidential seat had been overturned in the 1992 democratic elections, returned from France in 1997. He returned with militia, political backing, and economic force. After his arrival, Brazzaville was at its highest point of tension. The city was on lockdown, broken up into different camps, Sassou's rebel troops called the Cobras in one section of the city, and Lissouba's government troops holding fort in the other. The civilian population was in the middle of the triage. "I was in the crossfire," said Hugo. "In the middle between the government and Sassou's rebels." There were moments where he didn't leave the house for three days at a time. He watched people dying in the streets. At one point he couldn't take anymore of the inhumanity, and buried a dead person before the dogs could eat the body. The political power struggles turned the city into what Hugo refers to as No Man's Land. Most of the escapees from that period were from the South, where President Lissouba was from. Sassou was from the North. The war ended in a successful *coup d'état* by Sassou. The division between the North and the South became much more pronounced after these events.⁸²

The Congolese were a peaceful people, in the words of Marien.⁸³ "We never knew war," she said. "Chad, Angola – they knew war." Her reference is to the surrounding countries that supported rebel groups with militia and weapons. Child number seven of eight children, she was born in Dolesi, from the Bembe tribe, in the 1960s, and left Congo in 1987. Her political life died, she said, when her brother died. Her brother was very active in politics, and so she was very informed of the nuances within the conflict. The Congolese were not as equipped with the necessities for armed conflict, according to the diaspora. Such events deserve a line of questioning: Who

financed the rebel groups? Where did the military arms coming from? Understand where the key players are coming from, and why, and what are their motives. Consider the timing of the coup: right before the second democratic election of the entire country. It was within this context, where people were targeted because of their ethnic tribe, but it was not the origin of the conflict in itself. It was the symptom of a larger, broader problem.

“Today is quiet. But division is so quiet,” said Marien. In other words, people stick more to their own tribe. The political machine has heightened the sense of tribalism to an extreme. Deeply tribal instincts are skewed in Congolese politics, in which “ethnicity is both a device and focus for group mobilization by political actors who seek to protect their own well-being and to gain political and economic advantages.”⁸⁴ Common denominators reveal themselves through the following: Who is at risk? Who is benefiting from the current regime? Today jobs can be given or not given, based on last name, ethnic tribe, or whether a person is from the North or South. Today those in power keep the influence, power and financial benefits within their own tribe, at the expense of the wellness of the majority in the country. Today the context reflects Michael Hechter’s theory of internal colonialism in which “the dominant group regulates the allocations of social roles in such a way that those roles commonly considered to be of high prestige are reserved for its members, while those of lower prestige go to members of the subordinate group”.⁸⁵ The conflict that began from the top politically, produced a horizontal conflict, neighbor against neighbor, tribe against tribe.

The framing of 1997 event as a civil war is misleading in the following respects: it denies the truth that certain groups were fueled, financed and fortified by other armies

or governments at large; it doesn't acknowledge Congo's colonial history as an active thorn in its democratic attempts; it pits the conflict between ethnic groups, rather than as an international struggle for power and natural resources. Today France is in a long-term political and economic relationship with the man who overthrew the first and only democratically elected President in Congo's history.

3.3 The Distortion of Ethnic Conflict

The dominant narrative of ethnic conflict in Congo-Brazzaville obscures the presence of international stakeholders in the country. There are many moving parts, and this narrative takes away the spotlight from those stakeholders. Such a perspective implies that an internal war requires an internal resolution, and absolves the international community from any responsibility. This is symptomatic of colonial legacies in African contexts, in which the problems are disconnected from the original sin. Ethnic tension, in actuality or in hyperbole, is a part of the package of suffering inherited from legacies of colonial regimes. The other parts of suffering include corruption, lack of development, and poor human rights standards.⁸⁶

“There is no ethnic conflict in the Congo,” said Gael.⁸⁷ “There is political [leaders] who use ethnic differences for their own means.” He is a young Congolese man with a last name that identifies him as belonging to the same tribe as Congo's current President-for-Life, who changed the constitution to continue his term of service *ad infinitum*. Growing up, he was keenly aware of identity: who you are, where you belong, where you don't belong. Today he is consistently confronting stereotypes, both about his own political beliefs and the way others perceive of him. He avoids diaspora events

because he gets targeted when they hear his last name – *Sassou pays your bills*, is a recurring accusation. However, his distrust in the current regime began with the historic event of The Disappeared of the Beach,⁸⁸ a moment in which subversive currents broke the surface and shook the Congolese community. Congo-Brazzaville had signed an agreement with the Democratic Republic of Congo and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, to accept the refugees who had run to the neighboring region for safety; hundreds of Congolese civilians returned to port on Brazzaville’s beach, and there they were separated into groups, killed, or disappeared.⁸⁹ This was a rude awakening for Gael – suddenly his government, his tribe, was killing young people.

It is a difficult contention for a Congolese person to distance himself from his own tribe, particularly when that tribe is ruling the country. Gael explains that his paradigm shift occurred when he got a scholarship to study in Morocco, and had to share a house with two other young men. They were all from three different Congolese tribes – Lari, Mbembe, Mbochi – coming from three different regions of the country. “So after we were living together, that’s when I saw that they are people. They are like me. And we all had that same love for the country,” said EM. “I saw from them that they are also patriots, as me, but with the only slight difference, that we were not from the same tribe. And I saw that we all had the same fear – that same fear – of you’re going to kill me.”

