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AN ACOUSTIC REGISTER, TENACIOUS IMAGES, AND CONGOLESE SCENES OF RAPE AND REPETITION

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A recent documentary film on war-related sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) includes words and images of raped women. Some are bent over in pain, some speak, and others are harvesting new fields together. Graphic medical photographs show magnified images of torn body parts, vulvas mutilated from guns, coke bottles, and sticks forced into them. Much of the film is set in eastern Congo, at hospitals in Kindu and Bukavu, where doctors have been treating many of the thousands raped in recent years. This film, produced by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and called “Les âmes brisées” (“Broken Souls”), devotes considerable space to scenes in Equateur, where there have been well-publicized incidents of soldiers raping women and girls. In December 2003, former soldiers of Jean-Pierre Bemba’s rebel movement, who had not been paid although recently mixed into the national Congolese army, turned on some 200 girls and women in a village named Nsongo Mboyo in a storm of angry mass rape. In an unprecedented action of Joseph Kabila’s state, some of these soldiers were charged, found guilty, and imprisoned in 2006, just three months before the presidential elections whose results kept him in power (Gueye 2006; cf. IRIN 2006; Kambale 2006; UN Mission to the Congo [MONUC] 2006).¹

Nsongo Mboyo is located just south of Bondanganda in the same Equateur region where the largest, most notorious rubber concession company, Abir, was located when the Congo was King Leopold II’s scandalous Congo Free State (1885–1908). The 2006 film makes no mention of this history of iconic

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imperial violence. Instead, the documentary begins its Equateur section with a weak attempt to historically locate place, with a stone declaring the site of a colonial geographic marker. The filmmaker was Senegalese; history was not his purpose; clearly this image of a monument commemorating colonial geographic science was a mere placeholder for him. But it is significant that none of the international and Congolese actors who have been making a concerted effort to help the thousands of rape victims in the DRC (Initiative Conjointe de Lutte contres les Violences Sexuelles faites aux Femmes et aux Enfants en RDC 2003; Lussy and Matemo 2006; Senga Kossy 2007; cf. Csete and Kippenberg 2002) seems to know that Nsongo Mboyo was once in the Abir concession,² a region of death, starvation, wife abduction, “hostage houses,” mutilation, and sexual abuse from 1892 when the violent rush for raw rubber began.^{3,4} Indeed, this absence of historicization within today’s international humanitarian campaign tells us something important about ruination, historical forgetting, and missed opportunities to work with “toxic imperial debris” (Stoler this issue) in producing effective, urgent histories.

The film does much to mark as “historical” the moment in 2006 when the soldiers who had raped at Nsongo Mboyo were condemned to prison for life and ritually stripped of their uniforms before a crowd gathered for the military trial. Using archival footage from the UN Mission to the Congo (MONUC), the film editors made sure to use a substantial still at this juncture, showing the soldiers’ uniforms spread on the ground as detritus, symbolic evidence not only of their guilt but also of the firm stand that President Kabila’s regime had taken in this precedent-setting case. I viewed the film in Kinshasa with an educated, worldly Congolese woman, the widow of a former university professor. As we watched this concluding segment together, she cried out that these soldiers, who had raped, should all be killed. Then she suddenly changed her mind as the best way to proceed. “They should cut off their hands,” she declared.

BOALI AND VISUAL DEBRIS

This Congolese woman’s suggestion of a fitting punishment, unwittingly pulling a tenacious image from the past, resonates with Ann Stoler’s (this issue) challenge to “think with ruins of empire” so as “to attend to their reappropriations . . . within the politics of the present.” Mama Pauline Betu’s recuperation of severed hands from the psychic and visual ruins of Leopold’s Congo may disturb us. Yet I use this reappropriation to problematize questions of duration, reproduction, and repetition in history and historical writing.

We watched the film in a 2007 context in which secure possibilities for dealing with the ubiquity of sexual violence as a weapon of war seemed few. Indeed, we watched knowing that Kabila's regime had since failed on its promise of impunity, as ten of these same 11 soldiers had escaped from Mbandaka's prison walls earlier that year. Mama Pauline's suggestion implies a claim and an unwitting recuperation of some of the images left behind from the Free State and still circulating globally—the mutilation photographs that have become iconic not only of atrocities in Leopold's Congo but of all racialized violence.

This article turns to visual detritus from the Congo not as concrete “debris” that wedges open ethnographic history (Hunt 1999). Nor does it do so to understand how the “phantasmagoric use of atrocity photographs” produced anti-Leopoldian humanitarian spectators in the West (Sliwinski 2006:355). It takes up “shock-photos” (Barthes 1979) as refractory evidence whose selective circulation then and since is worthy of canny attention. Some images from Leopold's Congo traveled and were recycled, repackaged, and reframed, over and over again. Some did not. We can still find some of this photographic debris in recent and not-so-recent histories on “red rubber” (Morel 1907) and its ruinous violence.⁵ Go open Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost* (1998: 116–117) to its insert of archival photographs, and you will find these most recycled visual remains there—from the image of a father named Nsala looking at the severed hand and foot of his five-year-old daughter, to a photograph of two male youth, their handless black stumps displayed against white sheets of cloth. Each of the five photographs was an image in the standard magic lantern show that circulated in Britain and the United States at the height of the CRA's anti-Leopoldian campaign. Most of them were taken by Alice Harris of the Congo Balolo Mission station of Baringa, also the location of an Abir company post. As Kevin Grant (2005) has shown, Harris' photographs and the magic lantern shows that they permitted, together enabled Morel's relentless humanitarian propaganda machine to gather force and move an ever-larger British and North American public. By 1907, the London Auxiliary of the CRA had sold some 10,000 copies of a less expensive brochure called *Camera and Congo Crime*, which included 24 Harris photographs. The standard magic lantern show of the period, which Riley Brothers Ltd. was marketing by 1907 under the title “Lantern Lecture on the Congo Atrocities,” included 60 lantern slides in all. “A savage Abir sentry” appeared quickly, followed by an image a Congolese being whipped. One was of a group of chained women, “The treatment of women hostages.” Six slides were mutilation photographs, picturing Congolese with missing hands or feet. Almost all of these were of young men and boys. An advertisement

(Morel 1907:verso) listed the 60 slides, divided into four sections with a trajectory from rubber system and mutilation to the civilizing potential of missionary work.

Alice Harris' mutilation photographs were powerful, overwhelming. Ultimately their autonomous force as "shock-photos" (Barthes 1979) produced an effective "public revulsion" in Britain, the United States, and western Europe that worked to "change the course of history" (Warner 2006:353, 202; cf. Grant 2005, Sliwinski 2006, and Sontag 2003). Cathy Caruth (1996:3) suggests that traumatic form combines repetitive reappearance with repression, the "insistent grammar of sight" with some kind of "effacement of the event." The continued use and reuse of these images reify a notion of a maimed, disfigured, individualized body. In the process, they work to distort and erase a complexity of forms of ruination and refusal far wider, more spatial, and more enduring.⁶

The visual nature of the evidence—what foreign observers wrote about seeing, what Congolese explained that they had seen, and the kinds of photographs that circulated and shocked—has oriented humanitarian, scholarly, and popular attention toward severed hands.⁷ The mutilation photographs, in particular, have directed interest away from what was more hidden, tactile, and out of sight, and away from another modality of violence, the sexual. And this modality of violence was intrinsically more reproductive and transgressive in its nature.

Enter Boali. Boali was a woman who resisted the sexual advances of an Abir sentry. The armed man hired to supervise rubber collection shot her in the belly, took her body for dead, and then cut off her foot in order to run off with the brass ring of sure wealth fastened tight just above her ankle. Boali was one of Alice Harris' photographic subjects. The photograph shows her almost naked, wearing a mere apron around the waist, holding on to a long pole to stay erect. Her belly is traced with marks of scarification, more recently misshaped by her gunshot wound. Her missing foot is just visible at the bottom edge of the frame. This image of Boali traveled far in Britain and North America as part of the standard magic lantern show, while her name became deformed as Boaji in the process. Slide no. 34 carried the caption "Boaji, Mutilated for her constancy" (Morel 1907:verso). These redemptive, evangelical words appended to her ambiguous image tried to turn her into a model, faithful wife.

Since then, Boali's image has tended to disappear. Morel (1904, 1907) never reprinted the Boali photograph in his books, although it did appear in at least one CRA pamphlet.⁸ In contrast, the photographs of young men with missing hands—their black stumps posed and in high contrast against white cloth—became

cropped and reduplicated over and over again, as well as brought together into an assemblage of repetition, with several cropped mutilation photographs shown all at once within a unified frame, as in Mark Twain's *King Leopold's Soliloquy* (1905). Often, individuals were no longer named in captions, and their stories disappeared. It was as if humanitarian spectators already knew the cast of figures. The quantity and simultaneity of the images summarized all: horror.

