

## The Coltan Novel: Narrating the Congolese Saga in In Koli Jean Bofane's *Congo Inc. : Le testament de Bismarck*<sup>1</sup>

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The Congo has consistently been a subject of wide-ranging historical and creative productions aimed at capturing its dramatic history. This has often led to the submersion of Congolese voices under exogenous and exotic depictions of Congolese realities in ways that position the Congolese subject and space as the other, void of complexity and possibility. In Koli Jean Bofane (1954) belongs to a generation of Congolese authors who “write the Congo” from within, through an inventive sensibility, an insightful worldview, and an unsettling style aimed at representing the paradoxes of the nation’s trajectory. Bofane hails from the Congolese Equateur province, a fact which perhaps explains his affinity with Isookanga, the protagonist of *Congo Inc.* (2014). He spent his childhood and youth in the Congo before settling in Belgium in 1993. After a series of literary works that earned him modest recognition, he rose to literary fame with the publication of *Mathématiques congolaises* (2008), which won the Grand prix littéraire de l’Afrique noire in 2009 and has been translated into various international languages. His award-winning novel has already marked a distinctive voice among the flurry and cacophony of representations inspired by the specific history of the Congo, a voice which is given a new profundity in *Congo Inc.*, the text under study. The present article discusses the complexity of the Congo as represented in *Congo Inc.*, analyzing the Congolese territory as the interface of the violent dimensions of globalization. I discuss the process through which *Congo Inc.* converts the ambiguous coexistence of scarcity and excess in the Congo into not only a unique text, but also into the creation of a new narrative genre which I refer to as the coltan novel.

*Congo Inc.* is a novel written with a historical mindset, grappling with a painful and disconcerting memory. Bofane narrates the Congo as the construct of a well-marshalled historical project whose beneficiaries are mainly non-Congolese and European powers. What is particularly striking about Bofane’s novel is his uncommon description of a grave subject matter in a light-hearted tonality, leading to a narrative of dehumanizing violence

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told in sarcastic and humorous voice. The question one asks is why the author chooses humor and laughter as a way of narrating a history of ruin, violence, and death. In reality, elements of laughter and comic relief only serve to underline the unacceptability of the conditions of life that are portrayed through the victims of violence and the larger picture of the Congo's role in a globalization of violence. Bofane's text does not only offer a critique of the theme of globalization. Rather, globalization functions in this text as an aesthetic mode of narration, capturing and connecting a mosaic of networks and alliances that traverse the plotlines of *Congo Inc.* The text involves an affluence of characters, constantly shifting networks depending on changing circumstances and interests. In another dimension, the Congo as a text is a mere pretext and pawn for a variety of interests of internal and external actors. It is a network of connections, open or secret, internal, transnational, and international. The narrator posits that in the Congo, "Tout le monde était lié par des activités, avouables ou non : des petits arrangements entre amis ou, pire, entre ennemis. Pour faire court, chacun tenait chacun par les bourses, dans ce pays" (262). In the same dimension, as if to reflect the complexities of the "Congo network," fragments of the story are set in the U.S. and China, far from its Congolese settings.

In the framework of this article, I define the coltan novel with regard to the Congo as one that paints a contradictory picture whereby capitalist consumerism, hedonism, and *joie de vivre* coexist with an atmosphere of criminality, violence, abjection, and precarity. Though the coltan novel takes place in the Congo, its networks cross several other spaces, as if to replicate the commercial circuits of Congolese minerals in a globalized economy. *Congo Inc.* is centered on the twenty-six-year-old Isookanga Lolango Djokisa, a half-pigmy from the Equateur province of Congo. Against his uncle's forebodings, Isookanga abandons his equatorial forest region for the capital city Kinshasa in a bid to seize the opportunities of globalization, an attractive and promising buzzword of his time. From a distance, Kinshasa appears to him as the window to the globalized world of immense opportunities. In Kinshasa, however, he finds himself at the center of a world that is merciless, requiring sheer pragmatism as a criterion for success and enrichment. His (mis)adventures in the capital city reveal a society caught in between the hangover of civil war and collective sense of injustice and a deep-seated spirit of struggle for survival. In a satirical tonality, Bofane tells the story of Congolese violence, the aftermath of seemingly ceaseless strife, the yearning for justice, and the existential quest for salvation. Above all, the author succeeds in fusing the subject matter with the manner of telling, creating what I might call a Congolese narrative, in matter and form. In other words, Congo becomes a form of narrative, transformed into a stylistic device, beyond being a mere physical setting.

Full of grim humor, *Congo Inc.* is a story of dehumanizing greed embedded under the so-called process of globalization of which the Congo has often been a central setting beginning with the Berlin Conference of 1884-85. The legacy of the Berlin Conference, organized by the German Chancellor, Prince Otto von Bismarck, the eponymous character in this text, is far-reaching. The epigraph of Bofane's text, a re-echo of the subtitle, contains a statement by Bismarck at the Berlin Conference: "Le nouvel État du Congo est destiné à être un des plus importants exécutants de l'œuvre que nous entendons accomplir..." (9). King Leopold's territorial claim was validated by the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 when he guaranteed the Europeans that this region would be protected as a free trade zone, purportedly as a bulwark to stamp out Arab slave trade and as a specimen of the civilizing

mission. The treaties Henry Morton Stanley signed with local chiefs and the construction of the stations meant that Leopold II fulfilled the clause of effective occupation stated by the Berlin Conference as the prerequisite for making a territorial claim in Africa. These treaties led to the establishment of stations in various localities, basically bringing the region under the control of the Belgian monarch. Stanley accomplished this with skill, guile, and brutality, earning him the nickname of Bula Matari, the “crusher of rocks” (Young 139). However, the end result, as envisaged by Bismarck and his peers, was to turn the Congo into a European free market space.

The question to be asked in relation to this ominous statement by Bismarck concerns the nature of the collective endeavor that “we” (European powers) intend to execute and the reason why Congo becomes an object of a foreign project. It is the aftermath of that preordained mission that is evident in Bofane’s novel—the legacy of the Congo as the prototype space of neoliberal economy. This Congo, the topos of a European project, in the course of its history, plays host to ferocious and seemingly endless conflicts of interests with local and international partners. By placing the story in an event that defines the history of the entire continent and its balkanization, the novel serves as a voyage into memory through the present condition of the country. The natural endowment and the rich subsoil of the Congo at every phase of world history becomes the source of a paradoxical outcome: a condition of abject “scarcity in abundance” and a motif for dehumanizing graft and war.

