

SCARS, MARKED BODIES, AND SUFFERING: THE MULELE ‘REBELLION’ IN POSTCOLONIAL CONGO*

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Abstract

This article examines the scars and marks left on the bodies of survivors of the Mulele rebellion (DR Congo), their signifying capacity, their relationship not only with the body but also with the uncertainty of time, the arresting of time, and the annihilation of future time that the scars and marks seem to both signify and put into effect by making the body useless, undesirable, and revolting to others. Drawing on extensive oral interviews and other forms of evidence, including scars and marks on the bodies of survivors, as well as a body of theory on psychoanalysis, continental mirror, time, laughter, and the gaze of others, this article argues that to be tortured during the rebellion was unimaginably terrible. But the suffering did not end there. There was something beyond that, something even more important that caused a kind of psychic suffering, which not only exceeded the physical, but also extended across time.

Key Words

Scars, body, suffering, time, image, self, other, future.

Papa, [in 1970], when I came out of the bush, the first thing I had to ask for when I got in Kikwit was a mirror. I did not want people to continue telling me stuff about my scars. . . . I wanted to see with my own eyes what my face had become I wanted to see myself and understand. . . . I asked for a big mirror. Not only that I wanted to see my face, I also wanted to see my back and all the marks that my back was carrying. In the bush, people used to tell me. But I was sick of them always talking about me. . . . This time, I wanted to see myself and understand. . . . I wanted to have a clear idea of what my body had become in its entirety. . . . After locking myself into the house, I took off my clothes. . . . Papa, it was horrible. I assure you that it was horrible to see my face in the mirror. . . . People used to tell me, but now I could see for myself what my face had become. . . . I did not believe at all that it was me, Kitoto. . . . I could see scratches all over

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my back. . . . On my buttocks, you cannot even describe. Besides, you can see how scars abound on my legs, just to show you these ones.¹

These are the memories of Eugène Kitoto, an 82-year-old man who I first met in November 2013 in Kikwit, a town located 500 km east of Kinshasa in the Congo. In 1964, he was arrested by the *militaires* during the Mulele rebellion. He was shot in the cheek. Some of his nerves were affected and, as a result, he does not speak well. Apart from the shooting, Kitoto was badly beaten by the same *militaires*.² They cut his testicles off and burned them. They mixed them with water and forced him to drink the mixture. The morbid spectacle of his being cut up, thus, was an indication of the transition of human being into animal, meat, and nothingness. The fragments of testimonies he provides are painful, full of emotion, and regret. To a large extent, they shed light on the new form of life that took shape when disruptions and reductions – aiming to reduce everything that was corporeal to ‘pieces, fragments, folds’, and wounds difficult to seal – were introduced into the continuousness of the corporeal. It is this new form of life, which I deliberately call *the life of scars*, which constitutes the subject of this article.

The Mulele rebellion was a guerrilla war. It was led by Pierre Mulele and his companions in the Kwilu region – and beyond – between 1963 and 1968. Pierre Mulele was one of the founders of the *Parti Solidaire Africain* (PSA), established in 1959, and served as the Minister of National Education for the Lumumba government from July 1961. He was violently murdered after being tortured by the Congolese Army in October 1968.³

Destabilized in the Congo’s violent nineteenth century, the groups most implicated in the Mulele rebellion were subject to colonial violence relating to the Unilever plantations, where coercion was used to secure wage labour for what was then the largest palm oil exporter in the world, with Kwilu being William Lever’s ‘brutal’ state – within a state.⁴ The area supported politicians from the ‘radical nationalist’ pro-Lumumba faction who won the elections at independence in 1960 – but who were then pushed out of power in a Western-backed coup.⁵ The aim of the rebellion, which broke out during Cold War, was to reconquer the Congolese state from what the rebels called ‘Belgian neo-colonial domination’.⁶ This form of ‘neo-colonialism’, which in the view of the rebels was more insidious than traditional colonial rule, operated through Congolese intermediaries.⁷

Over the past years, academic research in the fields of body and disability have shown how scars – or effects on the body, following a gruesome treatment of the latter – may

1 Interview with Eugène Kitoto, Kikwit, 7 Aug. 2015.

2 The Congolese/Zairian Army responsible for the atrocities described in this article grew out of the colonial *Force Publique* and came into being as the enforcers of the ‘red rubber’ regime under King Leopold II and the colonial project more broadly. See A. Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston, 1999); J.-J. Wondo Omanyundu, *Les armées au Congo-Kinshasa: Radioscopie de la Force Publique aux FARDC* (Saint-Légier, 2013).

3 See L. Martens, *Pierre Mulele ou la seconde vie de Lumumba* (Bruxelles, 1985).

4 See J. Marchal, *Lord Leverhulme’s Ghosts: Colonial Exploitation in the Congo* (London, 2008).

5 A.-R. Ilunga and B. Kalonji, ‘Les événements du Kwilu’, *Etudes Congolaises*, 6:3 (1964), 8–9; I. Ndaywel è Nziem, *Histoire générale du Congo: de l’héritage ancien à la République Démocratique du Congo* (Bruxelles, 1998), 610–19.

6 S. Kiangu, *Le Kwilu à l’épreuve du pluralisme identitaire (1948–1968)* (Paris, 2009), 228.

7 *Ibid.*

become sites of alternative readings: that of resistance through memorialization and commemoration, as well as a potential currency for reading one's experiences as righteous.⁸ Inspired mostly by the Foucauldian notion of the 'body as the inscribed surface of events', a number of these research projects have treated scars and marks as a text – that is, a character, something that can be read, a site from where narratives can emerge – or a 'fixed sign of identity'.⁹

My goal in this article is not to reiterate these works on scars and marked bodies; but to show the signifying capacity of scars, their relationship not only with the body but also with time, the arresting of time, and the annihilation of future time.¹⁰

The central argument that drives my analysis is that the scars that people bear on their bodies can produce or reproduce suffering in the *longue durée*, as long as those who bear them live. To be tortured during the Mulele rebellion in the 1960s was unimaginably terrible. But the suffering did not stop there. There was something beyond that, something even more important that caused a kind of psychic suffering that not only exceeded the physical, but also extended across time.¹¹ In what follows, I will demonstrate this by discussing first the production and reproduction of suffering in relation to the body, the self, the image of the self, and the gaze of others. In the second part of the article, I will take up these themes in relation to time (the future past), the arresting of time, and the annihilation of future time.

LIVING WITH SCARS: SELF, IMAGE, OTHERS, AND SUFFERING

To live with the scars of the rebellion is to permanently live in a state of self-questioning, or self-interrogation, about the transformations that the body has undergone. It means, to a large extent, continuously and critically looking at one's body as a shapeless mass that has

8 See E. Cole, *Theorizing the Disfigured Body: Mutilation, Amputation, and Disability in Post-conflict Sierra Leone* (Trenton, NJ, 2014); T. Meyer-Fong, *What Remains: Coming to terms with Civil War in Nineteenth-Century China* (Stanford, 2013).

9 R. Samolsky, *Apocalyptic Futures: Marked Bodies and the Violence of the Text in Kafka, Conrad, and Coetzee* (New York, 2011), 11, 13. See also P. Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, 1993); Cole, *Theorizing*; R. Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York, 1997); and T. Hollander and B. Gill, 'Every day the war continues in my body: examining the marked body in postconflict Northern Uganda', *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 8:2 (2014), 1–18.