FIELDS OF SOUND

This article reinserts Boali back into the complexity of evidence about ruination in the Congo, then and now (since 1996), as a way to argue for the importance of rewriting the standard Congo atrocity narrative in relation to urgent politics of the present. The conventional story has tended to get caught, often obsessively, on the malevolent, selfish, naughty King Leopold who never set foot in the place (Hochschild 1998), now should be put on trial (Bate 2004), and a mute row of male atrocity victims with mere stumps for arms. These histories tend to end not long after British Consul Roger Casement's incriminating report to the British Parliament and E. D. Morel's extraordinarily energetic and effective propaganda campaign with the way the Belgian parliament was finally forced to intervene, requiring King Leopold to turn over his private colony to Belgian administration in 1908.⁹

Another purpose here is to problematize and disaggregate the visual. This article moves beyond seeing as the primary mode of perceiving the past, by being wakeful to other senses and capacities, especially the field of hearing, producing, and muffling sound. Such attentiveness makes the following comment stand out and smart; it is from Adam Hochschild's (1998:5) moving, yet ever-redemptive and epic history about violence and humanitarianism in the Congo Free State: "One problem, of course, is that nearly all of this vast river of words is by Europeans or Americans. . . . Instead of African voices from this time there is largely silence." Hochschild perhaps did not realize how strongly he was echoing an idea found in his humanitarian sources. Consider these words from a CRA pamphlet of 1904: "It is from others, mostly, that we know what there is to know of his sad story . . . of women toiling in chains . . . the severed hands. . . . But in all of this we have not heard the voice of the native himself. At most we have seen him in photographs, stretching mute, mutilated and uncomprehending" (CRA 1904:22–23). Congolese voices, however mediated, may have been difficult to hear in 1904, but the historian today can find them in a rich range of sources.¹⁰

Enter Boali, once again. Boali spoke, and her voice can be located in the African Archives in Brussels, alongside the mediated, translated (into French), transcribed words of the 258 Congolese persons who made depositions before King Leopold's Commission of Inquiry in 1905–06.¹¹ Boali was from a village named Ekolongo in the Abir concession, and she testified at Baringa. Her words went something like this:

One day when my husband went into the forest to gather rubber, the sentry Ikelonda came, finding me in my hut where I stayed, and asked me to give myself to him. I rejected his proposition. Furious, Ikelonda fired a gun shot at me, which gave me the wound whose trace you can still see. I fell on my back; Ikelonda thought I was dead, and to get hold of the brass bracelet that I wore at the base of my right leg, he cut off my right foot. This happened at the time when the white man Ekolakauba (M. Rogers) was at the post of Baringa. [Boali of Ekolongo 1905]

Boali was one of 13 Congolese women to speak out and make a claim before the Commission of Inquiry. Together, these women's depositions provide complex evidence about sexual capital and sexual abuse, how some women managed to use the former to seek protection, how others became reduced to vulnerable objects of torture and violence (Hunt n.d.). It is not clear precisely when Alice Harris took her photograph of Boali, only that her picture traveled far at the time, along with the caption about marital "constancy," as we have seen. Boali's claim was about her wound as "a trace," her missing foot, the stolen brass anklet, and her refusal to be raped. Her words were about Ikelonda, the sentry. She knew his name. And her account suggests that after Ikelonda's fury and gun blasted through Boali with decisive, life-altering noise, she managed to remain "quiet as death" (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:126), while he used a sharp blade to separate this piece of wealth from her body. This capacity for lying silent and giving no "sign of life" while a body part was "hacked off" (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:163) had intrigued Roger Casement when he had investigated conditions in the Congo in 1903. But other aspects of violence during war and raiding he found to be "unfit for repetition" (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:140).

REPRODUCTIVE RUINATION

In *A Colonial Lexicon* (Hunt 1999), a history of colonial things and reproductive technologies set in the Belgian Congo, "debris" was the material and the concrete. Debris consisted of those colonial things—like soap, baby clothes, and

birth certificates—which remained as twisted objects in a specific postcolonial field in Mobutu’s Zaire, mired but ever alive, and exerting power over decisions, purchases, gifts, and secrets. The method for tracking such colonial debris began not with words or sounds, but with observing practice and use in a postcolonial present. *Debris as method* cannot work in the same way for an anthropological history focused on the violence of Congo Free State’s “red rubber” (Harms 1975; Morel 1907) period and its aftermath, and situated in the southern Equateur region.¹² A period in the field, trying to find remnants of concessionary company posts or whipping and mutilation sites, might prove evocative. But as I learned during two recent trips into the region, the Albini rifles and cap guns are long gone, the hostage structures and rubber baskets, too, even if there is a small monument marking the burial site of a Swiss officer who committed suicide at Bokatola (Boelaert et al. 1995, 1996) and “a ruined wall about a meter high” of “an Arab house” at the former Abir post of Mpusu (Chambers 1993). Most memories of violence from this period, I discovered, are now jumbled. More recent kinds of ruination—the structural violence and neglect of the Mobutu years, and especially the bombardments and penury of the last decade of war in the Basankusu area (Van Herp et al. 2003)—have displaced what still remained as a tangible and accessible set of memories in 1953, when a Flemish missionary mounted an essay-writing contest to collect Congolese memories of Europeans and rubber violence in the Free State period (Boelaert et al. 1995–96).

This article takes up the immediacy of ruination caused by the rubber regime and provides a fresh reading of it through the senses, through fields of hearing and sound. This direction will take us to fright, shame, and the unsayable, and the way these sometimes produced silence or, perhaps oddly, a brief eruption of laughter. Yet the duration of duress in this same region into the Belgian Congo years (1908–60) is also significant to issues about (overlapping) modalities of violence—structural, corporeal, symbolic, psychic, sexual—and their reproduction and somatization over time. The bodily and reproductive effects of spectacular, transgressive, sexualized violence are of particular interest.

Roger Casement found people frightened and frail in 1903 when he investigated conditions in the Free State, traveling from the Lac Leopold II area up the Congo, Lulonga, and Lopori rivers into the Abir concession. He noted the visceral effects of terror and trauma: “suspicious looks,” “evasive eyes,” and “flutterings” (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:249). And in his investigative report, he included the words of Rev. J. Clark of Ikoko:

Again a lower percentage of births lessen the population. Weakened bodies is one cause of this. Another reason is that women refuse to bear children, and take means to save themselves from motherhood. They give as the reason that if “war” should come to a woman “big with child,” or with a baby to carry, “she” cannot well run away and hide from the soldiers. [Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:144]

Many spoke of hunger and starvation, and at least one missionary in the Lukolela area, who spoke of “a disappearing” and “dying people” suggested that “fear and punishment” were producing loss of appetite and, among women, amenorrhea (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:132).

A less sensitive observer, one who was more aligned with King Leopold too (Hochschild 1998), the British journalist and traveler Viscount Mountmorres, found much to admire in the Free State, while arguing that the problem tended to be confined to the Equateur concession areas, especially Abir’s territory. He witnessed the violent squeeze of the Abir bonus and sentry system at a time when the rubber supply was almost exhausted (Harms 1975). This squeeze was producing uprisings, with rubber villages making war on food villages, while many people simply fled out of the Abir zone. Yet Mountmorres imagined the Mongo people who lived in this terrorized area as “indolent, timid, and sulky, desiring only to be left alone to lead a slug-like existence,” refusing to acknowledge the way these same conditions of war, forced labor, and starvation were producing the images of frailty and brokenness before his eyes:

The villages are smaller and not so well kept . . . one scarcely sees a village worthy of the name. . . . Occasionally one or two huts . . . will still be occupied by a surly, silent, depressed people, who neither greet one nor flee before one, but accept one’s presence with a dull indifference. . . . Physically the race is degenerate, being extremely small of stature and meager of build. . . . The rapidity with which these people fall ill and die is almost incredible. . . . They . . . accept death with a fatalism which goes far to encourage it. [Mountmorres 1906:45–47]

Mountmorres’ idea of a degenerate Mongo race became repeated in Belgian colonial words and practice, as this part of Equateur became relatively neglected in the decades to come, and as colonial finance capital turned to mining and its industrialization in other regions. By the 1920s–30s, when attention turned to worker shortages and the impact of labor recruitment on reproduction throughout the colony, the sight of overworked, exhausted people in Equateur again became

frequent. Worries about a low birth rate and infertility became commonplace. Continuing forced customary labor, while less murderous and physically violent in its application, remained a form of structural violence that shaped social geography and demography. Many robust Congolese of this region simply moved away, out of the “customary” realm and its legislated and regulated work obligations (porterage, road building, agriculture) and into “extra-customary” wage labor on plantations or in colonial towns. The women who stayed behind had to carry heavy loads of requisitioned food into the 1930s, and from at least the 1940s they had to build roads (Hunt n.d.).