Though idealistically perceived as synonymous to economic mobility and opportunity, the history of globalization is papered over the cracks of unequal power relationship, underlined by historical and contemporary violence (Quijano 181). The reality of “scarcity in abundance,” an essentially contradictory condition is inherent in the collective fate of most postcolonial societies in the Global South. Julio Ortega underlines the archetypical feature of Latin American narratives as located in-between a “figure of the native of American abundance” and “a subject who is the victim of this very abundance now converted into scarcity and lack” (29). He purports that such works “bear a peculiar tension. They begin from the rhetorical formulations of the garden and desert in the traditions that include the *locus amenus* [sic] and regions of hell. These belong to popular millenarian culture with its *topoi* of fertility and plague, banquet and famine” (10). Ortega underlines the ambiguous relationship between fertility and misery, the paradoxical condition of most societies of the Global South, whose territories have come under colonialist exploitation and its perpetuation by the postcolonial political elite. Global power interests have completely negated the potential of the Congo, which Sony Labou Tansi symbolically describes as a place where nature has been most generous: “C’est le pays où les choses sont les plus tendres du monde. Le ciel, le fleuve, l’herbe — tout est tendre. Mais c’est sur cette divine tendresse des choses que les hommes se tuent . . .” (155). The reality of war has denaturalized and defamiliarized this supposed space of abundance, converting it into a topos of scarcity and lack. In the same line of representation, Fiston Mwanza Mujila’s *Tram 83* echoes this paradoxical outcome in the opening lines of the novel, which say, “Au commencement était la pierre et la pierre provoqua la possession et la possession la ruée, et dans la ruée débarquèrent des hommes aux multiples visages qui construisirent dans le roc des chemins de fer, fabriquèrent une vie de vin de palme, inventèrent un système, entre mines et marchandises” (9). The discovery of “stone,” an atavistic reference to minerals,

seems to have ushered in a capitalistic economic system whose beneficiaries are not the common Congolese man and woman but those of networks of interests. It is the story of this paradox as lived by the people of the Congo that constitutes the reality of the Congo to its inhabitants that Bofane attempts to tell in his novel.

### **The Coltan Novel and the Hypertext of Violence in the Congo**

The plot of *Congo Inc.* is not only constructed in the form of a text, but rather the novel has a strong hypertextual dimension that cannot be ignored due to its frequency and its influence on the imagination of its protagonist. Interspaced in the main episodes of the novel's plot, this hypertext takes the form of a video war game played constantly by the protagonist.

Before examining the actual functionality of the video game in the novel, it suffices to examine the meaning of hypertext and what it performs in a narrative. In *Literary Machines* (1981), Tehodor H. Nelson defines the hypertext as "Nonsequential writing—text that branches and allows choices to the reader, best read at an interactive screen . . . a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways" (qtd. in Kilfeather 39). As an innovative technique in narrative, any definition of hypertext is more suggestive than definite. In general, the hypertext can be considered as any form of writing that subverts the linearity and logicity of the main text, underlining multiple ways of reading and diverse and nonlinear interconnections. The hypertext thus progresses not by filiation but by affiliation, not by effect but rather affect, establishing uncommon relations and connections, opening up the mind to new loops of imaginative possibilities. The hypertext thus interrupts and sometimes interrogates the main text, introducing alternative means of telling or showing through other media. The relation between the text and the hypertext is that of association and trail, perhaps reflecting the nonlinear manner in which the human mind works.

The video game in Bofane's text can thus be considered as a hypertext from the way it interrupts the flow of the text, bringing in a visual and acoustic experience in the reading process and accelerating the narrative frequency of the text. The motif of the game fits well with the overall frame of the text. The game is part and parcel of an obsessive screen culture that entralls the imagination of Isookanga, who dreams of accessing a globalized culture as fully as possible. He plays it on the laptop he steals from Aude Martin in Wafania. With his laptop, Isookanga imagines a world far beyond his forest pygmy region. Through the infusion of motifs connected with new means of virtual communication, Bofane converts the setting of his story into a hypertext peopled with high-tech gadgets and modern recreational apparatus (videogame, the CD-ROM, the laptop, the telecommunication antenna) and constant references to war minerals, such as uranium, cobalt, and coltan that are instrumental in the fabrication of the most complex electronics. It is this procedure of factoring the product of high tech in a novel, interrogating the organized and globalized robbery of the Congo's riches that subtends their exploitation, that I have come out with the denotation *the coltan novel*. The coltan novel, like the Congo territory with its self-financed war, is replete with motifs that constitute its self-articulation wherein style and theme are fused.

Whenever it is played by the protagonist, Isookanga, the video game changes the narrative tempo and frequency of the text. Unlike the moderate narrative progression of

the main text, the hypertext is constructed on a melodramatic pace, offering a sensationalist picture of the violent scramble for resources by various forces on a territory known as Gondavanaland.<sup>2</sup> The game portrays the banalization of violence in the realities of Gondavanaland to the point of making war seem the natural *modus operandi* of both internal and external actors, battling to enhance their networks of exploitation of the country's resources. The main belligerents are Congo Bololo, Kannibal Dawa, American Diggers, Skulls and Bones, Goldberg & Gils Atomic Project, Hiroshima-Naga, China Network, Mass Graves Petroleum, Blood and Oil, and Uranium et Sécurité. In the same way as fictional representation, the relationship between simulation and reality is hypothetical. However, in "Video Game Characters: Theory and Analysis," Felix Schröter and Jan-Noël Thon underline the possibility of video games to paint a situation that is identical to social reality: "... in what we call 'social experience', characters are perceived as avatars, as *representations of other players* in a multiplayer setting. In this case, players not only form mental models of a fictional being or game piece but also of the player 'behind' the avatar, resulting in a connected or mixed representation which includes features of both"(50; emphasis in original). The realm of the video game is liminal, disconnected from social reality in principle, but the characters and issues it depicts position it as a defamiliarized though recognizable cognate of social reality. In Bofane's text, the game maintains a disturbing affinity with true to life human world, as far as the Congolese reality is concerned. The game exposes the violent confrontations between the various consortia, underlining the volatility of the Gondavanaland. The tactics deployed by the various belligerents are meant to outdo various competitors and to brutally eliminate them in order to appropriate the biggest possible share of the territory.<sup>3</sup> The various actors are willing to turn to unconventional war tactics to ensure the supply monopolies of gold, diamonds, ivory, and other resources that exist in excess in the Congo. The maxim of power relations in the simulated territory in the video game is underlined by a Machiavellian attitude that gives priority to resources over human lives. In Gondavanaland, either you eat or you are eaten:

... c'était manger ou se faire manger. Mais l'enjeu essentiel restait l'exploitation des ressources minières. Pour cela, dans la vraie vie, il fallait d'abord prospecter, ensuite obtenir des licences auprès des gouvernements, s'acquitter de taxes, payer de la main-d'œuvre, construire des infrastructures... Le jeu faisait fi de tout cela. Pour atteindre ces objectifs, il

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<sup>2</sup> In world natural history, Gondwanaland refers to the name of the super-continental landmass of the world's continent that, 180 million years ago, included South America, Africa, Australia, and Antarctica.

