

Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres

Genealogies of a Miner's Literature

The Political in Sinzo Aanza's *Généalogie d'une banalité*

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Introduction

“Don Quixote is the best book out there on political theory, followed by Hamlet and Macbeth. There is no better way to understand the tragedy and the comedy of the Mexican political system than Hamlet, Macbeth and Don Quixote. They're much better than any column of political analysis.”

— *Corte de caja, entrevista con el subcomandante Marcos* - Laura Castellanos

Literature might be the most invaluable human invention. It is a wonderful source of entertainment that makes its reader travel from tears to laughs. It also embarks its reader in journeys through time, space and emotions. Literature holds a mirror to the soul of its reader and can reveal its depth, its light and its darkness. The present dissertation will focus on yet another capacity of literature: its ability to reflect upon political matters. *Don Quixote*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* are not just about Don Quixote, Macbeth and Hamlet, they are about the societies in which these characters live. These three books have an undeniable political dimension. Literature and politics are not usually conceived as going together. Yet, book burnings and censorship, which often go hand in hand with authoritarian regimes, prove that the political world has since long understood the subversive potential of literature. Since then, authors like Sartre and Camus, with their “littérature engagée” have demonstrated the role that writers can play on the political scene. Literature also had a key role to play in the postcolonial context for as Elleke Boehmer explains in *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*: “writing is an integral part of self-definition” (229).

As the citation above explains, some books can be fantastic tools to decode our present political world, *Généalogie d'une banalité* is one of them. It is the first novel of the young Congolese author Sinzo Aanza and it was published in 2015 by Vents d'ailleurs. “There is something rotten in the State of Denmark” is one of the most emblematic quotes of *Hamlet*. Replace “Denmark”

by “Democratic Republic of the Congo” (DRC) and you have the one line summary of *Généalogie d’une banalité*. Aanza’s novel points to the problematic past and the problematic present of the DRC. Few literary texts have revealed so well the lasting consequences of colonialism, neo-colonialism, dictatorships and wars on the Congolese population. These themes are of crucial importance considering how Belgium still fails to address its colonial past and the consequences that it still has on the Congo.

Généalogie d’une banalité, is an unusual book for many reasons. The most striking one may be that the story is embedded inside a radio program that functions as a grotesque parody of the Congolese official speech. This radio show anchors the novel in orality. The radio’s voice interrupts, censors and mocks four voices that rise from a forlorn Lubumbashi slum, the Bronx. These four narrators, plus the radio, “font la généalogie d’une actualité malheureuse” (10) ¹, that is, of an artisanal mining accident that took place in the Bronx. The narrators tell a web of intertwined stories about the Bronx, Lubumbashi, the past and the present. The novel is an enchanting cacophony of voices and stories that slowly unearth a maze of causes that led to the mining accident, as Elara Bertho explains in her article about Aanza’s novel. *Généalogie d’une banalité* immerses its readers into a neighbourhood where prostitutes are streets, where rail workers do not work with trains, where teachers are cursed poets, where street kids illuminate the slum, where a siren hides inside the tunnels of a mine and where a community decides to take its fate into its own hands. It is also a place where a prostitute discusses the long lasting damage that the missionaries made on her culture, where old men talk about the Congo’s role in the second world war, where a school teacher tries to make up for the State’s shortcomings. *Généalogie d’une banalité* is a novel where the political keeps erupting inside the story and manifesting itself in every possible way.

Aanza’s writing could not be anything else than political considering the context in which he started to write. Sinzo Aanza was born in 1990 and he grew up in a popular neighbourhood of Goma, a city in Kivu, a province in the East of the DRC that is scarred by constant wars over minerals. In an interview conducted by Céline Gahungu for *Continent Manuscrits*, Aanza explains how his first writings were eulogies for people who died because of the insecurity and the wars that tore up his region. At quite a young age, he found himself writing eulogy after eulogy. In this context of extreme violence, Aanza states that each eulogy that he wrote “c’est

¹ For the purpose of clarity and readability, all the citations from Sinzo Aanza’s *Généalogie d’une banalité* will be followed only by their page number between brackets.

sur tous les autres morts que portaient mes textes, ceux que j'avais vus mourir, ceux que j'avais vus morts, ceux dont on m'avait rapporté la mort et puis nous-mêmes dont la mort était tout le temps si proche, si présente, si évidente". Death, insecurity and war is what led Aanza to write in the first place. Therefore, it is hard to imagine that his writing could be anything else than a political statement, than a rebellion against the system that provoked the death of so many people around him. Sinzo Aanza also expresses his thoughts about power relationships and the political situation of the Congo through plastic art.