“This is something that helped me develop, and get out of this box of always thinking the other side as being part of the problem,” he said. The house in Morocco provided the time and space to uncover difficult histories and common misperceptions, to recognize the false construction of The Other, and to read the narrative of ethnic conflict as a distortion. The consequence of this narrative is that the diaspora is divided, fed up,

and without love for their country. “It’s like a divorce,” Gael said. “We need to go deep to find a common identity – that we are all Congolese – that the country is ours, like it or not.” After that experience, he switched his position. It is one of the reasons that inspired him to attend a master’s program in Conflict Resolution at an American university: “I really want to advocate for unity.” Today his father is still a general under President Sassou Nguesso, but his goal is to work with young Congolese people for the integration of all tribes and for the future of a unified Congo.

Ethnic conflict is a popular narrative with Biblical proportions. This is the narrative that the diaspora have to contend with. Ethnic conflict is digestible because it recurs as an ancient and primal theme in history: consider ancient texts and the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Ishmael; consider Jacob and his twelve sons; consider all the tribal conflict that ensued from these families. Dysfunction seems to be a particular recurring theme in the African context. The power of this narrative lies in its implicit believability, and is part of the reason that it remains largely unchallenged.

3.4 One Congo

How do you challenge something as subterranean as ethnic conflict? The damage is compounded into a specific kind of internal violence – psychological trauma – and its ability to maintain division and subjugation. It complicates finding the “truth” that the diaspora already know: ethnic conflict is a social construction that accompanies struggles among ethnic groups for the control of the state.⁹⁰ Those in positions of power use this deep-rooted cultural premise as a tool to maintain the status quo. Such constructions have intentions and goals that severely aggravate the concept of *We the People*.

Congo as a sovereign reveals a short, but difficult and violent history. As a young country, Congo has had only six Presidents; most of whom made violent entries into the political scene; four of whom were systematically annihilated. A UN Refugee Agency report documented that the Presidency was a throne in the “fight for power between elite leaders who wanted to maintain or retake power within a one-party state. Contrary to a widespread perception, the conflict is not a tribal one; ethnic groups were and are manipulated into fighting for one or the other of the elite leaders.”⁹¹ The diaspora advocate the need for a historical lens in an analysis of Congo’s current plight. They make the following considerations: Are African countries truly sovereign? Is the concept of nationality a Western concept? Is it in the interests of certain Western actors to maintain a level of division between ethnic groups?⁹²

After independence in 1960, countries like the Congo had newly-formed governments that faced great challenges.⁹³ Conceptual frameworks on the roots of this kind of conflict show that colonialism formed multi-ethnic states in Africa without creating any effective social, cultural or political mechanisms to unify these different ethnic groups.⁹⁴ Today, the notion of Congo under one nation, one flag, and one leader, is difficult to conceptualize because politics have perverted tribalism in such a way as to reshape the behavior and mentality of its people.

Chapter 4: The Catch-22 of Human Rights

4.1 Who Suffers?

The civilian population suffered the most from these political events, and the narratives told about the events. “It’s a very, very rich country, holding the poorest people on earth, and that’s uncomfortable,” said Hugo. “You cannot live with your quiet mind with that kind of statistic in your head.”

Hugo was part of a local NGO in Congo called the UN Congolese Association. They hid in the UN bureau during the cycles of violence in Brazzaville in 1997 so that they could convey information to the UN, and to exiles in different parts of the world. The struggle was: how to make public what was happening in the country without themselves being compromised? “The goal of that association was to promote everything that the UN is for, mostly when it comes to the protection of human rights, and all those kind of things.” They worked hard to promote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). “And because of what was going on in Congo, we didn’t have a choice but to protest and bring up all the violations that were going on.”

In September 2001, Hugo was invited to attend a UN conference in New York concerning these human rights violations that were happening in Congo. The conference was cancelled, however, after the terrorist attacks on September 11, and there were no flights going in or out of the U.S. Word eventually got out in Brazzaville that people were “bad-mouthing” the government, in October of that year he escaped with a visa to the U.S. and sought political asylum.

Today he is connected with Congolese diaspora in Canada, England, France, South Africa. Stateside, he gathers people together weekly by conference call to discuss

ways that they can make public protest or lobby the U.S. government for the sake of the Congo and her diaspora. Conversations like these led to a new discovery: not everyone in Congo or in the diaspora community is silent. They have an outspoken social media community of dissent and protest: for example, *Ras-Le-Bol*, based on the French slang to express the notion of “I’ve had enough!” is the name of Congo-based group of young people in non-violent protest to awaken the conscience of their fellow citizens; *Les Indignés du 242* is a Congolese diaspora group voicing its indignation against the dictator. Every so often, these voices emerge from the background and come into the foreground. This complicated the notion of the Congolese as silent, subdued community. And my initial question of, *Why are the Congolese not talking?* eventually evolved into *Why isn’t anyone listening?*

The only problem is that the dissidents and protestors in civil society seem disconnected from one another. There is not a unified chorus of dissent. This is a profound concern for human rights in the context of a fragile state because the “basic characteristic of the victim is powerlessness, an inability for self-defense against the state or the culture in question.”⁹⁵ It is most evident in the human rights violations, and breaches in international norms and customary law, and the lack of precaution among political elites to protect civilians. *Doctors Without Borders* released a special report entitled “Congo-Brazzaville: Chronicle of a Forgotten War” in documenting the events of the late 1990s:

“This fighting has generated massive and blind atrocities against civilian populations. The resulting widespread violence perpetrated by the parties at war affects the entire civilian population. Arbitrary executions,

mutilations, rapes, and disappearances illustrate the arbitrary character of the violence perpetrated against the civilians.”⁹⁶

[...]