10 The materials that form the core of this article are fragments of words. They are fragments of evidence. One of the questions this kind of evidence raises is: what kind of interpretation does one get from them? The interpretation one can get from fragments can only be fragmentary. Fragments do not allow for total interpretation. Ultimately, the knowledge that one can build from them will, out of necessity, be an incomplete kind of knowledge, a position that needs to be embraced as such. This should not be considered a lack, but the most logical approach. My interpretation of these fragments comes from a close reading of them. This attempt at close reading builds from theoretical insights gained from the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean-Luc Nancy, Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, Jean-Pierre Vernant, Reinhardt Koselleck, Jacques Derrida, Walter Benjamin, Nancy Rose Hunt, Achille Mbembe, and Martin Heidegger. These fragments of words come from a series of interviews I conducted with witnesses and survivors of the rebellion in Kinshasa, Kikwit, and Idiofa in 2013 and 2015.

11 The analysis proposed in this article could be useful to think about – and understand – (among others) the long-term personal, emotive, and temporal effects of mutilations in other contexts, in Africa and elsewhere.

undergone a series of mutilations and destructions, in order to grasp the nature of the terrifying act that led to these bodily reductions.¹² As many people from the contested region remembered, this is what was happening in everyday life, both during the rebellion as well as after it had ended and stability had returned.

This is exactly what we experienced. . . . My cousin, a very grown and strong man, was arrested by the *militaires* on the night of [30 June 1964]. They cut off his right arm from here [elbow]. . . . And then, they cut off his left hand. . . . One can only imagine the kind of trouble he went through! . . . I can see how he was howling that day. It was not different from the howling of a beast. . . . All the time we spent in the bush, he could not stop looking at himself. . . . Whenever we got somewhere after many hours of wandering, he would prefer to withdraw and be alone. . . . He would constantly raise the stumps of his arms and look at them. It was painful. One could read the pain on his face. . . . At the end of the rebellion, he could not do anything. He would stay in the village from morning to night, regretting all the time. . . . One day, after having looked at his arms, he turned to me and asked me sadly: ‘What did I do to deserve all of this? . . . Is there anyone out there who can give me a clear explanation?’ Papa, looking at his body and asking himself a bunch of questions had become his new life. As he could not bear the pain and the humiliation anymore, he died prematurely in 1968.¹³

But, to have a look over one’s own body is more than this gesture of self-questioning. In *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre states that this gesture requires one ‘to stand’ in front of someone or something that is being questioned, interrogate this person or thing about his or ‘its ways of being’ and, based on a ‘pre-interrogative familiarity’ with this person or this thing, ‘expect’ an unveiling of his/‘its being’ or his/‘its way of being’.¹⁴

To have to look at one’s own body means turning this body into an object of knowledge and creating a discourse on it. It implies rejecting how others represent one’s body, even when one knows that in situations such as these, where one cannot see the deformities of his/her own body, one has to rely on others to describe these deformities; or, as Jacques Lacan states, ‘the image of my body passes necessarily through the one imagined in the gaze of the other’.¹⁵

Looking at one’s own body also means confirming for oneself that bodily disruptions are concrete and cannot be restored by adding up the individual parts of one’s body that others – those who look at me – describe. Looking finally means that one can only accept the gravity or profundity of the reductions introduced to the body’s natural life when one can see these disruptions oneself.

This opens the question of how one can assess the disruptions introduced to one’s body while one is unable to see these disruptions oneself. How does one make the disruptions of one’s body an object of consideration when one is unable to see them? How does one get a

12 Telephone interview with Balingite Osam, Kikwit-Idiofa, 8 Aug. 2015; telephone interview with Evariste Nzonzele, Kikwit-Idiofa, 8 Aug. 2015; telephone interview with Palmie Andiang, Kikwit-Idiofa, 8 Aug. 2015; telephone interview with Placide Ngay, Kikwit-Idiofa, 8 Aug. 2015; and interview with Adolphe Kuma Kuma, Kikwit Sacré Coeur, 6 Aug. 2015.

13 Interview with Georgine Mankieta, Kikwit Sacré Coeur, 6 Aug. 2015. See also interview with Adolphe Kuma Kuma; interview with Ernest Kiangu, Kinshasa, 14 Dec. 2015.

14 J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. H. E. Barnes (Secaucus, 1956), 4–5.

15 J. Lacan, cited in S. Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History*, trans. K. H. Jewett (New York, 2001), 6.

clear idea of the disruptions when one is deprived of the faculty that would enable one to grasp their essence? These are fundamental questions that most of the people who experienced violent disruptions to the continuity of their bodies posed to themselves in the years after the rebellion. A woman from Banda, whose uncle's body underwent a series of mutilations in Mukulu in 1965, remembered this questioning:

He was arrested at night. The *militaires* waited until the first rays of the sun to dissect him. ... They stabbed his right thigh with the bayonet. The man began to shout. ... They seized his right eye. They stabbed it with their bayonet. We were standing in front of the *militaires*, [who were] watching and applauding how they were dissecting my uncle. ... They seized him again. They gave him a blow of the bayonet in the left eye. There was blood. ... After all of this, they decided to release him. They asked him to run away. ... How could he run away while he could not see anymore? ... It was so sad. ... The man lay down on the ground. His body was covered with blood. ... He could barely speak. ... After the departure of the *militaires*, he tried to open his mouth and speak, but he could not. You could tell that the man was deeply racked by pain. In the following months he would ask himself: 'Oh the world, why? ... Why me? How could they take everything away from me? Even my own body, I cannot see it anymore.' It was hard. He would not let anyone tell him anything about his body. He died five months later because of the pain.¹⁶

All these questions – the ones this man was asking himself as well as those I raised above – have two implications. Firstly, they led the subjects to reject any mediation or evaluation by others, as they considered the comments as nothing more than the product of the others' construction. Phrases such as: 'I did not want people to continue telling me stuff about my scars'; or 'I wanted to see with my own eyes what my face had become'; or 'Please stop bothering me with your words, I cannot even see what you are talking about' all illustrate this rejection of mediation by others.¹⁷

Secondly, these questions led the subjects to search for tools that could help them receive a visual image of themselves and thus make this mediation unnecessary. Hence there was an increasing desire of victims to have access to a mirror.¹⁸ But, what would happen in front of this polished and metallic glass, believed able to capture what one really looks like and place it in front of oneself? To use Achille Mbembe's vocabulary, it is precisely the 'divorce between seeing and touching', 'a discrepancy, a gap between the subject and his/her representation, a space of intrusion and dissonance between the subject and its fictitious double [*double fictive*, in French] represented by the shade' that these women and men experienced in front of their mirrors.¹⁹ Kitoto's fragments of testimony, which highlight how he saw a new geography of his body represented through the mirror, are evocative of this. The most difficult part of the engagement with the mirror was, however,

¹⁶ Interview with Marie Nzamba, Kikwit, 9 Aug. 2015.

¹⁷ Interview with Eugène Kitoto, 7 Aug. 2015; interview with Marie Nzamba.

¹⁸ Usually, during the rebellion, people used to look at their reflections in water when they wanted to carry out self-examination. Bathing, under these conditions, became a moment of self-torture. Those who had no injuries on their bodies would splash into the stream without hesitation, while those with bodily disruptions would stop for a moment to look at their reflections to see if the wound was healed or not. Interview with Ernest Kiangu.