The aim of the present dissertation is to unearth the ways in which the political pervades *Généalogie d'une banalité*. To achieve this, chapter 1 will start by providing a summary of the novel that will outline how the plot is intricately linked with the setting of the story. Aanza sets his novel in Katanga, in the city of Lubumbashi, whose entire history revolves around mining. Lubumbashi's fate is tightly linked to that of a company, the Gécamines, whose rise and fall reveal the essence of two eras: colonialism and Mobutu's dictatorship. The story that Aanza tells in his book is very much a critical comment upon Lubumbashi's history and its current situation. Chapter 2 addresses how, in *Généalogie d'une banalité*, the theme of exploitation is portrayed as a case of (neo-)colonial mimicry, whereby some characters reproduce the exploitative behaviours and the extractivism that is at play around them since colonisation. Indeed, "plunder" has been the watchword of Congolese history for decades. Chapter 2 also examines how exploitation is pervasive inside of metaphors, and more particularly, inside the metaphor that connects the female body to the land. In *Généalogie d'une banalité*, both the land and female bodies are exploited and this is encoded in the language that the Bronx's inhabitants use to talk about them. Chapter 3 analyses the hidden violence that Aanza brings to light in *Généalogie d'une banalité*. Slow violence, as defined by Rob Nixon, is a type of violence that unfolds slowly, across a long period of time. As a consequence, it is often not perceived as violence at all. Aanza makes this violence visible by constantly pointing to the consequences of slow violence and to its origins, which often date back to the colonial era.

Chapter 4 focuses on a stylistic feature of Aanza's novel: the grotesque. It examines different interpretations of the grotesque and uses them to decode how Aanza uses it and what political implications it has in *Généalogie d'une banalité*. Indeed, Aanza's grotesque can be read as a reaction to the tragic and absurd political situation of the Congo. The grotesque is what makes the book both extremely sad and dreadful yet very amusing. Chapter 5 studies the radio show, which Aanza uses to make the novel polyphonic and to anchor it into orality. Chapter 5 also argues that the radio show is a parody that reveals all the incongruities of the Congolese official

speech. The radio show reveals the subversive potential of the Bronx's story that threatens the authority and the legitimacy of the State. Chapter 5 posits that the relationship between the radio show and the narration of the Bronx's story is a textual show of force. Starting with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of minor literature, Chapter 6 discusses how this notion can be used to have a better understanding of what *Généalogie d'une banalité* aims to do. It also reflects on the fact that Aanza's novel is both a minor literature and a miner's literature that gives a voice to some of most destitute people of the planet.

In the present dissertation I will try to bring to lights the ways in which the political situation of the Congo is reflected in *Généalogie d'une banalité*. My analysis is restricted by my limited understanding of the DRC. The perspective of this study cannot help but being European, which may have an influence on my findings. In light of my readings, I will try to respond to the following questions, among others. How does Sinzo Aanza use lexis, style and structure to convey political statements? What does the novel say about relations of power and official speech in the Congo? What is the political context and the history that make the absurdity of the Bronx mining project and of Aanza's writing understandable?