“Until now, no party in the conflict has taken significant steps to prevent the violence against civilians. This lack of action clearly shows their indifference to the fate of the civilian population. Given the gravity of the situation, the silence and indifference of the international community is unbearable.”⁹⁷

“We think the UN is for us but when you’re going through all these troubles you question yourself. Where is the human rights in the world? We read it in books, we watch it on the TV, but where are they now?” said David, who left a family back home that endured great suffering when he came to the U.S. many years ago. “Today they continue to kill people, nobody is saying anything about it.”

The UDHR articulates noble, moral aspirations that speaks to the core of what it means to be human and “the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want”⁹⁸ – but more than 70 years after its adoption by the UN General Assembly in 1948, it is still without the practical measures to ensure these rights for all people. Research and history have shown that poor human rights records are often in weak or failing states.⁹⁹ The human rights wreckage in Congo since the 1990s includes, but is not limited to:

- **Political violence** – disappearances, killing, jail, rape
- **Corruption** – economic slavery, poverty
- **Quality of life** – lack of food, water, healthcare, and education

The history of Congo demonstrates why the human rights framework in its current application is deeply problematic.

4.2 The Catch-22 of Human Rights

According to research on state capacity, “if the weakness of the state itself leads to human rights abuses, this has an important implication for where the blame should be lodged and how problems can be best addressed.”¹⁰⁰ The human rights framework does not consider when the government supports an international ecosystem that creates poor human rights standards, or when the government is the principal violator of human rights of its people. Legal scholar Makau Mutua, particularly outspoken in intellectual scholarship known as *Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL)*, thoroughly unpacks these theoretical flaws: “The state is the guarantor of human rights,” he claims. “It is also the target and *raison d’être* of human rights law.”¹⁰¹

The human rights movement makes a claim on the dignity of life, but in the Congo, this right cannot be protected or corrected in its breach. What mechanism is there to ensure these claims? The human rights regime attributes the responsibility of enforcing human rights to the nation/sovereign; therefore Congo-Brazzaville has a double contradiction, not only is it a fragile state that is unable to enforce human rights standards, the government is the principal violator of these standards. This catch-22 is proof of Mutua’s claim that “there is an implicit tension in the relationship between states and rights: states are simultaneously a threat to human rights and their principal protector.”¹⁰² Slaughter likewise argues that human rights becomes an “enabling fiction” when the narrative of human rights promises more than it can deliver.¹⁰³

“It is not the politician’s families or children who were hurt in those wars. It is more the middle class,” said David. “They suffered for no reason. Nobody dared to take care of them.” The human rights movement in its current state may further alienate or polarize groups, intensify the power struggle between civilians and the political elite. “The issue of power is largely ignored in the human rights corpus,” according to Mutua. “It is equally important that it also address deeply lopsided power relations among and within cultures, national economies, states, genders, religions, races and ethnic groups, and other societal cleavages.”¹⁰⁴ The human rights movement needs a serious re-imagining and reorientation of its hierarchal view of the world.¹⁰⁵ Before it can be appropriately applied to a complex, multilayered, highly contested narrative context like Congo, its norms and theories must itself be decolonized.

Chapter 5: Emerging Voices

5.1 What Does The Future Look Like?

If the human rights program carries an internal contradiction, if certain frames are culturally dissonant, and ineffective in reversing power struggles, then what applications can the Congolese people look to? Can the program still offer certain tools to the Congolese? What is the most effective way of realizing rights?

The metaphysical plight of the Congolese: they have suffered under an authoritarian regime that has ravaged the country for almost twenty-five years (forty years in total, interrupted by the four years of democracy in the early 1990s). Some have never known a different regime; as a child, teenager, and adult, they have had the same President. It is therefore difficult to conceive of an alternate vision of the future, because they have never known anything other. Feelings fluctuate between deep resentment and resignation that things will not change, or will get worse before they can ever get better. The future that they imagine is a nightmare that seems to follow a downhill trajectory: President Sassou Nguesso will attempt to transfer his Presidential seat to his son, who may do even worse damage to the country; like a burning pot that finally boils over, the people will resist this attempt; Southern tribes will take revenge against the Northern tribes; a gruesome civil war will follow; complete anarchy; the end. Their notion of time and change is therefore collided, ironic and tragic. Here is a long-term, psychological side effect of trauma caused by repressive regimes. It is a handicap to the potential of collective healing.