¹⁹ A. Mbembe, *Critique de la raison nègre* (Paris, 2013), 202–03. See also F. Frontisi-Ducroix and J.-P. Vernant, *Dans l'œil du miroir* (Paris, 1997), 222–4.

confronting the image that appeared in it and its surprising and appalling appearance. The moment when the subjects step in front of the mirror, appearances were transcended. The subjects went beyond the boundaries between sight and touch and reached a point where their psyches cast aside their corporeality.²⁰ They questioned the images in front of them, and tried to grasp the reality that the image in front of them seemed to suggest.²¹

Papa, ... I was surprised when I saw the scratches all over my back. I could not believe that it was me. I thought it was someone else [tears]. ... People used to tell me, but it is only when I looked at myself in the mirror that I came to understand what I went through. ... My cheeks were completely distorted. The scars from the stitches were still there. You can see them, can't you? It was terrible. I remember spending hours and hours in front of the mirror. I was crying. I was saying to myself: 'If only I could change what I see into something else!' Papa, I could not stop wondering if what I saw in the mirror was me. I could not believe. It was so painful for me.²²

We can see how the process of self-examination could also become an act of self-torture. However, the images that the subjects saw in the mirror surprised them. This surprise lies, essentially, in the monstrous character of the image. Yet it also goes beyond this monstrous character. 'The image', writes Jean-Luc Nancy, 'disputes the presence of the thing. In the image, the thing is not content simply to be; the image shows *that* the thing is and *how* it is. The image is what takes the thing out of its simple presence and brings it to presence, to *praes-entia*, to being-out-in-front-of-itself The image is of the order of the monster [I]t is outside the common sphere of presence because it is the display of presence. It is the manifestation of presence, not as appearance, but as exhibiting, as bringing to light and setting forth.'²³ But the image of Kitoto's deformed body, and his encounter with this image, is of a qualitatively greater and different degree than an encounter with any image, as he, himself, shows in this testimony:

I spent hours and hours in front of the mirror. ... Thoughts began to multiply inside of me when I saw the image of myself in the mirror. ... What could I do? ... I was crying. I could not believe that. ... The hardest part was when I looked between my thighs. I came to understand that I had become worthless I held my [penis]. ... I raised it. ... I looked at it through the mirror. Papa, what a pain! It was terrible. I hit my hands against each other. ... It is true that when I was in the bush, I would touch my scrotum and my genitals. ... But in front of the mirror, things were different. ... I could see that my scrotum had lost its [normal form]. ... I could not stop thinking about what the *militaires* had done to me.²⁴

The surprise caused by what the subjects saw in the materiality of their mirrors was also because their reflections brutally interrupted the ignorance in which they had hitherto been able to live with regards to their bodily deformations.²⁵ And yet, while disturbing and troubling the subjects, the images also revealed some truths. As the testimonies

20 On this phenomenon, see J. Starobinski, *The Living Eye*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA, 1989), 4.

21 A reality whose reading was hitherto only possible through the mediation of the other.

22 Interview with Eugène Kitoto, 7 Aug. 2015.

23 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. J. Fort (New York, 2005), 21–2.

24 Interview with Eugène Kitoto, 7 Aug. 2015.

25 J.-L. Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. R. D. Richardson and A. E. O'Byrne (Stanford, 2000), 171–2.

above show, the truths revealed by the images were unsettling and shocking insofar as they only came out of themselves to harm. This is what Kitoto points out:

I was completely horrified. . . . Even though my [consciousness] reminded me all the time that it was me, still I could not believe that [the image] I saw [in the mirror] was me. . . . Tears were spilling from my eyes. . . . [Having a look between my legs] reminded me more than once that it was over. My marital life had no more meaning. A man without [testicles], was he still worth? . . . I cried out: 'Oh [my testicles], you are [now] gone! I will no longer have you.' . . . Papa, I cried out. I asked myself: 'The *militaires*, why did you cut my [testicles] off? . . . Why? And yet you had already stabbed me everywhere, why could not you just leave me my [testicles]?'²⁶

The most striking element in this process of revealing the truth is the way in which Kitoto recounted scrutinizing his body as something alien, something strange, something over which he had no power; and, in the process of this self-examination, talking to parts of himself, to fragments, to his genitals: 'Oh . . . you are gone!' Of course, it is common among men to experience the penis as a self-animated subject, distinct, and autonomous from the body that bears it. But here Kitoto described it as a lost possession and an autonomous subject worthy of address, one whose gratuitous, inexplicable destruction at the hands of the *militaires* rendered him without 'worth'. This, as we can see, has some bearing on the question of the 'wholeness' and partibility of one's body as an object of examination by oneself.²⁷

The image that the subject perceived through the materiality of his mirror, in which the body appeared in all its nakedness, reminded him that the body has been separated from its original form. It has undergone a becoming, a 'radical metamorphosis'.²⁸ It has become something else, something other than what it previously had been. Hence the shock, regret, loss of will, and negativity that is evident in the above testimonies. The same image that the subject saw in the mirror revealed the marks that a violent person, in this case the *militaire*, wanted to see on the body he attacked.²⁹ It revealed to the subject how this violent person was only preoccupied with seeing the externalization of the interiority of life principle;³⁰ and how, through this act of externalization, the same violent person wanted to grasp hold of death, not by looking steadily and intently 'into emptiness of the depths but . . . by filling his eyes with red . . . and with the clots [of blood] in which life suffers and dies.'³¹ Kitoto remembers this double act of externalization of the interiority of life principle and appropriation of death by the *militaires*:

When I saw my face in the mirror, I was shocked. . . . My mouth opened widely, I suddenly remembered the young man that the *militaires* killed like an animal in Lutshima.³²

²⁶ Interview with Eugène Kitoto, 7 Aug. 2015.

²⁷ Here, of course, it is a question of gender/sexuality as indexed by parts of the body. This relates to literature on mastectomy following breast cancer. See, for example, S. L. Jain, 'Cancer butch', *Cultural Anthropology*, 22:4 (2007), 501–38.

²⁸ On this concept of radical metamorphosis, see C. Malabou, *The Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage*, trans. S. Miller (New York, 2012).

²⁹ Nancy, *The Ground*, 20.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 24.

³¹ *Ibid.* 24–5.

³² Interview with Eugène Kitoto, 7 Aug. 2015.

Instead of killing him far away, they preferred to kill him in the presence of his father. They took the bayonet. They began to stab the child. The child fled. They ran after him. They caught him. They opened his eyes widely. Two blows of the bayonet into the right eye: ‘*kiek, kiek*’. The eye burst. Blood ... flowed. They grabbed him again. They bayoneted him at the neck, ‘*kiek, kiek*’. They began to turn the bayonet [in the neck of the child]. They moved the bayonet. The child shouted: ‘Ah, ah, *munu!*’ They pulled the bayonet out [from the neck of the child]. They gave him another blow to the chest, ‘*kiek, kiek*’. Over. The child gave up his soul [*azenga ntima*, in Kikongo].³³

I was horrified. I could see how the bayonet blows would make the young man urinate. It was painful to remember all of this.³⁴

This is where the obsession with looking at one’s own image in the mirror could lead. But more than that, the image that the subject perceives through the materiality of his mirror revealed to him how violence alters, shatters, and annihilates that which it attacks;³⁵ and how the same violence, once it has intruded the body, carries off the shape and significance of that which it has assaulted, and transforms it, in Nancy’s words, ‘into nothing other than a sign of its own rage, assaulted or violated thing or being ... whose very essence now consists in its having been assaulted or violated.’³⁶

It [the image] also reminded me of [those terrible moments] when the *militaires* came towards me and caught me.³⁷