Chapter 1

An A-maze-ing Story Underneath the Ruins of the Gécamines

Généalogie d'une Banalité is the first novel of the Congolese author Sinzo Aanza. It was published by Vent d'ailleurs in 2015. Sinzo Aanza was born in Goma in 1990. He is a photographer and contemporary artist as well as a writer. More than anything else, *Généalogie d'une Banalité* is the story of a community, of the inhabitants of a Lubumbashi slum called the Bronx. This slum has a particularity: it is located in the former cordon sanitaire, i.e. the space that separated the white neighbourhoods from the *cité indigène* where the black people lived during the colonial period. Thus, the Bronx was built on the remains of colonialism, in a space that had been left blank. It is a place where people from all over the DRC live and where a lot of languages coexist. According to one of the main characters, Kafka, the Bronx feels like a train station, filled with people coming and going (26). It is a noisy place, where houses, or rather, the “bicoques” (35), as they are called in the Bronx, are made of waste that lets the neighbours' conversations through.

Lubumbashi is situated in the province of Katanga, a region of the RDC that is very rich in minerals. In fact, Lubumbashi's story is intrinsically linked to mining and to a mining company: the Gécamines, previously known as the Union Minière du Haut Katanga (UMHK). As Rubbers explains in *Le paternalisme en question. Les anicens ouvriers de la Gécamines face à la libéralisation du secteur minier katangais*, the Gécamines brought prosperity to the region from the 1920s to the end of the 1970s. But it has, since then, undergone an unprecedented decline that has taken a heavy toll on Katanga's population. This decline was partly due to moments of

instability in the copper or cobalt market but the main reason for its downfall was the constant intrusion of the Congolese state into the company's finances. In 1981, for example, the prime minister stated that Mobutu had sold 20 000 tons of copper produced by the Gécamines for his own personal profit (Rubbers *Le paternalisme* 45). During this period, production plummeted from 476 000 tons of copper in 1987 to 10 000 tons in 2000, almost 50 times less (Rubbers *Le paternalisme* 49). Consequently, a lot of workers lost their jobs while the remaining employees endured long periods without being paid. After years of decline, the World Bank tried to rehabilitate the Gécamines by bringing in foreign investors and privatizing the mines. Moreover, it tried to impose transparency and free it from corruption and government interference. Unfortunately, the World Bank failed to accomplish this last, decisive task. In the 2000s the Congolese mines, like the rest of the African mining industry, entered an era in which foreign companies took on an increasingly important role, as Rubbers explains in his article "Les sociétés africaines face aux investissements miniers" (6). As a result, the Congolese mines are now largely in the hands of foreign investors but they are not clear of corruption and fraud. The mines now profit foreign investors and national leaders and not the people (Rubbers *Les sociétés* 7). In the end, they do not provide work for the local population nor do they really contribute to the national economy and to the State's finances. (Rubbers *Les sociétés* 7).

In the precarious situation of the 1990s, a number of unemployed miners began to exploit the mines themselves. These artisanal miners are called *creuseurs*. In 1998, the government legally allowed the *creuseurs* to mine a few specified ore deposits. Today, it is estimated that there are tens or even hundreds of thousands of artisanal miners in Katanga (Rubbers *Le paternalisme* 83). The issue of artisanal mining is at the core of *Généalogie d'une Banalité*. But the book presents a particular case of artisanal mining in which the miners do not dig in proper mines but underneath their own houses. It may seem unfathomable or far-fetched but it has, in fact, happened in a neighbourhood of Kolwezi, another mining city in Katanga. Thus, the absurdity of the plot only reflects the absurdity of the Congolese political and economic situation that allows for such a thing to happen. In an article published by the *New York Times* in January entitled "This is our land", Michael Kavanagh, a journalist awarded for his work about the DRC, explains that in 2014 a police officer found cobalt while digging for a latrine in his yard. This policeman thus decided to start digging in his yard and under his house. After a few days, some neighbours started to do the same. The journalist explains that when he visited this neighbourhood a year later there were so many holes that it looked as if it had been bombed. Almost nothing was left from the quiet working-class neighbourhood it once was. In February

2015, the shaft of the mine collapsed causing the death of many artisanal miners. It is believed that between 2014 and 2016 approximately 250 miners lost their lives in the mine. In 2017 the government made a deal with a Chinese company to move the neighbourhood's remaining houses in order to properly exploit the mine (Kavanagh).