The Congolese know the truth behind dominant narratives. They know that Congo is not a poor country, quite the contrary, it is rich in resources, minerals, oils, and an

abundantly fresh climate for agriculture. They know that colonialism is not dead, as they have to endure it in many subversive, thinly disguised forms. They know that the roots of ethnic division and human rights abuses are top-down, political conflict. The diaspora contend and argue with those narratives. Most astonishing, and perhaps the most destructive, is the narrative they *do* believe: Congo-Brazzaville does not have a future.

This work provides an alternative vision of the future by directly targeting dominant narratives: Congo is a poor nation, ethnic conflict is the root cause to human rights abuses, colonialism is “history” or dead, and that Congo has no future. Yet the mechanism of a truth commission dares to propose an alternate vision of the future by creating a clear and truthful narrative of the past. It can dig up the suppressed narratives and brings them out of hiding. “But overall, the truth commission name has caught on, and has now become a term with a generally understood meaning: an official investigation into a past pattern of abuses.”¹⁰⁶ This proposes a course of action that does not forfeit a future or hope, but inspires it:

To pay close attention to how strategically oppressors break down narratives and why they are intent on doing so. To focus particularly on transitional justice, which, by definition, is the founding of a political and moral community through the narration of past horrors.

Transitional justice recognizes that the past is not dead. It is a strategic confrontation, where the how and the why of mass crimes need to be unbraided – deep, time-consuming, analytical work that requires a heightened sensitivity... The beauty and the agony of this kind of study is that it requires you to rewind, pause, dismantle history, agonize over

detail, piece together a living document, and leave something tangible (a rule of law), and whole (a cohesive narrative, a unified voice) for the next generation.¹⁰⁷

For those in the Congolese community to whom human rights are a perpetual fiction, transitional justice offers an autonomous course of action¹⁰⁸: it clarifies and puts a high premium on the need for truth. It is a critical vehicle on the roadmap of effectively realizing rights.

5.2 The Right to Truth

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) did a comprehensive study on the right to truth as an “inalienable and autonomous right”.¹⁰⁹ Transitional justice has strategic, tactical approaches that engages with this right, and has a specific goal to unearth the suppressed narratives, build a collective memory and create a public record. Because false narratives have caused much damage in the perception of the Congolese identity and experience, then “truth” must be sought and fought for via a public platform. The right to truth is a valuable reference point precisely because it engages a practical and applicable mechanism of a truth commission, in order to create a space for civil society to express itself, a space for a suppressed history to emerge.

As this work has assumed the task of pursuing primary voices and flipping dominant narratives, likewise truth commissions use “qualitative variables” by “looking at the narratives of people’s stories, looking at the *why* questions”.¹¹⁰ A truth commission can reconcile the different versions of history, and bring the subtext to the foreground. This work defines reconciliation¹¹¹ as “reconciling contradictory facts or stories” and “the facing of unwelcome truths in order to harmonize incommensurable world views so that

inevitable and continuing conflicts and differences stand at least within a single universe of comprehensibility.”¹¹² It is an approach that counters the dominant narratives and builds a history from what has been violently suppressed and narrated by those in power.

5.3 Recommendations

The former President of the International Center for Transitional Justice, and also the first UN Special Rapporteur on truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, Pablo de Greiff, said that there are set challenges to transitional justice: it is indifferent to context, formulaic, technocratic.¹¹³ To avoid these kinds of failures, it is important to have a structure that can confront Congo’s destructive narratives, be culturally harmonious, and stay relevant to the specific context. This thesis makes a very urgent proposal to build a creative and strategic response, shaped as a truth commission, in order to consolidate Congolese voices about Congo’s most pressing concerns.

CONGODEEPLY This truth commission will not appear in the same form as previous commissions but, for Congo’s sake, will come in a freshly energized and adaptable multi-platform organism to address a volume of needs and core concerns. A living organism that can successfully grapple with the depth of Congo’s issues is hereby referred to as CongoDeeply.¹¹⁴

STRUCTURE This independent organism consists of three mutually reinforcing core teams: 1) intelligence, 2) memory and innovation, and 3) creative media.

WORK FLOW The truth commission’s mode of operations will include audacious and comprehensive documentation, research, and storytelling. The focus is on the untold

history, the hidden narrative, and building those elements into a library that will be accessible to the world. In order to best confront a multi-faceted set of issues that come with this kind of focus, the commission would necessarily involve a cross-disciplinary team of experts and specialists.

INTELLIGENCE The team will include legal experts, investigators, human rights officers, political scientists, economists, and researchers. They will work as an intelligence research and analysis unit, looking not only at Congo's insides, but also at the role of international actors. This is based on the important premise that the Congolese people and diaspora have a right to truth about the country's politics and economy. How do they operate? Who are the masterminds? "Follow the money" will be a critical strategy given Congo's colonial history and all the moving parts that are involved in its markets, resources, debts and profits. The team will work with a strong code of ethics that promotes transparency. It will build a historical and contemporary record of the factors that reflects a deeper reality of the Congolese identity and existential crisis. As a point of reference, the research will start from the 1990s, from which emerged the first and only democracy, quickly succeeded by violence repression orchestrated by the current administration, in order to arrive at the reality of failing human rights standards that the Congolese suffer today. Ultimately, this team would approach the central questions: What has happened, and what has made it possible for these events to happen?