<sup>3</sup> The underlying logic of Bofane's novel is very similar to Mwanza Mujila's *Tram 83*. If Bofane uses the image of Gondwanaland—that he spells *Gondavanaland*—in his hypertext where warring multinationals are engaged in their merciless competition for resources, Mwanza Mujila uses the setting of the eponymous bar called Tram 83 in a fictional mining "town-country" to underline the mentality of survival of the fittest in a morally decadent society. This bar is a meeting point for all sorts of characters, ranging from child prostitutes, drunkards, students, tourists, warlords to corrupt politicians who transact illicit goods and services while, at the same time, trying to outplay one another at the least opportunity. The bar is said to be characterized by "excès de bière et l'intention de vider sa poche qui exhale les minerais de sang, cette bouse juchée au rang des matières premières" (14). The wealth that is displayed in Tram 83 smells of blood, given that the "town-country" is at war with the central government. Coltan here is referred to as dung, a way of disparaging the system under which it is mined and transacted.

préconisait la guerre et tous ses corollaires : bombardements intensifs, nettoyage ethnique, déplacements de population, esclavage... (19)

Above, the narrator insinuates that though “under normal circumstances” companies need to prospect for minerals, and then obtain exploitation licenses, the characters in the game do not respect such protocols. This metafictional remark underlines the simulated nature of the game, as opposed to realistic norms of operation. But later, the narrator makes a revealing statement: In the game, the main characters could “acquérir des armes, mais aussi des alliés étrangers, des points au Stock Exchange, une « trousse de secours » incluant des traités de paix pour endormir l’ONU — parce que là aussi, comme dans l’existence réelle, on ne pouvait bien mener une guerre qu’abrité par des résolutions de l’organisation internationale —, des conférences pour gagner du temps” (19). In other words, both in the game and in “real life,” the treaties with the United Nations are mere ploys to pursue the war effort unchallenged. Since the game takes place in a metadiegetic configuration (that is, within the text that comments on the text), when the narrator talks about “real life,” it could logically mean the fictional (as opposed to the simulated world) or the real world outside of textuality. However, the fact that the narrator of the text is extradiegetic, (that is, not part of the story being told), references to “real world” could point to the world of social reality, outside the text. The underlying point is that the war in the Congo only follows the rules of greed and illegality, in contravention of treaties and UN resolutions. The procedures for obtaining permits for the building of infrastructure are not properly respected in the “real world” of the diegesis.

The inclusion of the game is a highly creative aspect of the text. Games are meant to bring comic relief to the narrative, a form of distraction to attenuate the tensions that arise in the course of narration. Isookanga’s war game in effect entertains a relationship of “interruptive continuity” with the ruthless logic of greed. The game offers an utterly disturbing picture of a dehumanizing war, pointing to a series of rather grim scenarios that are paralleled first to the novel’s reality and that could be paralleled to the history and actuality of the Congolese reality. The battle for access to resources determines the strategies and war tactics of Congo Bololo, the faction that seems to master the art of war to the fullest, outdoing all other belligerents in its recourse to weapons of mass destruction to open up the field for mineral exploitation. The Congo becomes the setting of a game without fair play. Congo Bololo, which, in reality, refers to the anti-malaria plant, is Isookanga’s game avatar, with Isookanga having fallen in love with the game character’s pragmatic approach. In explaining the freedom and limits of the game player with regard to the characters in the game, Schröter and Thon assert that “the player-controlled character is perceived as a tool, which extends the player’s agency into the game world. The player constructs a mental model of their character (or of other characters), which consists of game-related features and abilities as well as character-related goals and rules” in real-life and contextual references (49). This quotation entails the character’s consciousness that the game is partially a world of his making and that of its inbuilt mechanical possibilities. Isookanga, however, is greatly impressed by the prowess and tactical nimbleness of Congo Bololo, who outplays everyone in the lethal war-games. To some extent, his addiction seems to have removed the self-protective caveat of apprehending the game as a simulation. During his meeting with the warlord Bizimungu to discuss a phoney mineral

prospection deal, Isookanga's addiction to the video game attains maddening heights. His vocabulary is considerably inflected by the realities of the video game, transforming him more into a character like those in the Raging Trade, the game. Bizimungu does not understand Isookanga's war gibberish at a time when he wants them to discuss real-life business. Isookanga thus becomes a child of two worlds—the text and the video hypertext, blurring, perhaps like the reality in the Congo itself, the differences between simulation, fiction, and reality. The game thus transgresses imaginative boundaries, offering not relief but a disturbing account of the aberrant logic of global capitalism and globalization that have positioned the Congo as a near-permanent theater of violent conflicts of interests. Through the simulated game, Bofane gives vent to the hidden and declared tactics of both local and global actors involved in sponsoring and prosecuting war and violence in the Congo.<sup>4</sup>

Considered from its vantage point of globalized interconnectivity, the opportunities of globalization can enable social exchange, capacity building, socioeconomic cooperation, intercultural understanding, and an enlarged sense of humanity and human relations. However, from a realistic standpoint, this phenomenon does not take place in a vacuum, but rather in a space already marked by complex power dynamics. *Congo Inc.* satirizes the violent dimension of the global economy, presenting the losers and winners beyond the discursive romanticism of globalization. *Congo Inc.* is a story of collective memory, told in laughter but underlined by a tremendous sense of collective pain and by the quest for justice for the victims of the violence in the Congo. The simulated world of Gondavanaland in the video game in the text can be considered a synecdoche of the Congo as well as an analogy for the bellicose logic that underlies international politics in modern world. Using the geological concept of Gondwanaland, a space that belongs to prehistory, to reflect current global politics, Bofane makes a critique of modernity and civilization, of ideologies used to placate the persistence of dehumanized relations that underlie global politics in the era of so-called globalization.