Colonial language about subfertility and sterility in the Mongo and Nkundo regions of Equateur spoke of degeneration, race suicide, extinction, a customary world unable to reproduce itself, and widespread childlessness. Shock became an everyday colonial word, as a string of doctors began to report on STDs and think about infertility in a psychic lexicon from the interwar period on. The best demographic age pyramids (from Befale territory) indicate a significant reproductive downturn in 1885–90 and again in 1905–10, thus when Abir first arrived in this region and again when abuses reached their height, with a general regression in the birth rate between 1905–30 (Van Riel and Allard 1953). Up to 40 percent of women were childless in the larger Tshuapa region of Equateur in the 1950s (Romaniuk 1968a, 1968b; Voas 1981; cf. Hunt 2007). Much of the degenerationist language was figurative; but we are no longer in the realm of metaphor when we see the list of women patients’ names treated by Dr. Magis (1958) in his sterility clinic at Boende.

Reproductive disruption in Equateur contradicted the Belgian colonial high modern aesthetic of the 1950s, focused on reproductive modernity, maternity wards, and happy, helpful husbands (Hunt 1999). There were few rural mothers beaming with babies in their arms in maternity hospital beds in Equateur in the 1950s, but instead women unable to become pregnant or give birth to live babies, who attended what was the first infertility clinic—likely in all sub-Saharan Africa—to open its doors at Befale in 1953 (Allard 1955). The contrast in birthrates and maternity services between Equateur and other parts of the colony (Hunt 1988; 1999) suggests the unevenness of temporalities (Harootunian 2005), modernity, and ruination within one and the same Belgian African empire. Not at all Congolese received welfare capitalism, maternity wards, and babies in equal measure. And the ruinous, violent resource extraction in early colonial Equateur had enduring effects—on Congolese memory and reproductive bodies, on European attitudes,

and in the penury of economic and human investments that were made in this relatively empty region with a haunting past of widespread death and injury.

“A CALLOUS EYE” AND ACOUSTIC DEBRIS

Debris takes on a different—more sensory and mnemonic—meaning in a history that contains violence, death, and mutilation, where ruination was bodily and psychic, and where war and sexual violence have resurged in the same region over the last decade. Rather than debris first sighted in a postcolonial field and then traced historically through archives (Hunt 1999), in this history, I use sensory traces parsed from a refractory colonial archive to anchor a reading of the immediacy of anguish and ruination and of the kinds of sounds and images people were left with, at the time and some fifty years later.

Any archive can be likened to an ethnographic field, if it is techniques of observing, listening, wondering, and parsing that we privilege. Still, we need to be careful before we imagine every scrap of paper, photograph, and object that we find in colonial archives and museums as the debris or ruins of empire. Doing so would be facile, and it would embrace too much. Neither would it push a vocabulary of ruination to work for us in a way that presses forward questions about claims and consequences, memory and the senses (Geurts 2002; Seremetakis 1996), immediacy and duration, and reproduction and repetition. I have found myself reading canonical, new, and underused sources, while thinking about forms of perception, and listening for signs of “an acoustic presence” (Warner 2006:273), of hearing, sounds, noises, as well as hushed stillness and silence. I seek out a soundtrack and words spoken as a way to ground a new reading of Free State ruination, the anguish and fright of being in the moment, forms of remembering and muteness that followed, and claims made and their potential for reappropriation—repetition—in the present.

My constructed archive consists of four sources. Rather than gathering inspiration from Conrad’s “hallucinatory” prose (Taussig 1987:10), indeed consciously avoiding the spectral frame that it might reintroduce, I have returned to a canonical source, the investigative report to the British Parliament of Roger Casement, then British Consul to the Congo Free State. I examine how optics and acoustics operate with studied restraint in this circumspectly composed indictment of Leopold’s Congo (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003).¹³ Second, I have parsed the daily journal of the former Free State officer turned major heroic veteran, Baron Francis Dhanis (1904), who the Abir company hired to go in and investigate on its behalf just as its regime spun into chaos from rubber exhaustion (Harms 1983), increased atrocity,

and humanitarian scandal.¹⁴ Baron Dhanis was neither neutral nor a humanitarian witness. Hired as a special adviser, he was allied with Abir's and King Leopold's interests. And, he was already a major colonial hero, almost as famous as Stanley in Belgian colonial circles, who had helped to win some key battles of conquest in the so-called Arab war in Congo's Zanzibari-dominated East in the early 1890s. But Dhanis was not backed into a defensive mode either, and this makes his unstudied, spontaneous, and often pained personal jottings about the visible and the heard—none ever intended for publication—a precious counterpoint to the “studied realism” (Taussig 1987:10) of Roger Casement.

Dhanis entered into the Abir landscape of ruination in early June 1904 and left again by mid-September. His is not a worked-over text, but a diary. Embedded within it are notations on a series of encounters with Congolese, most of which are akin to if not actual appeals to Dhanis for help. These suggest a range of kinds of duress, some visible, but many from the realm of the “tactile and the unseen” (Stoler 2006). Also present are claims, occasions when people—some “natives,” some chiefs with names, one former European agent's “boy”—came to complain, protest, or ask for aid or intervention. These claims are an interesting counterpoint to my third source, the testimony of the 13 Congolese women who testified before the King's Commission of Inquiry in 1905–06; in addition to Boali's words above, we will hear those of Mingo below.

Congolese did not only speak at the time of rubber wars and abuses to Roger Casement, to appalled missionaries, and before the King's Commission, but among themselves. And, they wrote down memories some fifty years later for the Flemish missionary, Edmond Boelaert, who organized a Lomongo-language essay contest in a mission newspaper. Some 170 teachers, students, clerks, and chiefs wrote about the violence, death, cruelties, and hardships of the Free State years in Equateur (Boelaert et al. 1995, 1996). All four of these sources are used to sense violence and ruination in their immediacy and in forms of remembering.

Stoler (this issue) suggests discerning “tenacious and weak traces.” As I parse this diversely constructed archive, I attend to weaker, aural traces to complement and complicate the overpowering tenacity of the visual. But even within the visual, I distinguish among an image of a basket of hands in someone's immediate field of vision; an image of severed, counted hands in memory's eye; and an image of a mutilated young man in a photograph that circulated then, as it still does in histories and documentary films today, influencing memory's eye wherever it alights. The central idea is to push beyond the shock of the photographic that tends

to blot out all else, and seek more fragile, memory pictures and acoustic traces that tell us something new and more complicated about the immediacy of violence and its duration in memory. Within this, silence and the unsayable are significant. Casement's report spoke of "the quiet of death," and, as we will see, muffling sound saved lives.

Some sounds were words voiced out loud. Sometimes a girl's fear meant her "voice was very small" (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:156). Some sound was visceral and eruptive. A chief "broke down and wept, saying that their lives were useless to them" (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:84). A crowd "roared with laughter," when a sentry claimed he did not know the 15-year-old maimed boy, whose hand the throng knew very well he alone had hacked off (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:170). Some sounds were technological, emitted by new objects that moved, killed, and made troops march to time—steamboats, rifles, cap guns, bugles, and military brass bands known as *fanfares*. To Bonsondo's young ears, the sound of a bugle suggested that a white officer had been present when soldiers attacked her village.

Not all objects that made sound were new. The "noise" of brass anklets put a girl like Bonsondo on the run, at risk of being sighted and caught (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:155–56). Death produced the sound of weeping and lamentation. Fright led to the loss of voice. Bikela remembered that after a killing of many persons that it was "friends who were left" who "buried the bodies and there was very much weeping" (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:149). When soldiers killed her own mother with a gun, "I cried very much." Afterward, when soldiers told her sister to call her, Bikela "was too frightened and would not answer" (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:149).

Elima's visuality extended to dreaming: "she had dreamed that Bula Matadi [the state] was coming to fight them, but her mother told her she was trying to tell stories," but a little while later "she heard the firing of guns" (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:152). If guns, detached human hands, and baskets for carrying rubber and hands (severed so they could be acknowledged and tallied by white agents) were some of the objects that were part of this world of violence and rubber, the Congolese memories of 1953 also repeatedly emphasize that protective medicines were, too. These charms enabled a special kind of visibility. Into the *ikakota* pot, Jean-Ambroise Yolo explained, one could see rows of troops at war (Boelaert et al. 1995:108–10).

Memory smells and shudders. Indeed, the 1953 memories are the only source with odors. People recalled the stench of rotting corpses. Children and grandchildren of victims and survivors tended to write these essays in 1953; they are

rich with sounds, of the first boat that arrived “like the noise of large wind that precedes rain” (Boelaert et al. 1995:165–166), of an old man and his inebriated song about the war that had confronted some and might spare others (Boelaert et al. 1995:68–71), of mocking insults hurled at white men arriving for the first time with unkempt hair (Boelaert et al. 1995:62–65, 65–68), the bang of guns firing as rain drizzled (Boelaert et al. 1996:68–71), and of women and children crying from hunger (Boelaert et al. 1996:47–49). Images are also omnipresent—the trees used for hangings, baskets of severed hands, blood running like a river or up to the thighs (Boelaert et al. 1995:36–39).