Any reconciliation of truth would be ineffective without the whole truth, the big picture of geopolitics. It is an extremely rare achievement but this kind of research within a truth commission does have one precedent. The truth commission in Chad, for example, named the U.S. as an entity financially supporting the violence. This project will build

upon the following precedent:

Most truth commissions have not investigated this international role at any depth; few have addressed the issue at all in their final report. The truth commission in Chad perhaps ventured the furthest in this area. While not entering into in-depth investigation, the commission report names the exact amount of external financial backing provided to the regime, as well as the extent of training for the intelligence service responsible for the worst abuses—facts that were not previously well known by the public or the international human rights community...¹¹⁵

Repression is a reality achieved not only by violence, but also by all the overt and subliminal tactics in keeping the mass population under complete submission. If the truth emerges, the world will know the patterns, forces, habits, and systems that need to be restructured/demolished/remade.

MEMORY & INNOVATION The team will include historians, anthropologists, sociologists, social workers, rapporteurs, researchers, translators, and administrators. They will focus on qualitative research and documentation by collecting testimony from the Congolese people and the diaspora, and creating an official record of memory. This reinforces the need for Congolese voices as “primary stakeholders”.¹¹⁶

“The great number of interviews with victims, typical of these commissions, allows a detailed accounting of the patterns of violence over time and across regions, literally recording a hidden history. The detail and breadth of information in a truth commission report is usually of a kind and quality far better than any previous historical account, leaving the

country with a written and well-documented record of otherwise oft-disputed events.”¹¹⁷

A suppressed civil society is symptomatic of repressive regimes. If, as experts and research show, that there has never been a successful transition without a strong civil society¹¹⁸ then this can be point of access for the Congolese to be agents of change. This allows for a platform that can address difficult, but necessary questions: How should we remember? Who will write our history? Who are we? What does the future look like?

In this sense, the team will have a historical perspective, and a forward-thinking orientation. Restorative practices can offer guiding questions and “collaborative problem-solving”:¹¹⁹ “The key element is interaction between the participants in a safe environment, focusing on acknowledgement of the past hurt and the emotions it has generated, disabusing stereotypes of each other and providing a future orientation which is mutually discussed and agreed.”¹²⁰ This will create a charged feedback loop of historical resonance, and future innovation.

Consider Rwanda’s *gacaca* courts based on the idea of “justice on the grass” before colonization, according to Olivier,¹²¹ Senior Political/Electoral Affairs Officer in the UN’s Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. As a Rwandan who spent time in both Congos, he has an extensive knowledge about the rise and fall of political regimes in the African context. After one million people were killed in three months in Rwanda, Olivier said, and wise leaders were killed or had killed others, they had to answer the question, how do you render justice when the entire judiciary is destroyed? The Rwandan public elected wise leaders – the notion of people of integrity – which included women, and youth, and as a community, they processed what had happened, and

built a narrative to prevent future atrocities. It was the first time victims were able to express themselves. It was a leap forward in sustainable change in institutions, culture and disposition. This justice mechanism led by civil society was one of the critical turning points in bringing Rwanda out of the depths of its ashes.

CREATIVE The team includes videographers, writers, filmmakers, photographers, producers, artists and cultural influencers. They will take the intelligence data, qualitative research, and narratives and broadcast them in multi-media platforms. The Congolese experience as a form of historical and intellectual property can promote education, awareness, and public dialogue about Congo's troubled history. They can pull from the stream of intelligence, memory and innovation in order to put these stories of the Congo on the global map.

Alongside documents, reports, and analyses that offer a clear vision for the necessity of human rights, what they are, and what it means for each person to be a rights-holder, a truth commission can also explore creative alternatives to communicate its findings and respond to the question, what does it mean represent history with dignity? Art and media have the intrinsic potential to challenge or invert power relations, and triumph through social struggles. Scholars have claimed that the human rights world has excluded art to its own detriment, given that the role of art is to see across boundaries; question orthodoxy; reveal complexities; offer spaces for polarities, contradictions; invoke engagement and multiple intelligences.¹²²

It is beneficial for a truth commission to break outside of its silo mentality, and collapse rigid walls in order to bring its discoveries to a broader audience. It should have porous borders with art and culture – films, documentaries, mini-series, animated shorts,

and podcasts are just a few innovative expressions that have universal cultural currency. The presentation of these dynamic forms of storytelling can connect the Congolese identity, history and culture with the rest of the world.

5.4 Closing Remarks

This project does not make light of the fact that Congo needs a holistic, systematic restructuring and reimagining. That includes: a bullet-proof constitution; a leader of particular integrity, stamina and vision; reformation of its economy; law enforcement; a new judicial system; funding and revision of its health and education systems; a market that encourages and sustains free enterprise; and more, more, more. That is to say, it needs a rebirth.

Wisdom reminds us that it is important to build on the infrastructure and culture of the local context. But you cannot build without the reality of who you are and what you came from, and if anything, a truth commission forces you to face history, and face yourself.¹²³ A truth commission can “reveal a global truth of the broad patterns of events, and demonstrate without question the atrocities that took place and what forces were responsible.”¹²⁴ Congo would therefore not be defined by her past, but informed by it.