From the generalized amoral pursuit of self-interest among characters, Bofane constructs the Congo as the subconscious id of capitalistic instincts of greed and profiteering. The characters, for the most part, dream of and devise means of enriching themselves, by hook or by crook. In the Congo, the end justifies the means. The protagonist, Isookanga, incarnates this mentality. His connection with the rebel Bizimungu is an example of this unscrupulous quest to get rich. He leaves the Ekonda forest region to settle in the city where he intends to exploit the currents of globalization and make the best for himself: “Quand on utilise des bits pour communiquer, qu'importe qu'on parle pygmée, lapon ou japonais. . . . Dans l'univers globalisé du monde virtuel, même le ciel ne constitue plus une limite” (22). Shortly before his departure for the globalized city of Kinshasa, he steals the laptop of the Belgian girl, Aude Martin, whom he first meets during the

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<sup>4</sup> The analogy between the different competitors in the video game and real-life behavior of multinationals in a globalized economy is unmistakable. For instance, most of the rebel leaders in eastern Congo had multinational partners that ensured the purchase of illegally exploited minerals and supply of arms in return. Thomas Turner reveals the illicit activities of the American Mineral Fields (AMF) in eastern Congo that financed Laurent Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL) onslaught on the Mobutu regime through anticipated war tax that mortgaged a sizable proportion of the country's resources to the American company in advance (39).

installation ceremony of the telecommunication antenna by the China Networks. This laptop, which his friend Bwale teaches him to operate, becomes key in connecting him to a globalized world: "Pendant que la batterie d'Isookanga rechargeait, Bwale dispensa à son pote tout l'enseignement qu'il pouvait pour l'aider à intégrer parfaitement le monde digital et à parcourir l'éther grâce à des ondes véhiculées à partir du bout du doigt de l'homme . . ." (34). Eager to get into any form of business that will change his fate in Kinshasa, Isookanga joins a "dumped" Chinese immigrant, Zhang Xia, in a water selling business. Though Congo has immense hydraulic sources, clean and potable water is a scarcity in Kinshasa. The two decide to package their water as a Swiss brand, "Eau Pire Suisse" ("Worst Swiss Water"; 94) given that any product labelled as Swiss carries a global commercial magnet. The intended meaning is "Eau Pure Suisse" ("Pure Swiss Water"). As part of the Congolese-French accent, some speakers pronounce the French *u* as *i*, producing false homophones and (like the case above) antonyms. This caricatured labelling opens interpretative possibilities that underline the deplorable reality of Congolese wealth. Swiss companies account for a considerable proportion of the exploitation of the Congo's mineral resources in the form of coltan, cobalt, gold, and diamonds. When these products are processed and marketed as Swiss, they become goods of ostentation, sold at exorbitant prices to the rest of the world, including Congo where the minerals are mined at the cost of bloody war and competition among rebel networks.

Isookanga is an archetypal figure of commercial pragmatism that characterizes Congo's economic war history. He is a product of the Congo, *stricto sensu*. When Zhang Xia confides in him that he owns a CD-ROM that contains the ecological map of the mineral wealth of the Congolese territory, he sees this as a possible jackpot. In his usual pragmatism, Isookanga tells Zhang Xia, "Ne rêve pas. Tu es comme tout le monde, tu as besoin du Congo pour te développer" (221). Both plan to negotiate a deal with the corrupt and bloodthirsty warlord-turned-government-official, Kiro Bizimungu,<sup>5</sup> over this invaluable data. They hope this will lead to a mutually beneficial business deal between the three of them (223). Unfortunately for Isookanga and Zhang Xia, before their business deal is concretized, Bizimungu is burnt by the mob just as the UN mission prepares to arrest and extradite him to The Hague for war crimes committed in eastern Congo. Isookanga and Zhang are spotted around Bizimungu's office and are arrested and detained by the police. Isookanga is later on released, while Zhang is extradited to China to face corruption charges in an ongoing investigation against him. The question that begs itself in this episode is why the secret CD-ROM containing the map of Congo's immense wealth is the property of a Chinese character. The answer is at least clear from the fact that China has become one of the most ferocious exploiters of Congolese and African wealth. This also accounts for the intriguing fact that the titles of the chapters of *Congo Inc.* are written both in French and Chinese. China is a major player in the postcolonial economic scramble for Africa, whose long-term consequences might be comparable, if different, to the established Western neocolonialism.

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<sup>5</sup> The name *Bizimungu* is reminiscent of General Augustin Bizimungu, the Rwandan army chief responsible for the training of the Hutu militias that carried out the genocide against the Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda in 1994. The use of this name could be a symbolic attempt by Bofane to draw attention to the Congolese genocide that has apparently attracted less global sympathy when compared to the Rwandan case.

The warlord, Kiro Bizimungu, is a central character in *Congo Inc.* He represents the pragmatism of the Congolese rebel groups that maximize their own interests by collaborating with multinational companies and foreign powers. His rebel group is responsible for egregious exactions in Kivu. In an extensive flashback, the narrator traces the biography and trajectory of Bizimungu that reveal the complex war scenario in eastern Congo and the region's connection to Rwanda. Bizimungu gets involved in pillage as a Banyamulenge warlord fighting against the Hutu militias and the Mai Mai forces in eastern Congo. There, he makes a huge fortune in the Ituri region through a mineral smuggling network in connection with agents of multinational companies. The narrator describes the Ituri region as the Congo in miniature:

Cette partie du Congo était devenue une zone de non-droit où la chair humaine était débitée comme de la viande à l'abattoir et où seule la poudre avait encore voix au chapitre. Ceux qui y étaient nés devaient comprendre que leurs champs, leurs maisons, leurs femmes étaient à la disposition des nouveaux conquérants et des multinationales exerçant dans les secteurs de la haute technologie et des mines. (80)

Bofane's recreation of Ituri is strikingly similar to the view expressed by David Renton, David Seddon, and Leo Zeilig when they assert that "No region symbolizes the plunder in the Congo in the last five years as graphically as Ituri. The province is even a creation of war, having reached independent existence only in 1999. . . . Ituri is rich in gold, coltan and timber" (196). Thus, there is a symbiotic relationship between the multinational companies and the warlords. The warlords do the dirty job of ethnic cleansing to clear the territory for exploitation undertaken by corrupt transnational companies. The aggregate losers of these endless wars remain the Congolese people, the ill-fated displaced civilians. The well-being of the multinational companies and the local warlords is plotted on the same line as the deterioration of life of the Congolese populace caught up in the brutal wars. The Kivu region is the epitome of the paradox of scarcity/excess as a product of its war economy. As Bofane's narrator puts it, "Le Kivu représentait la violence mais aussi la richesse à profusion" (183). According to a fact-finding mission carried out by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), illicit natural resource exploitation in eastern Congo is valued at "over USD 1.25 billion per year (USD 722-862 million if excluding diamonds also sourced outside eastern DRC)" (3). Ironically, the conditions under which the minerals are mined can be considered a modern form of slavery, occurring in zones permanently at the crossfire of rebel violence. In the case of the Katanga, for example, the "average miner earns . . . about two or three dollars a day. Most work without protective clothing, equipment or training, and scores die every year in preventable accidents . . ." (Turner 48). A commission set up by the United Nations Security Council to analyze the role of multinational companies in the war economy<sup>6</sup> in the Congo came out with a list of close to