Roger Casement was hyperattentive to visibility and audibility. Such concentration was in keeping with the charged imperial atmosphere of accusations, investigations, and denials. When the King Leopold’s Commissaire told some Protestant missionaries their “*ears are too long*,” Rev. Clark had replied: “*their eyes were sharp. . . . We see and know*” (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:147, emphasis added). Casement observed and saw, and people offered up visible evidence to him: “Several . . . *showed* broad weals across their buttocks,” while “a lad of 15 or so, removing his cloth, *showed* several scars across his thighs.” (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:69, emphasis added). There is no lack of toxic images of human cruelty in Casement’s report and its inclosures. Ncongo saw a basket of 200 hands being counted out for a white man (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:158). Casement reported seeing “fifteen women in the shed . . . tied together, either neck to neck or ankle to ankle, to secure them for the night, and in this posture *I saw them twice* during the evening” (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:95, emphasis added). In the morning, one sentry ordered another “*in my hearing* to ‘keep close guard on the prisoners’” (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:95, emphasis added). When writing that people living in the Abir zone “were not happy under this system,” Casement said, “it was *apparent to a callous eye* that in this they *spoke* the strict truth” (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:98, emphasis added). He was aware that what he could report as *seen* or *observed* became a fact, while reporting on things heard, “*from their lips*” (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:114, emphasis added), would double the truth effect. And he made his readers aware of the scopic economy at work: other eyes watching and guarding all around, the filling of sacks “taking place *under the eyes* of . . . a State sentry” (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:75, emphasis added). Casement used eyes (“*viewing* their unhappy surroundings”) and ears (“*hearing* their appeals”) to argue that there was “a very real fear of reporting” among Congolese. Even though people spoke to him during his investigatory voyage, he argued, “the broad fact remained that their previous *silence*

said more than their present *speech*" (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:112, emphasis added).

Seeing ultimately took precedence over hearing in the Casement report. And, these were the only two senses alive and at work. This is quite different when one when one turns to either the 1953 memory accounts or to the stories of five Ikoko mission women who had been rescued as girls about 1893, where sound and hearing were at least as important as sight. Casement took pains to collect and translate these latter firsthand accounts when in the Lake Mantumba area and include them as an enclosure. The girls had run for their lives and quickly became attentive to sound as risk. A misguided or inadvertent sound could cost a life, as Bikela learned after running "very far into the bush" with her mother. Soldiers had followed and when they "came near us they were calling my mother by name, and I was going to answer, but my mother put her hand to my mouth to stop me. . . . If she had not . . . we would all have been killed" (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:149). The sound of gunfire produced flight, while the sound of crying was dangerous: "Then we went into the bush to look for people, and we heard children crying, and a soldier went quickly over to the place and killed a mother and four children" (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:151).

This sense of danger also comes through in the 1953 memories. Antoine-Marcus Boyoto recalled, "When they perceived a noise or the rattling of shots, they went further into the forest. Mothers buried alive their small children because of their crying" (Boelaert et al. 1996:143–145). And, the sound of a nervous laughter "out of place" (Goldstein 2003) could produce a more violent, punitive, fearful death, as Nongo explained: "On our way, when we were coming to Bikoro, the soldiers saw a little child, and when they went to kill it the child laughed so the soldier took the butt of the gun and struck the child with it, and then cut off its head" (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:158). Laughter, as sound and subject, will return again below.

SENTRIES, LAUGHTER, THE UNSAYABLE

People referred to the armed rubber company men by the instruments they carried; Joseph Imome called these sentries "guns" (Boelaert et al. 1995:51–52). When François Bombute wrote of sentries using their guns, he penned "the guns spoke" (Boelaert et al. 1995:54–58).¹⁵ Dhanis concentrated on the Congolese sentries, seeing them as the "gangrene" of the Abir system and noting many cases of these armed militia committing theft and murder and stealing wives. There is an arc to his observations and queries about women, as Dhanis tried to zero in

more and more on the abduction of wives and daughters by sentries and their overseers, *capitas*. He seized on details about the gifting of women to sentries by chiefs to receive exemptions on the quantity of rubber that had to be collected. When one sentry came to him with a complaint, Dhanis asked the armed man to declare how many wives he had; soon some of the wives present on this occasion gestured toward yet additional uncounted wives with pointing fingers, turning their sentry husband into a liar. By the time Dhanis discussed one complex murder case involving a sentry named Insala, he was making lists of the cast of characters involved, naming each sentry and his servant or “boy,” while trying to work out the series of clashes and murders among factions of Congolese.

Of some 25 episodes of mistreatment, protest, and conversation that involve a plea or claim made before Dhanis, ten were made by chiefs, five involved groups of “natives” complaining collectively, and four were by individuals. Two pleas were by sentries; six from Besongo asked together for caps for their muskets, while saying they needed Albini rifles. Only a few of these claims involved a soundtrack beyond the suggestion of words. By attending to Dhanis’s use of the word *supplications* for the entreaties made by the women doing basketry work in rubber drying sites as he approached a prison, we almost hear their tortured cries. He asked a “skeleton” of an old man in this same prison how long he had been there. The man’s wry retort, “Judge for yourself. I no longer know,” stirred Dhanis to send the frail and disappearing man home with an unprecedented intercession, a generous gift of cloth.

The acoustic register of Dhanis’s journey also embraced the sound of laughter. A “native” of Boande asked the Belgian baron how to get back his wife. She, Bondonga, had been adducted by a sentry named Ikenge some time ago. Dhanis noted that the husband had never complained before and asked him why. Later, he recorded the reply in his journal: “He laughs. The response is sufficient” (Dhanis 1904:211). Dhanis also noted that the sentry had been “laid off on April 1 of this year”; the sentry likely had lost his access to a gun in the process. It is not Bakhtin on laughter who is useful here; the husband’s laugh was not a cackling subaltern, carnivalesque laughter. Nor was it a laughter that mocks. It seems closer to the nervous, agonized shaking suggested by Baudelaire’s (1961) language of “trembling laughter.” Bataille’s (1986:90) ideas about the “unknowability” and “anguish” of laughter are helpful: “That which is laughable may simply be *the unknowable . . . the unknown makes us laugh*.” Laughter, a “moment of release,” involves “the violence of an excitement which can no longer be stopped.” He added: “Anguish is not the cause of the laugh . . . but anguish is in some form necessary: *when anguish*

arises, then laughter begins” (Bataille 1986:70). This husband’s laughter seems to have come from the realm of the immediate and the visceral, the instant and the direct. But this erupting sound suggests something important about the duration of duress. The evidence suggests a delayed laughter, coming from a delayed claim, an uncomprehending white man’s question, and a prolonged and diffuse suffering.¹⁶

When Casement traveled in 1903, he also heard the sound of laughter. In the village of Nganda, a state soldier in his third term who came from the Upper Bussira river, hundreds of miles away, “spoke fully of the condition of the people.” Casement asked him why he had stayed with the work for so long: “he asserted that, as his own village and country were subject to much trouble in connection with the rubber tax, he could not live in his own home, and preferred, he said, laughing, ‘to be with the hunters rather than with the hunted’” (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:76). Perhaps the soldier’s laughter revealed uneasiness, nervousness, a suppressed anguish in his relative safety, his obligation to be a hunter of others. As Bataille reminds us: “the nature of laughter . . . lies in its link to a position of dominance . . . we laugh on condition that our position of dominance not be at the mercy of laughter, the object of laughter” (Bataille 1986:97). In *King Leopold’s Ghost*, Hochschild uses the word “frenzy” as he tries to comprehend what happens when killing “becomes a kind of sport, like hunting” (1998:234). He gives telling examples of European “sadists” (Hochschild 1998:166), torturing Congolese with doses of castor oil, their faces rubbed in excrement, and holes shot through their earlobes. The complex relationships among laughter, domination, pleasure, anguish, and frenzy are worthy of further exploration, especially as they relate to fields of vision and sound—capacities and incapacities for observation, silence, and controlling and modulating sound—in situations of sadism or torture.

Congolese memory accounts give examples of both European and Congolese sadism, of transgressive, gratuitous, grotesque violence, sometimes in a repetitive, almost fanciful mode of remembering.¹⁷

The one inflicted with the chicotte [whip] who defecated right afterward, they obliged eating this excrement. If you refuse to eat it, they kill you. . . . A woman is pregnant, they order: “Eviscerate her so that we see how the baby is inside.” The death of the woman follows. They cut one ear from someone and left him another. They forced a woman to have sexual relations with her son. If she refuses, they kill her. . . . They had a breast cut off a woman and left her another. . . . They obliged a boy to have sex with his mother, if not they kill him. [Boelaert et al. 1996:240–242]

The way sadistic pleasure combined with the sexual torture of women came through clearly in Mingo's testimony before the King's Commission in 1906 about what happened during her brick-making work at an Abir post.