It is a keen moment for the reconciliation of the truth, precisely because the current regime perceives itself to be eternal. This is an Achilles heel. It has forgotten what it means to be challenged; it has forgotten that it is an old and tired regime. Are Congolese voices enough? Sometimes a small pressure point, a hairline fracture, is enough to make the final coup.

**Author’s Note: The individuals interviewed for this research have been given an alias in order to protect their identity, livelihood, and privacy.*

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- ¹ Sharlene Hesse-Biber and Patricia Lina Leavy, “The Practice of Feminist In-Depth Interviewing,” in *Feminist Research Practice*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2007), 110-148. <https://dx-doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.4135/9781412984270.n5>
- ² Marien, a Congolese woman who has been living in the United States for more than 30 years, made this statement, though the sentiment seems to be a common animating metaphor among the diaspora.
- ³ Congo (Brazzaville). *United States Census Bureau*. <https://www.census.gov/popclock/world/cf>
- ⁴ These are recurring themes in conversations with Congolese persons: the burden of incredible scarcity amongst the people, in a nation with abundant resources, including a high production in oil and minerals, and one of the more fertile regions for agriculture in Africa.
- ⁵ Human Development Reports, *United Nations Development Programme*. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2018-update>
- ⁶ Human needs-based theories of conflict can be attributed to different generations of thinkers, perhaps more recently, John Burton and Paul Sites. Richard E. Rubenstein. “Basic Human Needs: The Next Steps in Theory Development,” *The International Journal of Peace Studies*, Vol. 6, Number 1, (Spring 2001). https://www.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol6_1/Rubenstein.htm
- ⁷ David Keen, *Complex Emergencies*, (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA, USA: Polity, 2008), 15.
- ⁸ Alisa Solomon, “Who Gets to Be Human on the Evening News?” *The Humanities in Human Rights: Critique, Language, Politics* compilation of papers from conference held 21-22 October 2005 at the Graduate Center, City University of New York. *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, Volume 121, Issue 5 (2006): 1590. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1632/pmla.2006.121.5.1515>
- ⁹ Essay by author, “Statement of Purpose,” Columbia University, 2012.
- ¹⁰ Peter Balakian, “How a Poet Writes History without Going Mad” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 50(35), (2004). <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/214704651?accountid=10226>
- ¹¹ Essay by author, “Thesis Proposal,” Human Rights Research Seminar, Columbia University, 2019.
- ¹² Sandra So Hee Chi Kim, “Redefining Diaspora through a Phenomenology of Postmemory”. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, Volume 16, Issue 3, (2007): 338. <https://muse-jhu.edu.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/article/504367>
- ¹³ Balakian, “How a Poet Writes History without Going Mad”.
- ¹⁴ Solomon, 1592.
- ¹⁵ There were, of course, other key figures involved in this armed confrontation, including, for example, the presence of Bernard Kolélas, another political leader from a different ethnic group. However, this paper focuses on the contest for power and control of the Congolese state, which the diaspora claim, was mainly between President Pascal Lissouba and Denis Sassou Nguesso.
- ¹⁶ The UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia. <https://ucdp.uu.se/country/484>
- ¹⁷ “Profile of Internal Displacement: Republic Of Congo (Brazzaville),” *Global IDP Database of the Norwegian Refugee Council*, 8 April 2005, 11. <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/3f49128e4.pdf>
- ¹⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New edition with added prefaces. (San Diego, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), xviii.
- ¹⁹ Interview by the author conducted December 15, 2019.
- ²⁰ The target was to enroll 25-30 participants, but those willing to go through the official enrollment procedures were closer to half that amount.
- ²¹ Interview conducted by author on December 17, 2019.
- ²² Interview conducted by author on December 11, 2019.
- ²³ Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 6.
- ²⁴ Essay by author, “A Mixtape for Congo,” Columbia University, Spring 2018.
- ²⁵ Solomon, 1592.
- ²⁶ A phrase and concept borrowed from Séverine Autesserre, whose research illuminates the dominant narratives in Congo-Brazzaville’s next-door neighbor, the Democratic Republic of Congo. Her argument focuses on the need for simplifying frames, identifying urgent concerns, and offering a call to action. I want to suggest that the dominant narratives about Congo-Brazzaville are over-simplified, false narratives, whose architecture strategically hides a subversive truth about the country and her people.