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<sup>6</sup> Filip Reyntjens offers an encompassing analysis of what he defines as the war economy of the Congo whereby members of *clair-obscur* networks cooperate "to generate revenue and, in the case of Rwanda, institutional financial gain. They derived this financial benefit from a variety of criminal activities, including theft, embezzlement and diversion of 'public' funds, under-evaluation of goods, smuggling, false invoicing, non-payment of taxes, kickbacks to officials and bribery. International players were closely involved in this criminal economy, as the local and regional actors drew support from the networks and 'services' (such as air transport, illegal arms dealing and international transactions of pillaged resources) of organised international

100 multinational companies that continue to buy “blood” gold, diamonds, coltan, cobalt, and other mineral products in contravention of international trade rules (7-10). Business enterprises considered by UN Security Council to be in violation of the OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises include companies from countries such as U.K., U.S., Belgium, Germany, South Africa, Ghana, DRC, Swiss, Canada, South Africa, Ghana, Zimbabwe, and UAE (7-10). Thus, in line with the formation of new centers of the global economy, the war economy map of the Congo gets more warped and complex. Ironically, many of the abovementioned countries are among the major supporters of the peace process in the Congo, but, at the same time, they are unable (or rather, unwilling) to pressurize their multinationals to comply with international business and trade laws. This bolsters the thesis that the Congo is a complex network of interests, covert activities, and contradictory discourses, where utter economic calculations take precedence over any legal or humanitarian considerations.

To reflect the above-painted reality, Bofane’s narrative is based on networks, reflecting the complex channels of illicit economy that brings together a wide array of characters from diverse backgrounds and nationalities. Though set in a postwar dispensation where there could be some expectation of sociopolitical reconstruction, most of its secondary characters face an acute scarcity of resources. The street children, many of whom are former child soldiers, are left to their own devices, while their former recruiters, the warlords, occupy lucrative posts in the transition government. In effect, though the warlords swap their khaki jackets for the office suits in order to participate in the 2003 government of national unity, their bellicose mentality has not changed. Many of them use their positions in the new government to perfect their networks of illicit transactions. In a conversation with Iookanga on how to make use of his position as the manager of the Salonga National Park to exploit the forest reserves under his control, Bizimungu expresses his intentions in the following passage: “Du diamant, de l’or et d’autres choses très très valables. Si je pouvais mettre la main sur certains produits que je connais, j’effacerais tout ça en beaucoup moins de temps que cette foutue désertification qu’on annonce depuis des décennies et qui se fait toujours attendre” (158). Bizimungu wishes to use his position to multiply his riches to the detriment of the environment. The short-term interests of the character are of more importance than the public good and the preservation of the environment.

In perfect resonance with the adage that peace is a period of cheating between two wars and that politics is the continuation of war by other means, the warlords use their position in the “postwar” government of national unity to maximize their bargaining power with mineral business partners and even build new alliances with new rebel allies. In his analysis of the general contours of the Congolese war economy, Reyntjens has referred to such officials as Bizimungu as entrepreneurs of violence and of insecurity (206). They thrive in times of war through dubious network of mineral exploitation and exportation. The situation represented in Bofane’s novel resonates with several commissioned reports on the interconnection between mineral exploitation and the war in the Congo. According to UN Security Council report on the Congo, the networks of mineral exploitation consist of a small core of political and military elites and business persons and, in the case of the

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criminal groups” (225).

occupied areas, rebel leaders and administrators. Some members of the elite networks occupy key positions in the Congolese government (7-9, 14-15). In the same vein, International Alert alleges that the “wars waged in North and South Kivu and the Ituri between 1996 and 2003 strengthened the illegal character of artisanal mining and fueled the formation of militias who exploited their control of the mines in order to raise the funds necessary for their own economic survival and arms purchases” (5). Thus, in *Congo Inc.*, there is no clear-cut distinction between wartime and peacetime given that the networks and continuous realliances have become a reality of the country’s political economy.

Set against the background of globalization and interconnectivity, the narrative moves in the form of a web, with the narrator apt at creating relationships between the Congo (the novel’s primary setting) and events in other settings. Kinshasa is depicted as the capital of the country that sends shockwaves across the world through its uranium, the effects of which are felt in Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Bofane 271-72, 289). The demand for some products by core economies in Europe, Asia, and the U.S. results in war, pillage, rape, and enslavement in distant spaces. Money laundered in some corners of the world is registered in stock exchanges in the global financial powerhouses. The narrator makes suggestive comparisons that connect the Congo with other spaces where war has become endemic. For example, the clamor of the street children after the murder of comrade Omari, a former child soldier involved in a street scuffle, is compared to the commotion in the Security Council during a resolution on Palestine: “Et ce fut la plus vaste cacophonie qu’on ait entendue depuis Babel, sauf peut-être aux assemblées de l’ONU juste avant le vote d’une résolution sur la Palestine” (107). One gauges in *Congo Inc.* an attempt to write, through the topos of the Congo, the tragedies of global geopolitics, the uneven distribution of costs and benefits of a global neoliberal economy. In effect, the author develops an aesthetic of globalist writing that grants the Congo both a substantive and an aesthetic/paradigmatic connotation. Bofane’s narration of the Congo underlines a point made by Renton, Seddon, and Zeilig when they assert that “[t]he Congo exists not in an obscure and primitive place in ‘darkest Africa’ but in a modern and globalized world. Commentators frequently emphasise the ‘complexity’ of the war; but under the constantly shifting alliances of the various rebel groups, there was one overriding and predictable motivation: control of the country’s vast mineral wealth” (175). If the Congo, with its stories of war, continues to be regarded by some as the heart of darkness, this is a reflection of the ruthless spirit of colonial exploitation nurtured by its colonial design and kept alive by the greed of local, intranational, regional, and global powers, not an intrinsic quality of the territory itself. It is due to the brutal consistency of economic *realpolitik* in the Congo, as I have argued in this article, that Bofane represents the Congo not only as the spatial setting of his novel but also as a way of doing politics, which he creatively converts into a way of writing. The nature of Bofane’s text is spatially rhizomatic, probably a reflection of complex conflicts and alliances in Congolese history and the globalized range of Congolese resources. The narrator likens the Congo to a veritable nest of vipers in human history (213). Bofane’s text represents the Congo’s contribution to contemporary high-tech arms and mobile technology, a key purveyor of modern day globalization: “. . . Congo Inc. fut plus récemment désigné comme le pourvoyeur attiré de la mondialisation, chargé de livrer les minerais stratégiques pour la conquête de l’espace, la fabrication d’armements sophistiqués, l’industrie pétrolière, la production de matériel de télécommunication high-tech” (272). As a major source of coltan