They took the bayonet. They wanted to kill me with the bayonet. I said to their leader: ‘Pardon, ... Lieutenant Nguya. I am begging you. Please shoot me. Don’t kill me with your bayonet’. The *militaire* replied: ‘No, you spent so much time deciding. You must die by bayonet as your comrades were. If you do not want to, you will die “suffocated” like ... the other recalcitrants [have been killed]. ... The weapons ... will [only] [help] to kill Mulele. But you, you must die by bayonet’. They decided to kill me. They asked me to pass ahead. They tied me up. I was shaking. They shot. The bullet penetrated my cheek. Then, it came out on the other side. ... I was bleeding. They left me naked. I managed to flee. ... I [reached ...] a village called Yongo My heart was overheating Everyone was laughing at me as I was naked It was painful. I [cried out] and regretted having been born.³⁸

On reading these testimonies, one can see how images from the past, which the subject would not want to remember, are being crystallized again and again in his memory. But the same image in the mirror, that raised so many questions and thoughts in the subject, reminded him that violence, which unexpectedly intruded his body, is only ‘stupidity’. It is ‘stupidity’ for, once it has intruded the body, it does not want to substitute anything else other than itself.³⁹ Violence owns the body that it has invaded, and imprints itself on it. Instead of leaving those marks free, it assigns them new functions, that of producing

33 Interview with Eugène Kitoto, Kikwit, 1 Nov. 2013.

34 Interview with Eugène Kitoto, 7 Aug. 2015.

35 Nancy, *The Ground*, 16.

36 *Ibid.*

37 Interview with Eugène Kitoto, 7 Aug. 2015.

38 Interview with Eugène Kitoto, 1 Nov. 2013.

39 Nancy, *The Ground*, 17.

and reproducing suffering.⁴⁰ A focus on the fragments of memories of those who experienced the relentless desire of violence, which makes it exclusively preoccupied with its own overwhelming obtrusion, can help to have a better understanding of how, in the *longue durée*, these marks imprinted on the bodies fulfilled this role of the production and reproduction of suffering assigned to them.⁴¹

If I am miserable today, it is because of what the *militaires* did to me. ... When I came out of the bush [in 1970], it was very difficult for me. ... At the time, Mobutu did not want people to speak about the rebellion anymore. Talking about my injuries to strangers was really a problem. Whenever I was in front of a stranger, I would lie about the cause of my injuries, because you never know ... I was a man of pride when I was born. But, today, I am worthless. ... I am now the object of mockery for everyone because of what the *militaires* did to me. My voice, I no longer have it. And it has been years now. Along the way, people make fun of me. ... They say to me: 'Look at this "mute" [*espèce de muet*] walking up and down.' 'Mute' is the name they gave me because of my voice. When I tell them that I have not always been so, no one understands me. When they begin to laugh at me, you have no idea! And when I see all of this, ... pain and sorrow multiply in me. Even when I politely tell them that I was not born with these deformities, nobody understands me. On the contrary, they laugh out loud at me. This is what I have been experiencing – and still experience – for years. ... It is painful!⁴²

Hence, to seize 'bodies' during the rebellion, to torture these 'bodies' until they are marked is to expose these 'bodies' to the perpetual renewal of humiliation, and to crush them into subjectivity across time. It is also to render the mobility of these people vulnerable within a political regime that is essentially preoccupied with liquidating its enemies. By grafting tightly on the skin, the marks imprinted on people's bodies automatically linked them to politics. This was particularly the case in the Mobutu regime, which, as the testimonies above suggest, often understood the scars imprinted on a body to suggest that its bearer had been part of the rebellion. The scars could thus lead to the arrest of an entire 'body' as they betrayed the bearer. People bearing scars could be dragged before military courts and condemned to a violent death. They could be hanged in public, in front of everyone, without mercy.⁴³ The *raison d'être* of power during the Mobutu regime was decidedly *nervous*. It could get into the bodies of its subjects with extraordinary intensity. Once in the bodies, it would place the subjects in threatening and defenceless situations and produce in them various kinds of sensations.⁴⁴ This could go 'from physical pain to convulsions'.⁴⁵ It

40 After having seen his image in the mirror, Kitoto said: 'I came to the conclusion that the *militaires* cannot be anything else than dogs. They are ... idiots ... All they know is to destroy. ... They do not care about the consequences of their actions.' Interview with Eugène Kitoto, 7 Aug. 2015.

41 Nancy, *The Ground*, 16.

42 Interview with Eugène Kitoto, 7 Aug. 2015.

43 Interview with Jacques Kuma Kuma, Kikwit Sacré Coeur, 6 Aug. 2015.

44 A. Mbembe, 'Variations on the beautiful in Congolese worlds of sound', in S. Nuttall (ed.), *Beautiful/Ugly: African and Diaspora Aesthetics* (Durham, 2006), 74. A thorough analysis of the relationship between the scars of direct violence and other forms of bodily memory which encode violence, such as dance (see N. Argenti, *The Intestines of the State: Youth, Violence, and Belated Histories in the Cameroon Grassfields* (Chicago, 2007); J.-P. Warnier and J.-F. Bayart (eds.), *Matière à politique: le pouvoir, les corps et les choses* (Paris, 2004), could well be undertaken. It is, however, a task that goes beyond the boundaries of this article.

45 Mbembe, 'Variations', 74.

resulted from this *nervousness* that bodies were violently spread out, flesh and organs torn apart, and bones broken.⁴⁶ This man remembers what happened in 1965 near Kikwit Airfield:

They [the *militaires*] began [the process of killing] the young man, who was arrested because of his scars, by giving him food. They gave him a lot of food and forced him to eat. . . . [And then] they beat him heavily to the point where he could not rise anymore. [After that] they dragged him in front of the wooden podium that was there. . . . They forced him to say in front of everyone why he was going to be killed. . . . Afterwards, they placed the rope around his neck. They destroyed the plank [he was standing on]. . . . The young boy began to swim in the air. His body was shaking. His tongue came out. The saliva was flowing from both sides of the mouth. The young boy died while he was still urinating and shitting.⁴⁷

Beyond this humiliation caused by political power is the form of suffering created by the narrative construction by others. In the specific case of Kitoto, this narrative construction by others led to the attribution of degrading stereotypes such as ‘mute’. Other victims were nicknamed ‘eighteen’ or *diboité* (dislocated), depending on whether they lacked two fingers or two toes, or they walked with a limp. As this woman recalls:

The *militaires* arrested three young men. . . . Papa, do you know what they did to them? . . . They grabbed the first one. They stabbed his right arm [with the bayonet]. And then they cut his thumbs off. . . . They caught the second one. They beat him up heavily. And then they cut his ears off. . . . They turned to the last one. They beat him as well and they cut his lips off. Afterwards they asked the three young men to walk away to the bush. . . . Do you know what people used to call these three young men? The first one people used to call ‘eighteen’ as he lost both thumbs. The second they used to call *maseke* [horns], because he would put his hands around the eardrums to hear better as he had no longer had ear cups. The fact of continuously putting his hands around his ears gave the impression of someone who had horns. That is why he was nicknamed *maseke* [horns]. . . . The last one people used to call *aseka kala*, meaning someone who always laughs, because he did not have his lips anymore. And having his teeth always visible gave the impression of someone who always laughs.⁴⁸

‘Mute’, *diboité*, as well as ‘*maseke*’ are primarily words. ‘A word’, writes Mbembe, ‘always refers to something. But the word also has a proper thickness, a proper density. A word is made to evoke something in the consciousness of that which it addresses, or who hears it. The more it has a density and thickness, the more it provokes sensation, a feeling, a resentment among those to which it refers. There are words that hurt.’⁴⁹ ‘Mute’, *diboité*, and ‘*maseke*’ are among those words. Worn permanently as an insult, the effects of their weight mark the consciousness of those who are sentenced to bear them unconditionally. As we can see, the words ‘mute’, *diboité*, and ‘*maseke*’ objectify,

46 E. M. Kalema, ‘The Mulele “rebellion”, Congolese political regimes, and the politics of forgetting’, *Cahiers d’Etudes Africaines*, 4:233 (forthcoming, Dec. 2018).