- Séverine Autesserre, "Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives on The Congo and Their Unintended Consequences," *African Affairs*, Vol. 111, No. 443 (April 2012): 202-222.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41494485>
- ²⁷ Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, xiv.
- ²⁸ Paul Gready, "Novel Truths: Literature and Truth Commissions," *Comparative Literature Studies*. Vol. 46, No. 1, Human Rights and Literary Forms (2009). p. 162. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25659704>
- ²⁹ Gready, "Novel Truths," 160.
- ³⁰ Joseph Slaughter, "Enabling Fictions and Novel Subjects: The Bildungsroman and International Human Rights Law," *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, Vol. 121, Issue 5, (2006): 1405.
- ³¹ Priscilla Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocity*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 5.
- ³² "What is Transitional Justice?" *International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ)*.
<https://www.ictj.org/about/transitional-justice>
- ³³ Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 5.
- ³⁴ Ruth Maclean, "Son of Congo-Brazzaville President Accused of Siphoning Off \$50m". *The Guardian*. 7 August 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/07/son-of-congo-brazzaville-president-accused-of-siphoning-off-50m-denis-christel-sassou-nguesso>
- ³⁵ "Sassou-Nguesso's Laundromat: A Congolese State Affair – Part II". *Global Witness*.
<https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/corruption-and-money-laundering/sassou-nguessos-laundromat-a-congolese-state-affair-part-ii/>
- ³⁶ "The Riddle of the Sphinx: Where Has Congo's Oil Money Gone?" *Global Witness*, December 13, 2005. <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/oil-gas-and-mining/riddle-sphinx-where-has-congos-oil-money-gone/>
- ³⁷ Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 25.
- ³⁸ "What is Transitional Justice?" *ICTJ*
- ³⁹ France emerges as a predatory figure in virtually every conversation with the Congolese diaspora.
- ⁴⁰ Arendt, 51.
- ⁴¹ J Daniel Elam, "Postcolonial Theory," in *obo* in *Literary and Critical Theory*, *Oxford Bibliographies*.
<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0069.xml>
- ⁴² Elam, *Oxford*.
- ⁴³ Elam, *Oxford*.
- ⁴⁴ Samuel Decalo, Virginia Thompson, and Richard Adloff, *Historical Dictionary of Congo*. (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 7.
- ⁴⁵ Tamar Golan, "A Certain Mystery: How Can France Do Everything That It Does in Africa – and Get Away with It?" *African Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 318. (Jan. 1981): 3. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/721427>
- ⁴⁶ Golan, 3
- ⁴⁷ Nicholas Shaxson, *Poisoned Wells: The Dirty Politics of African Oil*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2007), 82.
- ⁴⁸ Ian Taylor, "France à Fric: The CFA Zone in Africa and Neocolonialism," *Third World Quarterly*: 1065.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1585183>
- ⁴⁹ Taylor, "France à Fric," 1065.
- ⁵⁰ Decalo, Thompson, and Adloff, *Historical Dictionary*, 16.
- ⁵¹ Golan, "A Certain Mystery," 3.
- ⁵² Taylor, "France à Fric," 1064.
- ⁵³ Taylor, "France à Fric," 1067.
- ⁵⁴ Taylor, "France à Fric," 1071.
- ⁵⁵ Interview conducted by author on September 2, 2019.
- ⁵⁶ Taylor, "France à Fric," 1065.
- ⁵⁷ Julie Owono, "Devaluing a Controversial Currency," *Aljazeera*, 16 Dec 2011.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/12/2011121312953758399.html>
- ⁵⁸ Taylor, "France à Fric," 1064.
- ⁵⁹ Taylor, "France à Fric," 1065.
- ⁶⁰ Golan, "A Certain Mystery," 7.

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- ⁶¹ Golan, “A Certain Mystery,” 7.
- ⁶² Taylor, “France à Fric,” 1079
- ⁶³ Taylor, “France à Fric,” 1066
- ⁶⁴ Taylor, “France à Fric,” 1066
- ⁶⁵ Shaxson, *Poisoned Wells*, 215.
- ⁶⁶ “Republic of Congo – Petroleum Sector”. *Export.Gov*, Report from the U.S. Department of Commerce’s International Trade Administration in collaboration with multiple U.S. agencies. <https://www.export.gov/article?id=Republic-of-Congo-Petroleum-Sector>
- ⁶⁷ Shaxson, *Poisoned Wells*, 104.
- ⁶⁸ Shaxson, *Poisoned Wells*, 71.
- ⁶⁹ Shaxson, *Poisoned Wells*, 64.
- ⁷⁰ Shaxson, *Poisoned Wells*, 64.
- ⁷¹ Decalo, Thompson, and Adloff, *Historical Dictionary*, 92-93.
- ⁷² Shaxson, *Poisoned Wells*, 112.
- ⁷³ Interview conducted by author on October 9, 2019.
- ⁷⁴ Interview conducted by author on December 16, 2019.
- ⁷⁵ Shaxson, *Poisoned Wells*, 71.
- ⁷⁶ Shaxson, *Poisoned Wells*, 116.
- ⁷⁷ Gready, “Novel Truths,” 160.
- ⁷⁸ Interviews conducted in two sessions by the author on September 24 and September 28, 2019.
- ⁷⁹ There are various spellings for tribal languages and dialects. Some of them are oral languages without official written forms. “For us, we talk about 52 dialects that we can share treasures – it’s amazing. Now we’re killing all those resources for no reason,” said David.
- ⁸⁰ Wanjala S. Nasong’o, “From Grievance to Ethnic Mobilization: An Introduction,” *The Roots of Ethnic Conflict in Africa: From Grievance to Violence*, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 3.
- ⁸¹ Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 133.
- ⁸² Final Report - Republic of Congo. *The UN Refugee Agency*. As part of the 5th UNHCR Country Of Origin Information Workshop, (13-14 December 1999): 55.
- ⁸³ Interview conducted by the author on August 24, 2019.
- ⁸⁴ Nasong’o, *The Roots*, 3.
- ⁸⁵ Nasong’o, *The Roots*, 14.
- ⁸⁶ Neil A. Englehart, “State Capacity, State Failure, and Human Rights,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Volume 46, Issue 2 (1 March 2009): 165.
- ⁸⁷ Interview conducted by the author on October 15, 2019.
- ⁸⁸ “Context: The Civil War,” *TRIAL International*. <https://trialinternational.org/latest-post/blaise-adoua/#section-4>
- ⁸⁹ The amount of people ranges from hundreds to thousands according to different sources.
- ⁹⁰ Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga, “The Spread of Political Violence in Congo-Brazzaville,” *African Affairs*, Vol. 98, No. 390 (Jan. 1999): 51.
- ⁹¹ *The UN Refugee Agency*, 51.
- ⁹² Essay by author, “A Mixtape for Congo”.
- ⁹³ Nasong’o, *The Roots*, 20
- ⁹⁴ Nasong’o, *The Roots*, 20
- ⁹⁵ Makau Mutua, “Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights,” *Harvard International Law Journal*, Volume 42, Issue 1, (January 1, 2001): 221.
- ⁹⁶ “Congo-Brazzaville: Chronicle of a Forgotten War,” *Doctors without Borders*, 1 October 1999. <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/what-we-do/news-stories/research/congo-brazzaville-chronicle-forgotten-war>
- ⁹⁷ “Congo-Brazzaville: Chronicle of a Forgotten War,” *Doctors without Borders*.
- ⁹⁸ Universal Declaration of Human Rights. *The United Nations*. <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>
- ⁹⁹ Englehart, “State Capacity,” 163.
- ¹⁰⁰ Englehart, “State Capacity,” 164.
- ¹⁰¹ Mutua, “Savages, Victims, and Saviors,” 203.
- ¹⁰² Englehart, “State Capacity,” 163