and cobalt, indispensable metals in the fabrication of high-tech mobile telecommunication, space technology, and computer hardware, the Congo is an indispensable generator of globalization. As the protagonist's video war game discussed above suggests, the sources of supply of these minerals have to be secured by the big transnational companies at every cost.<sup>7</sup> This leads to the brokering of a network of unholy alliances between rebel movements, politicians, neighboring governments, and transnational companies. The merciless wars of control over resources have converted the Congolese subjects into human shields and cannon fodder of the globalized industries.

### **Sex, Rape, and the (Im)Possibilities of Justice**

The aspect of colonial/neocolonial responsibility in Congo's woes is represented amply in Bofane's text through the imagery of sex. Sexual relations occur in a context of unequal relations and carry a strong undertone of colonial and neocolonial relationship. The sexual metaphor is employed in the text to depict the geopolitical relations between the weaker and stronger nations that foregrounded colonialism and its multiple metamorphoses in contemporary political, economic, and cultural relations. The efficacy of the sexual metaphor lies in its potency to portray both normalized as well as violent dimensions of exploitation and oppression.

However, Bofane symbolically subverts this unequal relationship through a humorous episode involving the protagonist and a Belgian girl, Aude Martin, who comes to the Congo to carry out a research project in social anthropology on the Mongo people of the Equateur province. She meets Isookanga in a popular Kinshasa bar and falls in love with the "typical Congolese sensuality" with which he dances. At first, Isookanga, who doubles as her object of research, tries to exercise continence, feeling diffident due to his uncircumcised manhood, but Martin asks him sarcastically: "Quand allez-vous, les Africains, une fois pour toutes, saisir votre chance ?" (194). After hearing this rhetorical question, formulated both as an accusation and an invitation, Isookanga forgets about his corporal difference. The question becomes an existentialist comment on his whole being and propels him into action. However, the sexual encounter between the two is a bittersweet experience for both of them, especially Martin:

Arc-bouté sur ses cuisses, il ignorait que chaque coup de rein qu'il lui portait était — pour elle — comme le fouet que ses ancêtres avaient subi lors de l'esclavage ; que chaque assaut entre ses cuisses ouvertes était aussi impitoyable que la hache tranchant des mains, que la chicote infligée par Léopold II et ses descendants ; que chaque pénétration de son membre provoquait une turbulence digne d'une émeute pour l'indépendance ; que les « Han ! » émis par sa bouche rappelaient ceux proférés par le Belge Gérard Soete pendant la découpe à la scie du corps de Patrice Lumumba ; que chaque secousse dans son ventre sensible résonnait comme les salves tirées par le néocolonialisme sauvage, comme les diktats du Fonds monétaire international, comme les résolutions de l'ONU, comme une réédition de *Tintin au Congo*, comme le discours à Dakar d'un président français mal informé, comme la propagation des propos racistes dans la twittosphère. (195-96)

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<sup>7</sup> AFDL, the rebel movement headed by Kabila with the aim of overthrowing the Mobutu regime, was alleged to be financed in advance through a war tax in the east by the AMF (Turner 39).

The above episode is one of the most humorous but also symbolic episodes of Bofane's text. Once more, we find the narrator poised at every moment to give vertical depth to his story, exposing the wounds on the body of the Congo inflicted by colonial and neocolonial histories. The narrator contracts immense and complex histories of violence in a single passage. Some of the episodes evoked above include: King Leopold's rule in the Congo, the colonialist masterminding of Patrice Lumumba's death, the brutal ransacking of Congo's wealth by corrupt multinationals, illegal transactions in Congolese minerals by UN officials, Congolese warlords and the prejudicial image of the Congo through Hergé's comic album *Tintin au Congo*, and Nicolas Sarkozy's controversial speech in Dakar in 2007. The text thus distends a long history of grievances, considering the Congolese predicament in its historicity, the responsibility of colonialist practices in the fragmentation of the Congo, and its continuous predicament as a nation and as part of a dismembered continent.

In the scenario above, it takes the strident bellowing of Aude Martin to alert the neighbors, who flock in to rescue her. This scenario attests to the author's dexterity in deploying humor to portray a rather grim memory of violence and exploitation. In the end, the sobbing Aude Martin, a victim of her bodily/colonialist desires, is filled with a mixture of guilt and fury: "... avait-elle suffisamment payé de sa personne pour acquitter la dette que ses ancêtres avaient contractée envers ces peuplades depuis si longtemps? se demandait-elle, avec un délicieux sentiment de culpabilité" (198). The narrative converts Aude Martin into the epitome of the memory of colonial exploitation and a ransom for the crimes of her Belgian colonial ancestors. It can be asserted that Bofane's text is underlined by a deep-seated quest for the atonement of historical injustices. The anger of the colonized is compounded by the continuous exercise of colonial violence in the present through novel forms of exploitation, symbolized by Aude Martin's attempt to sexually ensnare Ilookanga. The reenactment of an extremely dolorous history, without any real prospect for justice, leads to a sense of generalized frustration beneath the humorous tonality of the novel.

When seen through the prism of Congolese history and its current reenactment, Bofane's novel is thus an exposition of the political economy of war in the Congo and the violent subtext of the globalization process. Thus, in spite of its humorous tone, the text presents the sense of injustice done to the Congolese by the globalist economic system that feeds on their country's wealth in collaboration with local politicians and warlords. Though the element of physical violence constitutes a key variable in the case of the Congo, one might be forced to read the globalizing process in the Congo as painted in the novel in line with Aníbal Quijano's view of globalization as a phenomenon that began with the conquest of America and the unbridled exploitation of the gold and silver of the New World (181). In effect, this perspective is corroborated by Ortega when he states that "[i]n a contemporary perspective, there is a continuing relevance in the fact that the native of abundance whose labour reproduces a regime that condemns him to lack, is, when all is said and done, the poverty stricken human being of a modernity dedicated to multiplying resources and wealth" (29). Quijano and Ortega's views, though primarily expressed with regard to the Latin American context, can be validated with regard to many societies in the Global South. The Congolese example underlines the affinity between many African and Latin American countries as major victims, to a great extent, of the grand history of Western modernity discourses and economic globalization.