47 Interview with Jacques Kuma Kuma.

48 Interview with Georgine Mankieta.

49 Mbembe, *Critique*, 219. On ‘words that hurt’, see also D. Schoenbrun, ‘Violence, marginality, scorn and honour: language evidence of slavery to the eighteenth century’, in H. Médard and S. Doyle (eds.), *Slavery in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa* (Oxford, 2007), 38–75.

degrade, paralyse, amputate, and emasculate those who are forced to bear them, as Kitoto went on saying:

When they insult me like that, I do not even know how to answer. ... Isn't it that you can only answer with words? I am deprived of those words. What do you want me to do? ... When I dare to speak, they multiply insults. ... They say to me: 'Look at this mute who wants to speak. What is it that he wants to say exactly?' It is painful. Even my own son-in-law calls me 'mute'. Nobody has any idea of what I am going through. ... Those who cannot make fun of me openly, they do it through gestures. ... What can I do? When I try to speak, my blood pressure increases, my body gets tired, I suddenly get breathless. And this is even one more reason for them to intensify the insults. ... How can I live in peace? How should I not be sick all the time?⁵⁰

Apart from these degrading words, the narrative construction by others also led to the use of gestures as a way of making fun of the victims, as Georgine Mankieta explains below. It is within this economy of gestures that the marked bodies could become a fixed idea and, therefore, destroyed. When people could not make use of gestures to fix them, they would make use of metaphors from their web of words. People developed ways of separating words and sentences from their conventional meanings. They would use those words in contradictory ways and, in doing so, offended those living with disruptions inflicted upon their bodies.

Papa, people suffered a lot. ... You get into a village to only find that some people do not have ears, others do not have legs, and some others do not have arms. ... You would not even be able to look at them. ... Once in front of them, all you could do is to pretend that you have not seen anything while actually you are watching them from the corner of your eyes. ... This is what we used to do. ... One day, my friends and I sat down on the edge of the road. ... We saw 'eighteen' coming. ... My friend touched me slightly on my thigh. She said to me in a low-pitched voice: 'Georgine, look, "eighteen" is coming towards us.' I lift up my eyes. I saw the man coming. Quickly, I turned my eyes around in order not to give the impression that I was looking at him. ... My friend insisted. I pretended not to understand and did absolutely not want to lift my eyes. ... She dug her nails into my leg. ... And when I lifted my eyes, she stretched her mouth twice in the right direction, as to point the direction from which 'eighteen' was coming. ... After a few minutes we saw 'eighteen' stopping. ... He turned towards us and stared at us. ... We understood that he was aware that we were watching him. For a few minutes he stood in front of us. He shook his head and then left. You could tell that he was very depressed. ... Everyone had their own tips when it came to making fun of people. ... One could laugh in front of this man without lips to say that this man had been laughing forever.⁵¹

Confronted with such humiliation, the marked body could do no better than itself seek refuge in laughter:

I was walking down the street. And suddenly, they began to laugh at me. ... I stopped and turned around. ... I saw them as they were laughing out loud at me. ... As I could not say anything, I just shook my head ... and laughed as well. ... I decided to go away as they were intensifying the insults. But all along the road I could not contain myself. I continued to laugh.⁵²

⁵⁰ Interview with Eugène Kitoto, 7 Aug. 2015.

⁵¹ Interview with Georgine Mankieta.

⁵² Interview with Eugène Kitoto, 7 Aug. 2015.

What was this kind of laughter that captured and invested in the marked body, maintained and extended itself across time? Certainly it was not the laughter of mutual recognition, the one that happens when one suddenly encounters someone one knows but rarely sees.⁵³ It was not even the ‘cackling carnivalesque laughter’, the one described by Bakhtin and which, in the postcolony, has constantly been used and mobilized by subjects in order to resist the dominant culture.⁵⁴ It was not even a laughter that scoffed, the one used by children when they witness the collapse of an authority, someone they fear.⁵⁵ It was rather something closer to what Nancy Rose Hunt calls ‘the nervous’, the ‘agonized shaking’, ‘the trembling laughter’; one that emerges out of ‘the unknowable’ and ‘anguish’, in so far as ‘the unknown makes’ people ‘laugh’; and one that comes from extended and unlimited suffering.⁵⁶ After having erupted, this kind of laughter usually involves a proliferation of thought that can no longer be stopped, not even by the person who is laughing.

While I was laughing, I could easily think of the swarms of flies which swirled around the streaming blood of my wounds, when the *militaires* shot at me. . . . I was asking myself if these people who were making fun of me have already suffered. . . . I could not understand why they were taking pleasure in my suffering.⁵⁷

Despite the excessive suffering caused by the laughter and gestures by others, the scars that the subject bears on his body never stop producing hardship and a particular state or kind of subjecthood. He is constantly immersed in asymmetrical relations of subordination. In contact with others, an atmosphere of submission has permanently been created because of the transformations that his body has undergone. Within the deeply paternalistic society in which a man like Kitoto lives, having lost his manhood, his own wife speaks to him in the way one speaks to a child. He is deprived of any right to assert himself. His body is both the object of appropriation and rejection. He is constantly driven to question the reasons for his continued existence.

We who were born very well have now become like kids because of the lack of testicles. . . . Oh, the *militaires*! My wife can treat me as her child and give me orders: ‘Turn these cassava chips [*cossettes de manioc*].’⁵⁸ I have no other alternative. I must do it; otherwise she will not give me food. . . . If I dare to speak, she says to me: ‘Shut up, sterile. Have you got anything on your body that you can give to a woman? Your body has been dead a long time ago.’ This is my life. She and I, we never had children. The only ones that we have are those that she had elsewhere. When I look at those three children, I constantly cry out. . . . Papa, since the day she discovered that I had no testicles we have no longer had romantic encounters. She has chased me from her bed. I sleep on the floor. . . . What can I say to her? When I tried to talk to her, she replied with brutality: ‘Open your mouth again, I will tell everyone here that you are not a man, . . . that you do not have testicles.’ . . . These days she is dating a young boy named Jonathan. . . . What

53 G. Bataille, *Writings on Laughter, Sacrifice, Nietzsche, Un-Knowing*, trans. A. Michelson (Cambridge, MA, 1986), 69.

54 N. R. Hunt, ‘An acoustic register: rape and repetition in Congo’, in A. L. Stoler (ed.), *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Durham, 2013), 51; A. Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, 2001), 103.

55 Bataille, *Writings*, 68.

56 Hunt, ‘An acoustic register’, 51.

57 Interview with Eugène Kitoto, 7 Aug. 2015.

58 He refers to his second wife here.

can I do? Those who have the power to impregnate women have confiscated my wife. I do not have testicles, what can I do? ... One day, I made her sit down and talk to me. She said: 'Look at this thing that is telling me that [Jonathan] is a child! Do you think he is not a man? ... In my opinion, Jonathan is completely a man. ... You, rather, you are not a man. Have you got anything on your body that you can give me?' ... Papa, what a humiliation! Instead of going out with an adult like me, my wife would rather go with a child. Oh, the world!⁵⁹

This is how the violence experienced during the Mulele rebellion of the 1960s continues to produce and reproduce humiliation. For Kitoro, it is made far worse by his wife attributing to him a lack or failure, even though it is one for which he bears no responsibility. This is the life of scars.