While I was working in brick-making at Mampoko, at two different occasions in order to punish me, the sentries, N'kusu, Lomboto, et Itokwa, made me take off my cloth and put clay in my sexual parts which made me suffer a lot. The white man saw me with clay in my sexual parts. He limited himself to saying: "If you die in my work, they can throw you in the water." The white man Longwango also saw the clay in my sexual parts, and he had the same attitude as Likwama. [Mingo of Ilua 1906]¹⁸

There is no way to know who dreamt up this idea of filling a woman's private parts with the clay, of using the very material of the work under question to threaten, humiliate, and abuse her, although as Vigdis Broch-Due (2005:25) reminds us, "violence can lead to a macabre form of creativity."¹⁹ Mingo's words suggest that voyeurism accompanied this spectacle of punishment, torture, and looking. She spoke about suffering but also about visibility: "the sentry made me take off my cloth," he "made me suffer a lot," "the white man saw me." We hear about a certain division of labor: there were the black men who "put clay in my sexual parts," and there were the white men who watched at a remove. This situation involved racial layers of authority and the capacity for observation: a white man could just sit as if apart and look, and in this case the white man did, and if he did not quite approve of what he saw, he also did not stop the situation. Another white man was also there with his eyes, looking. The optics here are clear; but the acoustics require a hermeneutic, sensory leap. It is as if there is an ellipsis of sound in Mingo's deposition through which we can begin to hear the twisted pleasure—the tittering laughter—that accompanied this sexual torturing of a woman through hardening clay.

These fragments bring near a human scale and a sensory awareness to the immediacy of ruination. The sound of twisted and anguished laughter collected, convulsed, and retracted around the forms of sexual violence that were basic to, indeed constitutive of, the reproductive ruination of the rubber regime in Leopold's Congo. The acts perpetrated involved hunting people as animals, commandeering girls, stealing wives, raping and sexual tormenting others. Listening for twisted sounds maintains "a technique of nearness" (Benjamin 1999:545), of paying attention to what remains unsayable and silent. It allows concentrating on

nonnarrativity and sound, the convulsive, frenzied quality of sadistic violence in process, the hidden, the shameful, in Casement's words, the "unfit for repetition."

Abjection and anguish were immediate. Uncanniness and the eerie came later, after the fact, *for some*, in remembering, in hearing about, and in seeing again and again in a (often magnified) photographic image. There is not a hint of evidence that the atrocity photographs ever circulated in the colony; there were no shocking magic lantern phantasmagoria in the Congo. Perhaps this goes far to help us understand the absence of a spectral mode of narration in the 1953 Congolese memories, (quite unlike the ubiquity of this mode in the West since Morel first began misdubbing Conrad).

Some "intimate injuries . . . appear as only faint traces," notes Stoler (this issue). Dhanis jotted down a chief's swollen finger in his journal. It does important work to identify detached body fragments—hands, feet, heads—as the instant visual debris of empire in the Congo. A corrosive kind of violence emerged out of having access to the barrel of a gun, using it to enlarge petty power and accumulate wealth in women in a situation of hunger, chaos, and devastation. Dhanis worried about the way the sentries were thieves, stealing all possessions from local people until they had nothing, robbing them of their wives, too. Four sentries from Bongulu were in charge of 65 rubber gatherers; they wanted to take their women, but they killed their dogs instead. "We can keep nothing" was the lament that Dhanis heard. The same sense comes through in the 1953 memories. François Bombute wrote: "If there were bananas in the banana patch, it is only he [the sentry] who cuts them. If he discovered that you ate these bananas, he killed you right away. If he found a bone . . . he killed you with a gun shot" (Boelaert et al. 1995:54–58). But even more vivid in the memories were forms of sexual violence and transgressive excess—sentries who made mothers have sex with their sons, fathers with daughters, kin with kin. Of particular note is the mention of sentries "amusing themselves while pounding the insides of women's vaginas with sticks" (Boelaert et al. 1996:211).²⁰ Such a strong, graphic image suggests acute pain, writhing bodies, damaged reproductive tracts and desire, a kind of damage to women in an era long before there were gynecologists around to speak about psychosocial trauma or proceed with fistula repair.

REPETITION AND DIFFERENCE

It is time to return to Nsongo Mboyo and the rape of women and girls there in 2003 by Bemba's former troops. The UNFPA film includes the words of one Nsongo Mboyo woman raped on that December night, speaking months afterward:

I do not deserve to live any longer. Several soldiers tied my feet and legs and raped me one after the other. Then, they forced my own father, threatening him with their weapons to make love with me. After that, they inserted pieces of wood and their gun barrels into my vagina. They hurt me so much morally and physically. [Gueye 2006]

The DVD was recently readily available at a convention gathering together African gynecologists and obstetricians in Kinshasa. The Congolese Minister of Health spoke about the need for new specialized training programs for gynecologists, so they are able to deal effectively with the psychosocial and fistula repair needs of Congo's thousands of rape victims (Senga Kossy 2007). The film mentions that of 24,520 rapes recorded in Kindu between March 2003 and August 2005, 6,000 cases involved traumatic fistula needing surgical intervention (Gueye 2006; cf. MONUC 2007). Some tears cannot be repaired; there were some 260 women in Bukavu in December 2007 who had received surgical attention, but will move about with urine-collecting pouches appended to their bodies for the rest of their days.²¹

The repetitions here are multiple. At the same time, much is new. The difference between the nature of humanitarian intervention into situations of human wreckage like that of the Congo in 1903–06 and again since 1996 are enormous. In each case, shocking numbers and “shock-photos” were used to produce revulsion and pity among spectators and generate humanitarian funds (Sliwinski 2006; Redfield 2006; Malkki 1996). Today, however, humanitarian intervention is highly medicalized and bureaucratized. In the Congo, it involves all kinds of national—not just foreign—humanitarian workers in the field, negotiating the readings of their ethnic identities at roadblocks (Pottier 2006) and clinics. In the case of rape, these humanitarian workers are applying, adjusting, and redevising imported gynecological, trauma, and gender sciences in ways that have not yet been studied for the Congo. But other post-1989 contexts involving peacekeeping operations and rape, like Bosnia among others (Harrington 2006), suggest that complex assumptions about speech, shame, post-traumatic stress disorder, and perhaps even psychopharmaceuticals, are having material effects within this UN-administered “global reservation” (Ghosh 1994).²²

The exceedingly medicalized nature of the recent humanitarian attention to rape in the DRC includes the construction of a novel gynecological category, the traumatic fistula.²³ And this particular injury forces a reflective return to the epidemiological theorizing of the demographic historian, David Voas (1981), who

came close to wondering some 25 years ago, if rape in “hostage houses” was not the major factor in spreading STDs and producing the low birth rate in Congo’s Equateur. Voas assumed a causal logic that had STDs—sterilizing gonorrhea or chlamydia and miscarriage-producing syphilis—as the mechanistic link between rape and infertility, not unlike the way rape in the DRC has attention focused on AIDS today. But pounding the inside of a vagina violently with sticks in an era before coke bottles suggests tearing, blood, and infection, while unmended fistulae would have produced incontinence, stigmatization, and untold humiliation.

It will never be possible to quantify the number of rapes in Leopold’s Congo. But if we turn only to the evidence on the one toponym, Nsongo Mboyo, we find that in May 1904, people in this village did not provide rubber in keeping with their assigned tax, many women were taken hostage, at least 83 people were killed, and cannibalism was committed, while in the neighboring villages “guards amused themselves in forcing villagers to commit incestuous sexual acts” (Vangroenweghe 1986:125).²⁴ We saw above that the same kind of “grotesque excess” (Broch-Due 2005:25) was present within the imaginary of memory in 1953. The Nsongo-Mboyo events of 1904 produced the father named Nsala who wrapped up the missing body parts of his devoured daughter and took them with him as he went to Baringa to protest to Abir agents; he ended up on Alice Harris’ verandah, and the result was an iconic magic lantern photograph of this father in grief next to a small hand and foot. Cannibalism and mutilation were more sayable—and more photographable—than either rape or forced incest, which seems to have remained “unfit for repetition” among humanitarians like Roger Casement.

AFTERLIVES

Often, Dhanis took refuge in his journal by trying to imagine a future, an exit from the ruination that he was witnessing. He was trying to articulate a way the Abir company could overcome its current state of disaster and achieve a viable future through rubber plantations and well-organized markets. This fantasy included a way to work with the persons who were present to create a middle rank of industrious, partly “civilized” Congolese. It also embraced the necessity of achieving numerical and bodily control, through counting individuals and inscribing their names in registers and identity books. He was already planning a future based on “civilizing” the Congolese perpetrators, the sentries. In keeping with Mountmorres’ impression of feeble, hopeless people, Dhanis did not base his future on the more “savage” victims, lowly slaves huddled in mere huts or prisons. Rather, the sentries’ wives

would get paid and be in charge of cleaning posts and planting and harvesting fields. Rubber plantations would develop.