Another dimension of Bofane's novel that reflects the complexity of the Congolese narrative concerns the subversion of the UN peacekeeping mission by its own workers. The UN forces under the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo (MONUSCO) are sent into Kivu to protect the civilian population against the atrocities of warlords like Kiro Bizimungu. As a matter of a gross violation of their mission, some UN forces engage in activities that end up stoking the flames of war through their illicit deals. The dedication of Bofane's novel to the UN, IMF, and WTO ("à l'ONU[,] au FMI[,] à l'OMC") in the opening pages could, therefore, be taken as an ambivalent and sarcastic critique of the inability of these global bodies to stop the bloodshed and criminal networks in the Congo, when they have not in some cases contributed to the entrenchment of the country's wounds. The sinister deals of some MONUSCO forces come to the fore when six of their Uruguayan members are ambushed and massacred at Kamituga in eastern Congo by the rebel group led by Kiro Bizimungu. During an ill-tempered exchange with the Lithuanian head of the mission, Waldemar Mirnas, Kiro Bizimungu explains that his forces were compelled to attack MONUSCO forces because the latter did not deliver the arms in exchange for minerals as previously arranged: "... sur les douze tireurs RPG7 commandés il en manquait quatre. Ne parlons même pas des roquettes qui allaient avec. Si les armes promises n'étaient pas là, elles étaient où, vendues à qui ? Certainement pas à des amis. On ne se faisait pas de cadeaux dans le coin" (188). The non-delivery of the entire cache of arms that constitutes the initial deal makes Bizimungu and his men suspect that the UN chief may have a double arms deal with other rival rebel groups. The killing of the blue helmets exposes the networks of illicit deals that contravene the principles and objectives of the UN peacekeeping mission.

Chiara Argento, a diligent UN officer in New York, is bent on bringing the culprits to justice and investigating the possible involvement of prominent UN staff on the ground. However, her attempts are hampered by the complexity of devious interests in the Congo, involving internal, regional, and global actors in Washington. The Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations tells Chiara Argento that Rwanda may be involved in the arms deal and that an investigation to bring out the truth of this affair may bring the UN face-to-face with U.S.-Rwandan interests in the region: "... les Américains ont besoin d'eux pour d'autres choses. ... Ils sont très utiles, vous savez, les Rwandais sont la tête de pont des Américains en Afrique, comme le Congo l'a été d'ailleurs" (260). The Congo, "un des plus gros nœuds de vipères" (213), is subject to an intractable web of interests locally, regionally, and globally rendering peacemaking a difficult task. It is in this web that the lives of millions of Congolese victims get unaccountably stuck. Chiara Argento comes to unravel the connection between the eastern Congolese rebels and the Rwandan army, a strong regional ally of the U.S. government.<sup>8</sup> Since Kiro Bizimungu is a pawn in a more complex game of secret interests that involves big political and economic powers, any real chance of bringing him and his callous comrades to justice would involve the tacit political

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<sup>8</sup> The memory of the genocide in Rwanda has increasingly been converted into a weapon used by Rwanda in order to advance a rather vicious policy of aggression and graft in eastern Congo. This has been generally referred to as the Rwanda's "genocide credit" (Reyntjens 281), through which Kigali strategically appropriates memories of genocide to foster its agenda in the Congo in the face of an international community still caught up in guilt for failing to stem the Rwandan tragedy. The "genocide credit" has often meant that Rwanda's point of view with regard to the Congo gets better international representation.

will of both regional actors and global superpowers with vested interests in the region (272). Chiara Argento is thus presented in the novel as an enthusiastic but frustrated character as far as the UN peace efforts are concerned.

Chiara's investigation reveals the role played by another character in the crisis: Waldemar Mirnas. He is the head of the UN peacekeeping mission in the Congo. He resists cooperating with Chiara's investigation, afraid that his illegal transactions in the Congo would be revealed. He is represented as a venal personality who welcomes his transfer from Afghanistan to the Congo with great delight in view of making the best out of Congo's gold, diamonds, and cassiterite (182). He is thus irritated by Chiara Argento's determination in investigating the conditions that led to the death of the MONUSCO soldiers at Kamituga. Mirnas' sexual encounters with the beautiful sixteen-year-old street child Shasha la Jactance, constitute a potent metaphor of violence and exploitation in this text. The image associated with the MONUSCO official reenacts violence on the pubescent female body: "Tandis que des consortiums menaient une guerre à outrance sur une dalle de l'avenue du Commerce, à la villa de Waldemar Mirnas, Shasha la Jactance, debout, les genoux légèrement ployés, les mains agrippées à la table, faisait monter et descendre sa croupe sur le sexe tendu de l'officier de la MONUCC..." (99). The graphic narration aptly captures the irony of the MONUSCO officer's activity in the Congo.<sup>9</sup> The relationship between the two is an epitome of sexual exploitation, with the UN official taking full advantage of the misery in which the street child finds herself. In another instance, the author represents Mirnas' act of eating at Shasha's table as reminiscent of colonialist voracious appetite for Congo's wealth: "Il prit son temps pour manger, savourant chaque bouchée, ressentant les saveurs, les intégrant, se forgeant des images ; de protides, de lipides, de sels minéraux, d'oligoéléments, de fer, d'aluminium, de colombo-tantalite, de manganèse, de germanium, de cobalt, de cuivre, d'uranium, de bauxite, de niobium, de platine, de chrome, d'hélium 3, de béryl..." (226). This long list of minerals reveals the rapid shift in Mirnas' mind from the composition of the food he eats to his hunger for the exploitation of Congo's immense mineral riches. However, the next occasion to savor Shasha's tropical food and body is ill omened. In sheer accordance with the novel's poetic justice, Mirnas' voracious cravings do not go unchecked. Shasha waits for the right moment to execute her revenge plan. She mixes the hair of a buffalo in the soup she is preparing for Mirnas, her MONUSCO sugar daddy, a vengeful tactic common among women of her area. The hair is nonbiodegradable and results in an incurable ulcer in its victim's stomach (288). Although the reader is left in suspense as to what finally happens to Mirnas as a result of Shasha's concoction, it is evident that his days are numbered. Iookanga is filled with both pity and wrath for Mirnas, as he perceives Mirnas' 4x4 driving in to look for Shasha. In an indirect discourse, the narrator posits: "Mais ce n'était pas ainsi que le jeune Ekonda concevait la mondialisation. On ne pouvait pas mettre les gens sous dumping à ce point-là, ils finissaient forcément par vouloir se venger" (288). Iookanga's statement marks his disappointment with the nature of life in a globalized world, a complete antithesis to his overzealousness at the beginning of the text about the merits of globalization. The statement also serves as a premonition to the rather dramatic turn of

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<sup>9</sup> Mirnas' escapades with the teenage Shasha are reminiscent of the confessions made by former UN worker Didier Bourget and the sex transactions in eastern Congo (Haskin 168).

events at the end of the novel. Shasha honors the meaning of her name: “Shasha la Jactance Kolo Eyoma Alukaki, azui” (“Champion of brawls. One who looks for a fight, finds it”; 288; my translation). Mirnas’ relation with Shasha can be conceived of as a scandal, the most apt mode of capturing the reality of Congolese history. However, what Bofane contributes to the manner of narrating the Congo is the fact that the scandal has been normalized to such an extent that it can only be told through an intricate combination of the humorous and the absurd.