BODILY DISRUPTIONS, TEMPORALITY, AND SUFFERING

Seeing my child having [his arm cut off] ... was a big shock to me. ... I never stop regretting that. ... I remember one day [in late 1965], after leaving the *Hôpital Général de Kikwit*, I had to wash my child. I took his clothes off. ... I made him sit in his pond. Papa, I sprinkled water on his head. ... It was painful. I began to cry. And to rub soap on his amputated arm, it was a big problem for me. I could not bear the pain. ... My heart was burning. ... After many hesitations, I managed to wash him. I took him out of the pond. ... I made him sit on my legs. ... To dress him, it was painful. I was crying. ... My right hand was holding his [amputated] arm. I was touching his scars. I was crying while I was looking at these scars. ... I was asking myself: 'Now that he has got only one arm, what does the future hold for him?' I was so scared. ... I could not believe it. ... I could foresee all kinds of suffering that was awaiting him in his life. ... I could see my son suffering. ... I could see how his friends would laugh at him. ... Papa, looking at my child's arm was so painful to me. ... I was afraid to see my own child suffering.⁶⁰

These are the memories of Angélique Niepela, a 79-year-old woman from Impanga Mbele, whose child experienced a terrible accident at the beginning of 1965.⁶¹ On the one hand, these recollections highlight the tremendous and deep pain that a mother experienced at the suffering of her child. On the other hand, they show the possibility of reading time – the future, in this specific case – from the scars that a person carries on the body. This is particularly true given the fact that, at the time, the issue of marked bodies and their well-being did not seem to be at the forefront of the Congolese authorities' agenda. For the Mobutu regime, the fact that someone was in the rebel zone at the time of the rebellion was an indication of collaboration with the rebels. Mobutu wanted to punish not only the marked bodies, but also the region as a whole, accusing everyone living there of supporting Mulele and his rebellion.⁶² This had a huge impact on the imagination – and conception of life in general – of those whose bodies were marked. The way in which they conceived of time and, particularly, of the future was determined by their physical condition. Kitoto,

59 Interview with Eugène Kitoto, Kikwit, 7 Aug. 2015.

60 Interview with Angélique Niepela, Kinshasa, 3 Aug. 2015.

61 The accident took place in early 1965. Her son was shot, and his right arm was destroyed. He was three years old.

62 Telephone interview with Ernest Kiangu, Johannesburg-Kinshasa, 28 Jan. 2016. This suspicion and related punishment did not abate during the rest of Mobutu reign.

for example, remembered projecting himself into an 'eternal' future on the basis of the scars of his testicles and thinking about how the life he had planned for himself would never come about.⁶³ Many others with injured bodies took the same approach. The following is the case of Adolphe Kuma Kuma's brother-in-law whose severe disfigurement was imposed on his body in the late 1960s. Kuma Kuma shows that people with marked bodies did not only perceive themselves to have no future, but that they were actively prevented from having a future by the central government, the community, as well as by local authorities.

Papa, may nobody delude you with persuasive speech. . . . One can somewhat give oneself the luxury – I insist on the word somewhat – of not worrying about what happened to one's body, or what this body has become, only if one knows that the injuries have been fully taken care of – either by the state or by the family. . . . But when you have undergone [a series of mutilations], like my brother-in-law, and no effort is being made by the government or those in the immediate environment to guarantee his safety and life, he who has experienced these mutilations, how could you expect this person not to worry about his life and his future in general? . . . Georgine [my wife] has just told you about her cousin who, as she described, was a very strong and well-built man. . . . His arms were [brutally] amputated by the *militaires*. . . . Do you know how he spent the two years before he died? It was horrible for him. . . . He would not stop complaining about his loss. . . . He was always absent-minded.⁶⁴

He continued:

Georgine has just told you that he would not stop looking at the stumps of his arms. . . . This is someone who was abandoned to himself. . . . He did not receive any help, neither from the government, nor from the community. . . . People could barely help him. . . . His own wife left him behind with two children because of his disabilities. . . . At the time, we had just come out of the bush. We had almost nothing to eat. . . . I guess you understand how difficult it was for a man without arms to feed two kids daily. . . . He would cry every single day. . . . He would think about his future and that of his children. . . . Whenever I visited, he would not stop sharing his fears: 'Adolphe, I am scared about the future of my children. I know I will die, maybe this evening, maybe tomorrow morning, or late in the evening. But should I die anytime soon, please do not forget to take care of my children.' . . . This had, practically, become his new life until 1968 when he passed away. . . . Papa, . . . may nobody convince you otherwise. The question of the future of these people was out of the agenda of the authorities. Nobody cared at all at the time.⁶⁵

It is this active denial of a future that led most of those who suffered mutilations during the rebellion to use their scars to project themselves into the future and to imagine what could happen. The question now was to know how this imagined future, terrifying and full of fears and uncertainties, would come to fruition. A careful examination of the fragments of testimonies given by the injured people and their acquaintances shows that they could not attach a specific date to what they were fearing would happen in the future.⁶⁶ All of them, nevertheless, seemed to be certain that this terrifying future would come.

63 Interview with Eugène Kitoto, 7 Aug. 2015.

64 Interview with Adolphe Kuma Kuma.

65 Interview with Adolphe Kuma Kuma.

66 This is not to say that this kind of imagined future did not come to pass.

Niepela's testimony is clear in this regard. 'As a parent', she said, 'I could not wish anything bad for my child. But [my consciousness] would not stop reminding me that, one day, this thing would eventually end up [making its appearance].'⁶⁷ As a result, the entire life, or the rest of life, was reduced to waiting for this terrifying future, this 'yet-to-come', to come into fruition.⁶⁸

But how many presents needed to pass before this terrifying future would make its appearance? How long should one remain, to use Jacques Derrida's vocabulary, 'between what goes and what comes, in the middle of what leaves and what arrives' for this imagined future would make its intrusion? A focus on the fragments of testimonies of those onto whom this terrifying future had been projected since 1965 allows a better understanding of the realization of this 'yet-to-come'.⁶⁹

All started in 1968. ... I must have been five or six years old at the time. ... It was the first time that I came to realize that I was abnormal. ... I was playing with my friends. I was observing them. I could see that each of them had two arms while me, I only had one. It was painful for me to discover this truth. I began to feel ashamed ... My friends began to make fun of me. They would single me out: 'Oh, look at him. He has only one arm!' It was a big shock to me. ... Over the years, things got complicated ... I was sad all the time, even though sometimes I would pretend that everything was okay. ... In 1975, when I went back to the village for the first time since 1965, it was even worse. ... People gathered around me. They wanted to see me, the child whose arm was taken away by the *militaires* during the rebellion. It was not easy for me because such attention caused emotion and pain in me. ... But it was at the age of 18 that I really felt the weight of my suffering. ... I came to realize that I was no longer this child who used to think that life was normal and that his parents would still be doing everything for him. I came to realize that I was becoming an adult and that I had to take care of myself. ... But when I turned to look at myself, all I could see was my deformity. And that made me feel terrible. ... I was so scared of my own future. I was asking myself: 'What will the future hold for me, I who have this deformity?' I could not stop asking myself this question. This is what I was fearing most of the time. ... And the more the years went by, the more my fears intensified. I was so scared to face [this] future because of my disability.⁷⁰