Dhanis's was a fantasy in the midst of ruin. But it was not an impossible fantasy either. As both memories and the archival record suggests, suddenly—effectively from about 1910 on—a new kind of colonial state, the Belgian Congo, emerged in which state agents were showing up and collecting names, distributing identity books and wealth in coin, and insisting on tax in money form and a new kind of less murderous, but also forced customary labor, ever glossed by authorities as “educative.”

What happened to the former sentries in the process? What new or similar social roles did they play, once the Abir company dissolved and a new more modernizing state needed tax collectors and village capita? Did familiars stay, while strangers moved on? Much of the violence of “red rubber” among Congolese was among persons who already knew each other, and the evidence suggests that in the Abir concession when sentries were familiars and when they were strangers made a difference in how violent they became and how they were remembered. (Outsider sentries were introduced into Nsongo-Mboyoy in May 1904, precisely because people deserved harsher, more terrifying punishments [Vangroenweghe 1986].) Some sentries, I imagine, became the petty police of villages, working for increasingly tyrannical, state-appointed, and socially disconnected “customary” chiefs. The question of what happened to the Free State sentries finds a parallel in the nagging question frequently asked in the DRC today: will the current program of *brassage* (literally, brewing or stirring) or military amalgamation work? Can all the various men and boys armed with guns from various rebel armies and militia—those who chose to be among the hunters, sowing violence and terror, rather than among the hunted in the last decade of war—be successfully integrated into one professional national army as part of “security sector reform”?

The UNFPA film speaks to another form of afterlife, to the subject positions of raped women and the difficulties of moving on and remaking lives after undergoing such destructive injury. It contains an awkward, disturbing scene of a woman rape victim whose face is intentionally blurred while her husband tries to overcome his impulse to reject and abandon her as a result. His smile is too forced. His effort to give her affection, likely contrived for the purpose of the film, was visibly of no comfort to the wife who appears only more strained and withdrawn as a result. The filmmaker tried; perhaps so, too, did some UNFPA assistants on hand, who wished him to produce this scene as a needed didactic model. However flawed,

it does suggest the emotional toxicity of sexualized violence within persons and relationships, within the “everyday work of repair” (Das 2007:62).

Compelling, too, are scenes of groups of rape victims given resources to plant new gardens and the space to be on their own, working together in safety, making new lives and nourishing food grow. But images of girls and women gathered in a Catholic, Caritas project are disconcerting. They are learning to sew. A few sewing machines suggest capital, a chance to learn an important money making skill alongside a technology that still costs dear. But these machines disappear quickly, and the dominant image becomes one of rows and rows of girls learning to embroider with needle, thread, and circular embroidery frame. This unsettling flashback to thousands of Belgian colonial domesticity training scenes, reinforces one more time an image of a Congolese woman as homemaker, helpmeet, dependent, and needy, obedient wife (Hunt 1999, 2005).

This aspect of Belgian colonial “ruination” should not be forgotten, not if we are to understand the dire state of gender relations in the Congo today. A domesticizing humanitarianism came into play for girls and women across the huge Belgian colonial terrain in the wake of the human rights disaster that was Leopold’s Congo. It is still present everywhere, from sewing classes still going on in most Catholic mission stations to the fact that only ten of some 550 professors at the University of Kinshasa are women. Girls, even those from most intellectual, middle-class families, learn quickly that their role is to be minor and obedient, to serve men (even their university fathers), find and mind a husband, and have children. It is no mistake that some of the most outspoken and independent Congolese women are widows who manage to raise their children on their own. Gender relations are reportedly changing most rapidly in the East, in that too slowly disappearing war and humanitarian zone, where women have suffered the most, where the new global word *genre* (gender) has come in alongside peacekeeping and humanitarian operations and novel forms of trauma science (Harrington 2006), and where the epidemic in rape has politicized many women.

Consider again Boali and the magic lantern show of the 1900s. Unlike Mingo, Boali could be photographed and turned into a pat story. But even then, this almost naked woman was difficult to fit into the missionary, humanitarian, development narrative. The lantern show’s last section sought to offer an image of the kind of uplift that British evangelical missionaries could provide, if only they were allowed to work without the constant turmoil attendant on the rubber regime. One photograph, in particular, showed mission girls at school, all dressed up in long, tailored dresses. The missionaries may have tried to underline Boali as first and

foremost a faithful wife, “mutilated for constancy,” but there was no easy turning of this unclothed woman with one foot who had refused rape into a domesticated school girl or mission wife. Boali’s photograph was an ambiguous, perhaps even troubling image, difficult to control, dangerous to repeat again and again.

It is important to stay alert to the kinds of redemptive projects dreamed up for victims of sexual violence today. More domesticity training for Congolese women and girls will only reinforce the minimization of women, further entrenching a form of imperial ruination that made all women minor to husbands, brothers, uncles, and fathers. The 2006 UNFPA film about sexual violence has multiple audiences in mind, from gynecologists in training, to police officers and soldiers, potential funders, and ordinary men and women. Yet it remains more a carefully crafted promotional piece for Joseph Kabila and the steadfast integrity of his presidency that will bring an end to indiscipline, rather than a new acoustic presence by which to let echo new, more militant voices of Congolese women who have come through the war, been raped, formed gender-critical, peace-focused NGOs, and activist mothers ready to take apart and remake the home-based gender training of their daughters and sons. Some of them are refusing embroidery for their daughters and doilies for their homes, as they remake lives, seek peace (Puechguirbal 2003), and say no to rape (Ohambe et al. 2004) amidst ruination.

May the sound of shame in the words of the raped Nsongo Mboyo woman saying that she “no longer deserves to live” become a productive trace from the very recent past that helps us begin to imagine what may have been unsayable in Boali’s time. May it also suggest the significance of Congolese essay authors writing in 1953 that the time of red rubber was a time when families broke apart and kin turned on each other. The point is to listen to distress in its immediacy and in its duration. Some gave up and died. Some divorced or moved away. And some carried on as memory and wounds were “folded into ongoing relationships” (Das 2007:8).

CONCLUSION

This article has urged two kinds of reflection, reading, and attentiveness. One has been about remembering and sound. The other has been about duration, reproduction, and repetition in history.

In encouraging a sensory, especially acoustic mode of reading, this article has insisted that the debris to be strategically reappropriated should *not* be photographic. In other words, we should *not repeat* and reproduce the tenacity of the visual and the sense of shock that it produces. Rather, the mode of parsing the archive performed

here listens for images and sounds in the eye of memory. It calls for hearing a nonspectral, acoustic register, the sounds of people scattering in flight, speaking in hushed voices, testifying bravely, remembering through stories marked by song, nicknames, poisonous images, and weeping. The process has included imagining the sound of a man tittering, as he pounds the inside of a woman with a stick as if she was a mortar and his instrument the pestle, crushing systematically, rhythmically.

Second, it is no longer tenable to imagine that one can write an urgent, effective history about violence and ruination in Leopold's Congo, without tethering it to the present, to the last decades of postcolonial war, death (estimates say some four million persons), and sexual violence. Supposing that one can stretch back in time and finally put King Leopold on trial, as the make-believe narrative structure of a recent historical documentary pretended to do (Bate 2004) is such a hollow gesture. It does little to interrogate the nature and modalities of spectacular violence among Congolese people who were living then nor how they moved on and remade lives and relationships.

This tethering to the present should not be about continuity or causality; one context did not produce another. Nor should the point be to forge historical links between these two situations of armed militias and sexual violence, as if each was part of one historicist stream of history that began long ago in most primitive Africa. It may be appealing to look at the history of the Congo, from the time that raiding economies became pervasive in the 19th century, which Leopold and his Free State then systematized from the 1890s into this notorious rubber regime, as "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage" before us. Yet the "pile of debris" (Benjamin 2003:392) still needs sorting. And then it needs form. One continuous historical narrative would distort much (and be impossible).²⁵

Rather, the tethering to the present should be about locating repetitions and, second, producing history in a "mode of repetition" (Harootunian 1996:75). The first has an analytic purchase. It suggests how to read the archive, how to begin to sort the debris. The second is about strategic—thus for the academic historian, in part, formal—reappropriations of some bits of debris for the present producing or telling of history. Form not only matters but constitutes the refining of theory and politics in historical writing and analysis. In this article, an analytics grounded in revealing acoustics shaped selection and form at every turn.

Boali's lost foot, stolen anklet, and verbal claim as storied fragment is a "moment of difference from the past" that might be used to "produce an effect of difference" (Harootunian 1996:68, 75, respectively). Repetition in this strategic mode could mean importing the figure of Boali into current radio discussions

and hip-hop songs about rape and war in the Congo. Doing so might produce an important questioning that has not really taken place in this country about war crimes and commissions of inquiry. The very fact that such a forum of investigation, of hearing and giving testimony, existed within the Congo Free State remains understated when a historian like Hochschild (1998) places too strong of a heroic spin on the kind of pressure that E. D. Morel and other humanitarians exerted from Britain and beyond. Instead, we need to remember that this same pressure produced King Leopold's historic Commission of Inquiry. Congolese in the dozens spoke before it effectively and with intimate detail about injury. And, despite King Leopold's success in suppressing this testimony and abridging the commissioners' report, such a public forum of producing history and testifying about violence, injury, and atrocity changed the course of history. Leopold lost his colony. Nor did he succeed in controlling or destroying all the evidence; these documents still await further parsing by historians today in relation to our now, as they will in the future in relation to other nows yet to come.