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- ¹⁰³ Slaughter, “Enabling Fictions,” 1408.
- ¹⁰⁴ Mutua, “Savages, Victims, and Saviors,” 207.
- ¹⁰⁵ Mutua, “Savages, Victims, and Saviors,” 245.
- ¹⁰⁶ Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 23.
- ¹⁰⁷ Essay by author, “Statement of Purpose”.
- ¹⁰⁸ Pablo de Greiff, Keynote Address, (Eighth Annual Conference of Historical Dialogues, Justice and Memory Network, Columbia University, December 12, 2019).
- ¹⁰⁹ Study on the Right to Truth: Report of The Office of The United Nations High Commissioner For Human Rights. *The United Nations*.
<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G06/106/56/PDF/G0610656.pdf?OpenElement>
- ¹¹⁰ Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 81.
- ¹¹¹ It is important to note that this definition is distinct from ethnic reconciliation.
- ¹¹² Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 162.
- ¹¹³ Greiff, Keynote Address.
- ¹¹⁴ The concept, structure and work flow of Congo Deeply as a truth commission is solely the creation of the author. However, the connotation of its name to the award-winning organization News Deeply is purposeful. This organization is not afraid to confront complex issues or topics that others may avoid; and the author respects this depth of analysis. Previous projects of News Deeply have included: Refugees Deeply, Syria Deeply, Ebola Deeply, among others. According to the website, “News Deeply designs topic-driven communities, built around high-quality information and strategic stakeholder reach. Since 2012 we’ve built our own award-winning community platforms and partnered with leading companies and foundations to design tailor-made digital convening strategies. In an increasingly fragmented information environment our goal is to surface the vital insights and stakeholder connections that can move the issues that matter, deeply, to our world today.” <https://www.newsdeeply.com>
- ¹¹⁵ Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 75.
- ¹¹⁶ Paul McCold and Ted Wachtel, “In Pursuit of Paradigm: A Theory of Restorative Justice”. *International Institute for Restorative Practices*, (Paper presented at the XIII World Congress of Criminology, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, August 2003): 1. <https://www.iirp.edu/news/in-pursuit-of-paradigm-a-theory-of-restorative-justice>
- ¹¹⁷ Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 25.
- ¹¹⁸ Greiff, Keynote Address.
- ¹¹⁹ McCold and Wachtel, “In Pursuit of Paradigm,” 2.
- ¹²⁰ Shapland, Joanna, Anne Atkinson, Helen Atkinson, Emily Colledge, James Dignan, Marie Howes, Jennifer Johnstone, Gwen Robinson, and Angela Sorsby. “Situating Restorative Justice within Criminal Justice.” *Theoretical Criminology*. 10, No. 4, (November 2006): 522.
- ¹²¹ Interview conducted by author on August 4, 2019.
- ¹²² Michelle LeBaron, “Forgiveness, Remembrance, Justice: Africa” panel discussion in presentation of her paper, “How Have Arts Been Effective in ‘Prevention Activism’ in South Africa,” (Eighth Annual Conference of Historical Dialogues, Justice and Memory Network, Columbia University, December 12-14, 2019).
- ¹²³ Facing History, Facing Ourselves is also the name of an organization that builds dialogue and educational awareness about confronting past atrocity. <https://www.facinghistory.org/>
- ¹²⁴ Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 85.

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