These testimonies identify the key moments in the chain in which the terrifying future projected in 1965 began to materialize. In the case of Alidor Muliongo (son of Angelique Niepela), for example, there are two key moments at either end of the continuum: five years and eighteen years of age. Each of these ends is dominated by the awareness of his physical condition. What was the future in 1965 became, as time passed, the *present* and then the *present past* or *past present*.⁷¹ The fragments of testimonies of the child lead to another reality: fear of his own future. His testimonies suggest that, as a state of mind, this fear gradually increased as he approached this 'new' future, the one that he posed, as his mother did long ago, as the 'yet-to-come' or that which 'comes towards

67 Interview with Angelique Niepela.

68 J.-P. Martinon, *On Futurity: Malabou, Nancy and Derrida* (New York, 2007), 1.

69 J. Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. P. Kamuf (New York, 1994), 29.

70 Interview with Alidor Muliongo, Kinshasa, 3 Aug. 2015.

71 J. Derrida, 'A time for farewells: Heidegger (read by) Hegel (read by) Malabou', preface to C. Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectics*, trans. L. During (New York, 2004), xix. See also R. Koselleck, *Future Past: On the Semantics of the Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York, 2004).

us'.⁷² He relied upon his present situation, as he went beyond perception and what could, to use Derrida's vocabulary once again, 'present itself in the present tense of sight'.⁷³

In this dreading, or 'bringing-close' 'close-by' of fearing, the self-reflective mind could not have other alternatives than to rely on his emotional states, and develop, at the same time, a variety of moods.

It was not easy at all. ... Fearing my own future had brought a lot of trouble in my life. I would get angry easily. If I was not sad, I would become shy. ... I began to isolate myself from the people around me because of shame. ... I could not stop looking at myself. ... My own life became boring. ... Evil thoughts would abound in my mind, you have no idea! ... I would foresee situations where my friends would be working and getting money, while I could not do anything because of my deformities. ... Mentally, I was already limited. ... I could not spend a day without fearing my own future. ... I was so scared. ... I would imagine myself working with friends somewhere. I would imagine them being aware of my incapacity to work like them, but none of them would help me ... [or] say: 'Let us give him at least 1 per cent of our salary because his physical condition prevents him from working like us.' ... No one could give me anything because, physically, I was not in good shape; and that I did not work like them. ... These are the kinds of thoughts that were torturing me. ... I could see how I would already been dismissed from life whenever it came to work. ... This is [precisely] what was troubling [me] in my early twenties as a disabled person.⁷⁴

But the most difficult moment in this process of dreading is the impression of passivity created on the side of those who were socially involved with the wounded child. In Muliongo's own words, it seems as if the others were unwilling to take any responsibility of avoiding this 'terrifying' future that was anticipated since 1965. It seems as though the others operated, in Slavoj Žižek's phrase, as 'passive aggressive' people.⁷⁵ They did nothing and thus actively ensured that nothing really changed. In an informal discussion, an interviewee, who wished to remain anonymous, strongly objected to this view, and accused the injured themselves of irresolution, passivity, laziness, and weakness:

It is amazing to see how these people [the injured people] remained entirely passive. ... Normally, when I have anticipated my own future, and I have discovered that this future I have projected onto myself is not promising, I cannot just cross my arms and be relaxed about time. ... I must do something. ... I must think about the ways in which I can overturn this future that seems too unpromising. ... I cannot take pleasure in withdrawing myself from the battle, sit down and watch how I am going to fail. ... I must do something. ... I am greatly surprised that they remained passive when they knew that the predictions regarding their future were not promising.⁷⁶

This way of thinking, based essentially on a lack of consideration, is evidence of the kinds of encounters that the injured people continued to have on a daily basis.⁷⁷ The others, by

72 Martinon, *On Futurity*, 1.

73 Derrida, 'A time for farewells', xxii. On this emotional state, or this way of anticipating something detrimental, see M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (London, 1962), 179–80.

74 Interview with Alidor Muliongo, Kinshasa, 3 Aug. 2015.

75 S. Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, 2006), 341.

76 Informal discussion with an anonymous interviewee, Kinshasa, 14 Dec. 2015.

77 On the recurrent absence of sympathy and literature that examines the deeper history of communities' treatment of the disabled or disfigured, see J. Livingston, 'Disgust, bodily aesthetics and the ethics of being

reading passivity, irresolution, and laziness into the actions of the injured people, ignored, to a large extent, the efforts made by the injured to counteract this terrifying ‘yet-to-come’.⁷⁸ Muliongo’s parents, for example, worked laboriously to give him a better future. They sent him to school at a very young age in the understanding of the time that it was the best means of gaining social mobility.⁷⁹ Muliongo completed his studies in the early 1980s.⁸⁰ Unfortunately, when he began to search for work it coincided with a crisis of unemployment in wider Zairian society. By 1980, the country was experiencing the consequences of an economic breakdown that had begun in the early 1970s.⁸¹ To avert the crisis, many individuals branched out into the more informal economy.⁸² Similar to most of the young people of his generation, Muliongo felt compelled to participate in these informal activities. Yet it is exactly in this informal economy that all his thoughts and fears found their expression. In a long testimony, he provided an overview of his life trajectory and how, in his quest for constructing a meaningful and active life, he became involved in informal activities.⁸³

After leaving school in 1983, I embarked myself in the *libanga* [informal economy]. ... In 1985, I was going to buy goods in Brazzaville and sell them here in Kinshasa. ... Quickly, I stopped with it because we were treated like animals on the Brazzaville side. There was no respect for human rights. ... In the mid-1990s, ... my friends convinced me to join them in seeking diamonds at the Congolese-Angolan border. The deal was made. I went with them. ... In any case, I did not gain anything. I came back empty handed. ... It was a bad experience. I would even say an ordeal. I could not work like everyone else because I was limited. ... The diamonds having become rare, I had to dive into the river to get them.⁸⁴ With one arm, how could I swim? ... It was very hard for me. I felt useless and unproductive. ... Life became so difficult to the extent that I could not even afford to buy bread. ... Nobody would give me anything as I could not work like the others. ... I felt somehow like I was harvesting the fruit of my deformity.⁸⁵

He continued:

In June 2015 I was returning from Kenge. ... I had some merchandise. ... I took a large vehicle. When we reached Bukanga Lonzo, the vehicle was about to fall down a cliff. ... All passengers and the crew jumped off, except me. ... With only one arm, I could not grab hold of the crossbeams of the vehicle and jump like them. As a result, I went down together with the vehicle. My left foot was

human in Botswana’, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 78:2 (2008), 288–307; J. Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge, 1987).

78 Martinon, *On Futurity*, 1.

79 Today, with the increasing number of unemployed academics, the school increasingly loses its symbolic value of social mobility. See N. Obotela Rachidi, ‘L’université face à une jeunesse en quête de modèle’, in I. Ndaywel è Nziem (ed.), *L’université dans le devenir de l’Afrique: un demi-siècle de présence au Congo-Zaïre* (Paris, 2007), 253–61.

80 Interview with Alidor Muliongo, 3 Aug. 2015.

81 Ndaywel, *Histoire*, 727–44.

82 *Ibid.* 745–50.

83 On the entrepreneurial use of handicaps by marked bodies, see D. Hoffman, *The War Machines: Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (Durham, 2011), 162–93.