Seizing hold of repetitions also produces productive questions about what has not been reproduced—about what is novel and different in today's now. A key parallel lies in the complexly layered war economies, with globally sought raw products (rubber then; coltan and other minerals now) fueling violence and battles that become localized in their dimensions, meanings, and escalations (Vlassenroet and Raeymakers 2004). Another is spectacular, telescoped, and devastating violence. But "the signature" (Das 2007) has shifted. Images of mutilated hands have not been repeated in the Congo, despite their ubiquity in media representations emerging from other wars of the 1990s in Africa. The sentry may have become a child soldier, a *genocidaire*, or a Mai-Mai, but the signature of horror that is serving as humanitarian and metaphorical fuel lies in the necessarily, in our era, much less photographable figure of a raped girl or woman. Three repetitions should make us pause: the armed militia (once sentry) figure, the sexually transgressed girl/woman figure, and the partially redeemed female victim figure. Each opens issues of social roles and subject positions and their repetition over time. But it is also worth continuing to track how each becomes a symbolic figure within humanitarian phantasmagoria and within the new Congolese national imaginary still in formation.

ABSTRACT

This article argues for the importance of rewriting the conventional atrocity narrative about violence in King Leopold's Congo Free State in relation to the present, the ongoing war-related humanitarianism and sexual violence in the DRC. The central

idea is to push beyond the shock and tenacity of the visual, the ubiquitous mutilation photographs that tend to blot out all else; and instead seek weaker, more fragile acoustic traces in a diverse archive with Congolese words and sounds. This sensory, nonspectral mode of parsing the archive tells us something new about the immediacy of violence, its duration in memory, and the bodily and reproductive effects of sexually torturing women. The sound of twisted laughter convulsed around forms of sexual violence that were constitutive of reproductive ruination during the rubber regime in Leopold's Congo. The work of strategically tethering the past to the present should not be about forging historicist links across time but about locating repetitions and difference, including differences among humanitarian modes and strategies in the early 20th and the early 21st centuries.

Keywords: Africa, Congo, historical anthropology, humanitarianism, laughter, rape, senses, violence

NOTES

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1. The multiple wars in DRC since 1996, which have cost some four million lives (Coghlan et al. 2006), are complex. They date back to the Rwandan genocide of 1994, which brought Paul Kagame's regime to power in Rwanda and have meant that ethnic identities (not only "Tutsi"- and "Hutu"-associated) have been built and manipulated as an excuse for political action and violence (Vlassenroot 2002). But these wars cannot be understood without attention to the extractive economics and shadow networks involved; all parties to war have been motivated by and financing their participation through securing and maintaining access to the extraordinarily rich Congolese resources in minerals and timber (Jackson 2002; UN Panel of Inquiry 2002). The DRC has seemed divided into eastern and western zones since the second "war of liberation" began in 1998, which soon meant that the DRC government of President Laurent-Désiré Kabila (and after his 2001 assassination, of his son President Joseph Kabila) only controlled the western half of the country (with essential help from Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia). The "East" became divided among two warring branches of the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD), one backed by Rwanda and the other by Uganda, and Jean-Pierre Bemba's also Ugandan-backed, Movement for the Liberation of the Congo (MLC). After five years of war (1998–2002), a transitional government brought most of the former leaders of rebel armies into the DRC government as vice presidents, a period that coincided with preparations and campaigning for the historic elections held in 2006 that brought Joseph Kabila to power as the country's first democratically elected president in over 40 years. The meanings of *East* and *West* shifted during this latter period of election preparations, with the East coming to mean the pro-Kabila, Swahili-speaking, and mineral-rich zone embracing Kisangani and running from Ituri in the north to Katanga in the south, including North Kivu, South Kivu, and Maniema; whereas the West came to mean the anti-Kabila, pro-Bemba (a former Mobutiste from Equateur), largely Lingala-speaking zone symbolically and numerically centered in the densely populated capital of Kinshasa. The fact that the war has still not ended in the eastern areas of Ituri and the Kivus since the elections underlines two salient issues. First, the extractive economics of war continue to finance and motivate all parties to violence, especially in the Kivus, a region rich in coltan (colombo tantalite) and cassiterite (tin oxide

ore), minerals used in rocketry and satellite engineering armaments and essential to mobile phone manufacture. Since at least 1998, the war zones from Kisangani east have been a vast hub of shadow networks wherein money launderers and arms dealers meet up with traffickers in diamonds, coltan, cassiterite, coffee, gold, tungsten, and cobalt; the multibillion dollar transborder flows involved have been linked to the highest levels in Rwandan and Ugandan political circles. Second, the Paul Kagame regime in Rwanda is still not satisfied with security issues for Tutsi in the region, whether Banyamulenge settled for generations in the Kivu region bordering on Rwanda or his strongly postgenocide, Tutsi-associated state, Rwanda. It should be recalled that the success of the first Congo “war of liberation” of 1996–97 would not have been possible without the strong military backing of Kagame’s regime, which had come to power in Rwanda in 1994, ending the genocide during which more than 500,000 minority Tutsi and moderate Hutu were killed. This Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL) “war of liberation” brought a Kagame-picked, former Congolese rebel of the 1960s, Laurent Kabila, to power in 1997, ending Mobutu’s 32 years in power. Rwanda wished to topple the Mobutu regime because of its support for the former Rwandan government, members of which were implicated in orchestrating the genocide. The massive influx of 1.2 million Rwandan refugees into the Congo (then Zaire) included thousands of armed exiles from the former Rwandan Armed Forces (ex-FAR) and its Hutu militia, the Interhamwe. Mobutu was helping the remnants of the ex-FAR to rearm from within the refugee camps; and he stripped citizenship from the Banyamulenge, ethnic Tutsi resident in the Congo-Zaire for generations, trying to force them out of the country. The AFDL military campaigns began in October 1996 with attacks on the refugee camps of eastern Congo; these attacks forced their dismantlement, with hundreds of thousands fleeing further west into Congo. Throughout the AFDL campaign, moving from east to west, until Kinshasa fell on 17 May 1997, AFDL troops, many of whom were Rwandan and Banyamulenge, engaged in the systematic massacre of perhaps as many as 200,000 Hutu refugees (Emizet 2000). When Kabila finally broke with his Rwandan backers in 1998, amidst increasing demands by the United Nations for serious investigation of the mass graves associated with these AFDL massacres, the second Kagame-backed “war of liberation” began.

2. Abir was founded as the Anglo-Belgian India Rubber and Exploration (A.B.I.R.) Company in 1892; its Congolese headquarters were at Basankusu, located at the confluence of the Lopori and Maringa rivers. The Abir zone embraced the entire region between these two rivers. A.B.I.R. became Abir in 1898, at which time all British capital had been withdrawn (Harms 1975). Casement mentioned during his first day at Bongandanga that 242 “men of the district named Nsungamboyo,” some 20 miles away, had “marched in a long file, guarded by sentries of the A.B.I.R. Company” to bring their rubber to the factory grounds. According to Harms (1975:85–86), “Sungamboyo” was an Abir post, and when people rebelled in late 1905, they burned it down.
3. In 1891–92, King Leopold issued a set of secret decrees that reversed the Free State’s previous free trade policy, made it resemble a state monopoly, and enabled the rubber regime and its brutalities. One decree gave all “vacant lands” to the Free State as well as all lands that already fell under its ownership, effectively banning Congolese from hunting for ivory or harvesting wild rubber unless they sold these products to the State. At the same time, Leopold gave tens of thousands of acres of land to concessionary companies in which he held major investments. Thus, when Abir was founded in 1892, the Free State gave it the exclusive right to exploit all products of the forest for a 30-year period; and people living in Abir territory were to collect wild rubber for the company in lieu of paying their taxes in labor or kind to the State. To enforce this collection, Abir received rights of police and powers of bodily detention (Harms 1975), enabling the system of company-recruited and armed militia, the notorious forest guards or sentries. The other key element to the systematicity of rubber regime violence was the payment of bonuses or commissions to functionaries for the amount of produce collected, thus providing incentives for maximal exploitation (Siocháin and Sullivan 2003:6).
4. Largely due to the photographs and reports produced by the Protestant British missionaries present in this area, the Abir zone also became the epicenter of the international humanitarian