In his article "This is our land", Kavanagh explains how such madness is possible. The DRC possesses half the world's known reserves of cobalt and has a steady economic growth, its population, however, has one of the lowest income per capita in the world. Kolwezi is surrounded by mines but Kavanagh reports that due to corruption they are not profitable to the population. In fact, two mining projects not far from the neighbourhood are at a standstill. Kavanagh explains that the first project has a \$9 billion debt which is why it cannot employ anyone. It is run by Katanga Mining, a company that is owned by the multinational Glencore. The former recently paid a \$21 million settlement because it had failed to provide information material to the business such as the corruption risk in the DRC. Kavanagh reports that the second project's standstill is due to its contentious ownership change. It is being bought by Eurasian Resource Group to Dan Gertler, an Israeli businessman known to have gained hundreds of millions of dollars in corrupt deals in the DRC. The transaction is now being investigated by the British government for fraud, bribery and corruption (Kavanagh). Kavanagh's reading of the events is particularly enlightening because it gives explanations that are absent from *Généalogie d'une banalité*. Indeed, Aanza's novel tells the story of how the Bronx's population started digging under their houses on a sudden impulse hoping to find copper. Kavanagh's article shows that the book was inspired by real events. Unlike the article, the book does not directly discuss the corporate and governmental dealings that lead to the situation in which the characters live. The focus of the book is at the level of the Bronx's inhabitants not in the high spheres of the international political and economic elites. In fact, a substantial part of the book is narrated by the inhabitants themselves.

However, the book establishes a connection between the story and the wider national context thanks to a frame narrative that has the form of a radio program. The story is thus a *mise en abyme* inside a frame narrative that has the particularity of being the transcript of the radio show. A radio speaker reads the story of the Bronx's mine exploitation while a radio host repeatedly interrupts the narration in order to comment on the story. Thanks to that, the reader cannot forget about the political context of the story. But the radio is even more intrusive than that. In fact, it does not hesitate to censor some part of the story that it deems unsuitable,

dangerous or offensive to the State. In these intrusions in the story Aanza, most often than not, mocks the radio by making its comments sound ridiculous:

Notre Beauté Nationale Da Vinci Code n'a pas pu lire quelques phrases pour cause d'hyperbole calomnieuse. Le chef de l'Etat, le raïs charismatique, l'homme de son temps, a été honorablement élu. Aucun bureau de vote n'a jamais affiché un score au-delà de cent pour cent. (177)

This extract is particularly laughable because it defeats its purpose. The part of the text about the election was, as mentioned in the extract, omitted on the radio. Therefore, the listener has not heard anything about electoral fraud. Thus, by making this comment, the host brings the issue to light, which is exactly what the censorship was supposed to avoid. Moreover, his justification is risible, everybody knows that in a democracy it is realistically not possible to obtain 100% of the votes. The radio's comments are often pointless, stupid or irrelevant, which is Aanza's way of mocking the Congolese official speech. As this extract probably gave away, the radio broadcasting the program is the national one, which contextualizes the narration into a political environment.

In addition to re-contextualising the story, the radio show has interesting implications in terms of temporality. The narration shares a lot of characteristics with Fiston Mwanja Mujila's *Tram 83*, a novel about a writer struggling to write in fictional Congolese city. Among these characteristics is its depiction of time. In his study of *Tram 83*, Pedro Monaville, explain that the characters of the novel live in a state of permanent crisis that is "vécue comme un état permanent, présent continu" in which the future seems out of reach and the past irrelevant (218). This perpetual present seems to be the time of *Généalogie d'une banalité*'s narration which contains very few temporal references. In fact, the reader is kept in the dark when it comes to the temporality of the events. By contrast, at the level of the radio program, time is everywhere. The radio host is very proud to announce that their program will last the entire day and that it makes it the longest radio program in history. This notion of breaking a record means that the present is considered by opposition to the past and therefore that notions of past, present and future are relevant. Moreover, the host often interrupts the narration and comment on what is happening in the country in real time. Thus the radio program does not only contextualise the story but it also inserts it into a Western conception of time.