84 On the issue of diamonds, see F. de Boeck, ‘Postcolonialism, power, and identity: local and global perspectives from Zaire’, in R. Werbner and T. Ranger (eds.), *Postcolonial Identity in Africa* (London, 1996), 75–106.

85 Interview with Alidor Muliongo, 3 Aug. 2015.

seriously injured. The heel was torn. . . . The bone came out. It protruded from the foot. Everybody could see it.⁸⁶

The nurses at Kenge Hospital did not suture my wound well. There was no difference between a beast and me.⁸⁷

It was painful. If I had both my arms, I would have jumped from the car as the others did. . . . Now that I am talking to you, I am no longer walking. To get out of the house, I have to crawl like a baby. . . . I am lost. What should I expect again from life? . . . First of all, I have one shortened arm; now that they are going to cut my leg off, what am I going to become? . . . I am already unproductive with one arm. With this . . . additional blow, it is clear that I am completely downgraded in life. What should I expect again from life now that I am 53 years old?⁸⁸

Here are fifty years of a life trajectory, essentially dominated by an explosion of metaphysics of anguish, sorrow, and suffering, and the end of which – this is the arresting of time – Muliongo, the marked body, no longer expected anything, neither from time, nor from existence in general. Even the future, which, not long ago had made him tremble with fear, was no longer important. It was replaced with a lack of expectations. Time, as we can see, ‘has gone farther away, leaving behind only a field of ruins, an immense weariness’, and ‘an infinite distress’.⁸⁹ At the heart of this distress, the injured body can only discover the senselessness of the life he has spent on earth: ‘I have wasted my life for nothing. What have I earned from all of this? Oh, life is unfair! It has no mercy at all.’⁹⁰ If not nullity, it is a combination of disgust, pain, and sorrow.⁹¹ This relates to the kind of suffering that Ernest Kiangu referred to as ‘supreme suffering’ when he said: ‘One feels like a wreck that was used and that has been subsequently cast, because it does not have any value.’⁹² And, as a result, the injured body feels completely lost, and, at the same time, disconnected from the world, as Muliongo, himself, went on saying:

Even in my family people usually do not need me because they know that I am worthless. When there are family gatherings, no one invites me. They know that I will not bring any money or any contribution to their reunion. . . . I am the king of rejection. . . . On more than one occasion I overheard my own family members saying: ‘Ah, what is it that Alidor is going to do again in his life?’ Even my own nephews, they often repeat that: ‘It is over for him. He will no longer do anything in life.’ . . . You see! Now, do you think there is anything else I can do to change their minds? What can I tell them to convince them, I who has already been downgraded in life? . . . I am useless. [All of this is happening] because of this arm.⁹³

Confronted with the proliferation and continuity of this ‘metaphysics of sorrow’, the marked body cannot do better than immerse itself into negativity and produce a critique of time – and the future more specifically:

86 Interview with Alidor Muliongo, 3 Aug. 2015.

87 Interview with Alidor Muliongo, Kinshasa, 19 Dec. 2015.

88 Interview with Alidor Muliongo, 3 Aug. 2015.

89 Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 199.

90 Interview with Alidor Muliongo, 19 Dec. 2015.

91 Interview with Alidor Muliongo, 3 Aug. 2015.

92 Interview with Ernest Kiangu.

93 Interview with Alidor Muliongo, 3 Aug. 2015.

With all of these [pains and sufferings], why should I continue to believe in the future? I am 53 years old now. I will be 54 years old next year. I am not married.

I do not have a wife. I do not even have a girlfriend. Ladies do not like me. Even when I approach them for a simple friendship, they run away because of my arm.

I do not have children. Why should I continue to believe in the future? My friends with whom I grew up are all married. They have children. . . . Tomorrow, it is these children who will be helping them. For my friends, there is at least a hope for the future. . . . The future means something for them. For me, however, it is nothing at all. . . . Why should I continue to think about the future? Have I ever gained anything from this future for me to continue to believe in it? . . . My life is a mess. I have failed everything. I do not even have an offspring because of my deformities. Why should I again believe in the future? It is over.⁹⁴

To compensate for this lack of interest in the future, the marked body turns back to the past and lives in a mode of repetition. But in this movement to the past, he no longer sees ‘the connected and sequential chain of events’ he, as a ‘forward-looking’ person, used to conceive of as a future possibility.⁹⁵ All he can now see is one catastrophe; the thing that made part of his body, in this case the arm, prematurely lifeless; a material thing that brought an untimely experience of death, as well as an incomplete sense of time.

I was a child at the time. I must have been two or three years old. . . . I do not even know why the rebellion broke out. . . . I never asked anybody because it is out of my interest. . . . When I am deeply in my thoughts, all I can see from this past is only my wound. The rebellion has brought a lot of pain in my life; that is all I can see. . . . When it comes to the rebellion itself, it is not in my interest. I do not even know why Mulele [took arms] and started the rebellion. . . . All I know is that I got injured from his rebellion. And this has brought a lot of trouble in my life.⁹⁶

This is the life of scars, a life that consists of navigating backwards and forwards in time, only to find oneself at the heart of disappointment, disinterest, nullity, and inutility.

CONCLUSION

This article deals with scars, their signifying capacity, their relationship not only with the body but also with the apprehension of time, the arresting of time, and the annihilation of future time that the scars seem to both symbolise and put into effect by making the body useless, undesirable, even revolting to others. The main argument is that the scars that people bear on their bodies can produce or reproduce suffering in the *longue durée*, as long as those who bear them live. To be tortured during the Mulele rebellion in the 1960s was unimaginably terrible. But the suffering did not stop there. There was something beyond that, something even more important that caused a kind of psychic suffering, which not only exceeded the physical, but also extended across time. This happened first and foremost when the self encountered its image, a deformed image, an image it could not recognize, a representation, which, to a large extent, was also a monstrous version of itself.

94 Interview with Alidor Muliongo, 3 Aug. 2015.

95 I am drawing here on Walter Benjamin’s conception of history. See D. C. Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality* (Cambridge, 2009), 154.

96 Interview with Alidor Muliongo, 3 Aug. 2015.

Looking at one's deformed image – and self conceptions in the face of the violence of truth brought into actuality by the same image – became an act of self-torture in itself.

Second, it happened at the moment in which the subjects were confronted by the 'nervous state' as the marks, 'the emblems of subjectivation' imprinted on their bodies, linked them to politics and rendered them vulnerable to further abuse by the same state.⁹⁷ Third, it made its apparition at the termination of seeing one's life continuously failing. It finally occurred when the injured people engaged in social relations with others. In this sense, the scars that people bear on their bodies register and condense a sense of hurt in the course of time. They bristle at the unethical treatment that the injured people receive from others and by the indifferent or cruel regard in which those who ought to exercise greater moral responsibility towards them hold. This only shows the extent to which the people whose bodies were disfigured during the rebellion are continuously being objectified by the gaze of others, the very same people that are supposed to help them reconcile their bodies with themselves. Because this process of reconciling with one's body never takes place, it is not possible to expect marked bodies to live in peace. Instead one only finds frustration, desolation, and lack of interest in time and existence more broadly.

⁹⁷ I borrow the concepts of 'nervous state' and 'emblems of subjectivation' respectively from N. R. Hunt, *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo* (Durham, NC, 2016) and J.-F. Bayart, 'Total subjectivation', in J.-P. Warnier and J.-F. Bayart (eds.), *Matière*, 217.