- campaign led by the British publicist E. D. Morel and his Congo Reform Association (CRA); see Morel (1904), Hochschild (1998), and Grant (2005).
5. E. D. Morel (1907) coined the expression “Red Rubber” with his book of this name, suggesting quite simply that the rubber became bloody, hands were cut off, people were bleeding and dying, and so forth. Historians of Africa, at least since the 1970s, have referred to this period in Congolese history (ca. 1892–1908) as the “red rubber” period.
 6. The longer duration in the Abir region embraces the preceding period of slave raiding and trading, from at least the 1870s through the early Free State years. This aspect tends to be either missed or understated in an historiography that seeks to find an imperial villain in King Leopold and a humanitarian hero in E. D. Morel (Bate 2004; Hochschild 1998), rather than working to try to understand the complex, uneven layering of economies of raiding and terror. Interestingly, Casement only uses the words *spectacle*, *sights*, and *scene* once in his report and then to speak of this earlier period, which he saw in its still-active days on the lower Lulonga River, when working for the Sanford Exploring Expedition in 1886 and 1887 (Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:89). These words from a visual register suggest a different genre, a “taste for the sensational” (Vellut 1984:682), otherwise absent from his sober report.
 7. Of which, the Casement report indicates, there were indeed many, especially in the Lake Leopold II and Lake Mantumba areas.
 8. Boali appears in the pamphlet, *The Indictment against the Congo Government*, as “BOALI: A woman of Ekorongo, shot for resisting outrage and afterward mutilated” (Morel n.d., F13/3/2). Her photograph also appeared on August 31, 1907, in “Murderland! New Series of Congo Articles By E. D. Morel,” *The Penny Pictorial* 34(431):51 above the caption, “The woman Boaji [sic], mutilated in her village by a sentry, and a witness before King Leopold’s Commission of Inquiry” (Morel n.d. F13/1/6).
 9. At the same time, the Congo Free State became the Belgian Congo.
 10. As Hochschild realizes and demonstrates as his book progresses. His suggestion about a relative lack of African voices, however, has recently been misrepeated by a visual studies scholar who makes the erroneous claim that “aside from Roger Casement’s attempt to record the testimony of those maimed individuals he encountered directly, there are simply no accounts (oral or written) from any Congolese person during the Free State’s regime” (Sliwinski 2006:357–358 n. 2). Sliwinski has misread Casement and also misses Hochschild’s (1998:255) later argument about finding “the voices of the Congolese themselves” in “a searing collection of firsthand African testimony,” the King’s Commission of Inquiry depositions, which did not become available to scholars until the 1980s. The Lomongo-language essays of 1953 did not become available in print, in a French translation by Charles Lonkama, until the mid-1990s (Boelaert et al. 1995, 1996).
 11. Few historians have used these; for exceptions, see Marchal 1996; Delathuy 1988; and, in a minor way, Hochschild 1998.
 12. Numerous name and boundary changes of the Equateur province and its districts make the term *Equateur* a shifting referent over time. In general, I use the term to refer to the southern Equateur region, thus south of the Congo, Lulonga, and Lopor rivers, embracing the former Abir zone as well as much Crown Domain and SAB territory in what became the Ruki, Tshuapa, and Lake Leopold II districts.
 13. It is now available along with all of its enclosures and his diary of that year in a superbly edited edition with an insightful introduction in Síocháin and Sullivan 2003; all the names that were concealed in the original published version have been reinstated.
 14. The only historian to use Dhanis’s journal is Vangroenweghe (1986), as part of his valuable event-based history of ABIR and the Equateur region.
 15. More research is needed within these 1953 memories and in other sources on how Congolese read the ethnic identities of soldiers and sentries, and how companies like Abir used these Congolese readings and their own to control and punish labor. How a company like Abir recruited sentries and from where is not well documented (Vangroenweghe 1986). Dhanis’s journal (1904) suggests many were familiars rather than completely new strangers, with some Basankusu, for example, being capita and sentries over other Basankusu; if a chief managed to continue to control their selection, he would likely have chosen subsidiary big

- men (perhaps once slaves, now client allies) who would have turned much lesser slaves into rubber gatherers, thus continuing the preceding raiding, client-building dynamics of the 19th century. Some Abir sentries were Ngombe supervising Mongo rubber gatherers, thus maintaining the ethnic rivalry among these two groups that also furthered 19th-century raiding dynamics; the process of sentry recruitment here would have been the same, that is, identifying a “chief” or “big man” who would agree to work with rather than against Abir and let him choose who received the guns that made a man a sentry. There is some evidence, however, that when Abir met with resistance, it introduced “stranger” sentries from another region to brutalize seemingly uncooperative gatherers. All of this seems to run counter to Force Publique or official Congolese army recruitment, which used African foreigners from its earliest days (especially Zanzibari and Hausa) and then as it fought wars of conquest “liberated” the captives—some of whom were already slaves—and made them soldiers, posting them throughout the colony; the classic and largely invented ethnicity out of this process were the Tetela, who also appear in the 1953 memories, not as company sentries but as state soldiers.
16. My reading of laughter here through Bataille may seem to suggest that I think laughter, including “laughter out of place” (Goldstein 2003), can be read across all cultures in a universal way. This is not the case. Rather, not unlike Achille Mbembe (2001), I find Bataille and Congolese novelist Sony Labou Tansi (cf. Veit-Wild 2006) useful for thinking about death, excess, sexualized violence, and laughter in central African cultures. My historical and ethnographic work in Kisangani region in 1989–90 including on laughter (Hunt 1999), as well as my research on Congolese comics in print (Hunt 2002) and in everyday life in Kinshasa and Equateur during 2007, has afforded my sense of license to interpret laughter and anguish as I do here. More ethnographic work on instances of anguished and cathartic laughter within Africa’s current zones of war and suffering would be instructive. May others take this up.
 17. This is not to suggest that any of these acts of violence was fantastic, in the sense of implausible or untrue, as there is other evidence suggesting all these kinds of violent acts occurred, but to draw attention to the poetic, tale-telling quality of repetition here suggesting the phantastic, thus the psychic at work within this secondhand memory account 50 years removed.
 18. Hochschild (1998:254–55) also uses Mingo’s testimony.
 19. I am grateful to Julie Livingston for first suggesting to me that I reckon with the creativity of the violence here.
 20. See Vangroenweghe 1986:134 for a similar instance near Boende from a contemporary documentary source. Casement never used the word *rape* in his report (although there is a brief mention of removing “the organs of the men slain by the sentries” [Síocháin and Sullivan 2003:125]). Nor did he use the more ambiguous word of his time *ravish*. Historians have become less shy on a topic for which evidence is rarely explicit. “Institutionalized rape was not uncommon, and such sentries often lived *en pacha*,” state Síocháin and Sullivan (2003:321 n. 43), when speaking about the rubber districts near Irebu in the southern Equateur zone, but they do not say how they came to this conclusion. Hochschild speaks of “raped hostages” in passing (1998:175), and quotes from a Force Publique officer’s diary entry in 1895 in the Uele region, far northeast of Equateur: “The women taken during the last raid at Engwettra are causing me no end of trouble. All the soldiers want one. The sentries who are supposed to watch them unchain the prettiest ones and rape them” (1998:162). Tswambe, one of Boelaert’s sources, speaks—within Hochschild’s (1998:166) book too—of the way armed men forced people to commit transgressive violence against their own kin: “Soldiers made young men kill or rape their own mothers and sisters.”
 21. Personal communication, Madame Maria Mukaya, UNICEF, following UNICEF-American Cultural Center Workshop on Gender Violence for Hip-Hop Musicians, Kinshasa, November 26, 2006.
 22. The UN Security Council set up MONUC as a first set of peace accords were signed in Lusaka in 1999; MONUC incorporated UN personnel authorized in earlier resolutions, and the council expanded its peacekeeping mandate and size in 2000. Some 17,000 MONUC peacekeeping personnel are in the DRC today.
 23. The sudden, recent humanitarian and Western mainstream media attention to rape in the Congo—from *Glamour* to the *New York Times*—suggests that the “rape card” is indeed effective

- in producing humanitarian funds; it is also distracting media attention from asking about Laurent Nkunda's funding and the continued extractive economics of this ongoing war (Snow 2007). I am not fond of Keith Harmon Snow's conspiracy-like style of railing against "white supremacy," but he does a much better job than most of pointing to who is benefiting from war in the Congo and how; provides information about specific persons, corporations, embassies, and humanitarian organizations; and evokes general themes that rarely if ever appear in mainstream or humanitarian media. See his website at <http://www.allthingspass.com>, accessed January 24, 2008. Equally interesting, for resources on sexual violence in the Congo (especially recent and yet-to-be-released documentary films on the subject) is Eve Ensler's Congo-related website at <http://www.vday.org/contents/drcongo/resources>, accessed January 24, 2008.
24. The village was known alternately as Nsongo-Mboyo and as Wala; it was located in the Nsongo-Mboyo district.
 25. As Lévi-Strauss noted, long ago, in his discussion of history in *The Savage Mind* (1966).

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