The radio program, like the narration, contains various voices. Indeed, the radio host often reads the interventions of politicians, ministers or pastors. Thus the host ties together a number of voices arising out of nowhere to contribute, often in ridiculous way, to the program. Their

interventions can generally be read as a defense against the subversive potential of the Bronx's story. To their eyes, the Bronx's inhabitants are dangerous "inciviles". The intensity with which the radio program responds to the story is exaggerated and mocked. Moreover, it points out that the government seems more busy responding to the contentious narrative than actually working for the country. However, the radio program is not only a web of voices, but it is also a web of intertextualities. The host's comments often refer to songs, important people or famous books. These citations create an intertextual discourse that enriches the book. The radio sometimes misinterprets what it quotes, for example, the host cites Lumumba's speech which he considers to be the "discours intemporel de notre héros national" (14). The irony here is plain to see: Lumumba stood for democracy, independence from foreign interference, and making Congolese people profit from the country's resources whereas the government that the radio host represents is dictatorial and lets other countries help themselves to the nation's resources. Therefore, the comical dimension of the radio program seems to mock the absurdity of the official speech in the DRC.

The polyphony of the radio program is also reproduced in the narration where four narrators tell their account of a mining project, which is the book's underlying theme. This project starts when Kafka, a school teacher as well as a respected figure in the Bronx, hears his neighbours fighting about a banana peel. Kafka tells the two quarrellers that they are stupid to fight over such a worthless thing when there is a fortune of copper waiting under their feet. After this incident, Kafka and some of the neighbours begin to dig under their houses. Soon all the neighbours join them and digging becomes part of the everyday life of the Bronx:

Creuser, c'est comme piler les feuilles de manioc; c'est comme se lever le matin et se brosser les dents avant d'aller en ville, comme on dit. Ça fait partie des choses qu'on fait naturellement ou qui sont devenues naturelles avec la généralisation de la débrouille... Creuser c'est jouer au loto. Tout le monde n'est pas censé obtenir le jackpot, mais les gens continuent d'aller taper dans le sol, parce que certains veinards y ont rencontré la vie après plusieurs coups de bêche. (33)

The Bronx inhabitants are forced to use "la débrouille" to put food on the table. This "débrouille" consists mainly in digging, which has become almost like a reflex although digging underneath one's house has no sense. Next to the neighbours, a group of street kids also take part in the digging. The group's leader, Pako, is an industrious young man who controls the Bronx's electric system. He and his band are the ones who find copper in the mine, at least that is what the neighbours believe. In reality, they stole the copper from electric cables

and pretended it came from the mine. The neighbours should have known that Pako finding copper was too good to be true but they chose to believe it, like a lotto player chooses to think that playing is not a waste of money. Thus they continued to dig until, one day, the mine collapsed. The accident happened precisely at the moment when Kafka's pupils were reciting a poem for the mine workers. A lot of them were swallowed by the mine and trapped in the collapsed galleries.

Through four narrators and five or six main characters, the reader discovers not only a mine but a neighbourhood with a life of its own. The tragedy that digging provokes is at the core of the book, but around it are the lives of the people of the Bronx. The reader meets colourful, endearing characters with very different lives. Kafka is an idealist schoolteacher who wants the children of the Bronx to appreciate art. Kafka "voulait leur rendre le musée et les expositions d'art contemporain aussi familiers que leurs faims et leurs désirs du confort (17)". He is one of the most respected and influential men in the Bronx that is why people listen to him when he says that there is copper under their feet. He hopes that the money he will earn in mining will steer his two children away from material vanities. Kafka's two children, Séraphin and Belladone, are fully grown already and they manage to earn their own money in the streets. Séraphin finds all sorts of odd jobs and small businesses while Belladone is a prostitute as well as the neighbourhood pharmacist. Another important character is their next-door neighbour, the Cheminot. He is the first man to dig with Kafka and he hopes that doing so will help him provide for his two wives and kids which, would confirm him as head of the family. His first wife, Clothilde has difficulties conceiving a child, which puts her in a very difficult position and creates tensions in the house. Fortunately, she is a force of nature and she does not let that take her down. Through the daily lives of these characters, the book portrays the life of the Bronx. It shows the reality of those that were cheated by globalisation and modernity. It gives them a voice, as the story is narrated partly by the characters themselves. Three characters are also narrators: Maureen, Belladone and the Cheminot. In addition to these, there is a fourth narrator called *l'auteur inconnu* which is a mysterious omniscient figure.