The end of the novel takes a dramatic turn for another villain in this text, Kiro Bizimungu. Just before the UN forces are about to clamp down on him, his sex slave-turned-wife, Adeïto, betrays him to the mob, accusing him of rape. The mob gets furious and merciless: “Le mot « viol », qu’elle avait prononcé, avait depuis longtemps marqué la conscience des Congolais au fer rouge et ils ne le supportaient plus. Ils se précipitèrent sur Kiro Bizimungu” (275). As Bizimungu’s body is charred to ashes, the narrator directs our attention to his suggestive posture. His burning body is said to assume the shape of a dog in a shooting position (278), while his phallus, the last to burn, stands swollen as if in an erection, before bursting violently: “Son sexe fut le dernier membre à bouger. En une monstrueuse érection, il s’allongea et gonfla . . .” (278). The violent manner in which he dies is commensurate with the atrocities he meted out on his victims as a warlord. The passage needs to be read beyond its immediate context to underline its symbolic depth. The phallus, the instrument of Bizimungu’s rape on Adeïto and other women in eastern Congo, is spectacularly devastated. Beyond that is the (economic) rape of the Congo through a collusion of internal agents with foreign companies.<sup>10</sup> The mob seems to be moved by a collective memory of oppression, the “rape” of the Congolese social body over a *longue durée* history. The rage of the populace and the vengeful fragmentation of Bizimungu’s body underline the caustic temperament of Bofane’s novel, beneath its humor and sarcasm. The narrator underlines a firm belief in and hope for justice as can be seen from the treatment of characters such as Aude Martin, Waldemar Mirnas, and Kiro Bizimungu. Adeïto, after several years of captivity and rape disguised as marriage, finally gains her freedom from Bizimungu’s oppressive phallus. The fate of Adeïto is quite telling of the fate of thousands of women in similar situations in eastern Congo and of the Congo as a neocolonial nation. She is turned into the warlord Bizimungu’s sex slave during a raid in North Kivu by his militia, the Banyamulenge,<sup>11</sup> but she finds the occasion to avenge herself at the end. Adeïto’s fate, as grim as it may seem, can be considered as mitigated when compared to her female peers who were raped and molested to death by the Banyamulenge rebels. In fact, in another novel on violence in eastern Congo, *En suivant le sentier sous les palmiers* (2009) by Pius Ngandu Nkashama, the narrator asserts that “le viol à grande échelle est devenu une arme de guerre à tel point que beaucoup de femmes et de jeunes filles auraient préféré mourir plutôt que de vivre ce qu’elles ont connu. Il n’y a pas de mot qui puisse qualifier cela” (7).<sup>12</sup> This quotation underlines the magnitude of suffering

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<sup>10</sup> As I write this section, BBC Africa French Service reports that Global Witness has just published its reports on unannounced mining deals concluded in 2015 involving Congolese State officials, on the one hand, and the Israeli Fleurette Group, China’s Nonferrous Metal Mining Co., and U.K. firms, on the other hand (“Cobalt”).

<sup>11</sup> A collection of eastern Congolese ethnic groups with affinities to the Rwandan Tutsis.

<sup>12</sup> Thousands of women in eastern Congo have suffered rape from all the parties involved in war. This has

in war-torn eastern part of the Congo. This situation reinforces the disparity between the eastern parts of the Congo, where the war took place as contrasted with the political expediency in Kinshasa, the capital city, where the experience of the horror of war is minimal (Djungu-Simba 37).

When Bizimungu moves to Kinshasa to assume his position in the transition government, he converts his war booty into a “wife.” During her few free moments, she becomes a regular visitor of the Church of Divine Multiplication led by Reverend Monkaya, who, in turn, wants to sexually abuse her under the cover of special prayer meetings. Monkaya finally gets his “God-given” opportunity. When Bizimungu is killed by the mob, Monkaya steps in to “comfort” Adeïto and to promise her a “better life” in the house of God. Discovering Adeïto in the mob with a (purposefully) torn skirt during her simulated rape by Bizimungu, the pastor removes his suit and places it on her body, promising her the church will henceforth be her home (279). As the novel ends, it is clear that Adeïto’s freedom is only illusory. She might just be about to get into another relationship of sexual violence under the cover of religious deliverance, a vicious cycle that echoes the cyclical rape of the Congolese territory.

Bofane’s novel is a provocative depiction of the “postwar” situation of the Congo and of the economic violence in the country as a reproduction of the painful wounds of Congo’s encounter with global capitalism. In this text, I have come up with the genre of the coltan novel as a form of representation that attempts to capture the historical imbroglio of the Congo, where excess coexists with scarcity and where the systemic impoverishment of its people offers a contradictory picture of the unfathomable riches of the country’s human and natural resources. The coltan novel features high-tech media and gadgets in order to underline the Congo’s role in the domain of global communication systems, while at the same time, underlying the aggregate marginalization of the Congo, as well as many countries of the Global South, within that very globalized economy. In another dimension, in a manner similar to the basic function of the coltan mineral of which the Congo is a major producer, the coltan novel is a “network” narrative form that unravels the knots of illicit interests in the Congo that involve local, regional, and international players whose financial calculations take precedence over any ethical considerations. In the coltan novel, Congo is transfigured into both matter and form and into a hypertext that exists in our midst, persistently interrogating both the nature of our postcolonial politics and global geopolitics.

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led to the abnormally high rate of women suffering from vaginal fistulae (resulting from gang rape). More so, as a result of the social norms of some Congolese societies, “in which a woman is blamed for rape and ostracized by her community, it is likely that thousands, perhaps even tens of thousands, more have not reported their rapes” (Haskin 164).

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