Maureen Vanderstraeten narrates the first three chapters of the book in which she sets the scene for the story. She is the daughter of Belgian colonials and she seems a bit lost in her decolonised city. She had to struggle to adjust to all the changes that the decolonisation brought. Nevertheless, she remains in a position considerably more comfortable than the other characters. Thus, the first depiction that the reader encounters of Lubumbashi is made from the point of view of a white lady that has never lacked anything. Maureen presents the Bronx with

contempt and even disgust. She explains how, after independence, “une horde d’ancien SDF, de campagnards en exode rural, de malfrats en fuite, et [...] toutes sortes de rats d’égouts” (31) started living in the former cordon sanitaire and turned it into the slum it is today. Maureen also introduces Kafka. She explains that he is a school teacher from the Bronx who tries to create a passion for the arts in his pupils. From her judgemental eyes, he is a naïve idealist. She also describes how important he is in the Bronx, as a pillar of the community. Maureen is condescending towards Kafka and the Bronx in general but when Kafka comes to see her to ask her to lend him money to fund his artisanal mining project she accepts. She is a landscape architect, she loves gardening. It is interesting because, in many ways, gardening and mining are drastically opposed. Gardening means giving seeds to the earth and making the plants grow. It involves a movement upwards and the creation of something new, the garden. By contrast, mining signifies taking something from the earth in a movement downwards. Mining also changes the landscape but in a negative way. Maureen embodies the Western spirit and attitude towards the Bronx and mining. She looks down on it but she profits from it as Kafka will pay her back thrice the amount of money she invested.

After Maureen, the reader meets Belladone, another narrator. Unlike the former, Belladone lives in the heart of the story, the Bronx. She is a lively young woman that does not hesitate to say what she thinks. Her language can be quite graphic as she uses a lot of metaphors or idioms connected to the body and bodily fluids. Belladone has not had an easy start in life because she was abandoned. Fortunately, Kafka found her and raised her as his own daughter along with his biological son, Séraphin. But since the day when Kafka took her in, the inhabitants of the Bronx have been hostile to her. They think that she is a witch and stay clear of her. Therefore, Belladone is accustomed to being treated with disgust and distrust. Belladone does not know who her parents are, but it seems obvious that they were not both black. In fact, nobody seems to have a clear idea where they could come from to produce such a singular-looking child. However, her life changed when she became a woman. Belladone grew up to become a very beautiful young woman and she began to receive not only looks of disdain but also of lust and desire. Consequently, Belladone began to prostitute herself as well as working in the Bronx’s pharmacy.

The ambivalent attitudes towards Belladone are encapsulated in her name. *Atropa belladonna* is the Latin name of the deadly nightshade, a plant with beautiful flowers and very poisonous fruits. That is exactly how Belladone seems to be perceived, both beautiful and poisonous. She is:

Une petite fille qui passait pour l'enveloppe charnelle d'une odieuse malédiction. Les jours coulaient comme une rivière accidentée et l'enveloppe s'enjolivait. [...] Conscients qu'elle portait la malédiction en elle, les gens se mirent pourtant à la désirer, ils la possédaient à tour de rôle, ils s'échangeaient la malédiction de sa biologie que chacun aurait voulu, dans une ultime saute d'égoïsme, garder pour lui seul, le coffret était tellement beau qu'on en acceptait volontiers de mourir. (272 - 273)

However, Belladone does not seem to possess any poison or bad intention. By contrast, she seems filled with a destroying self-disgust that she has inherited from spending years listening to the toxic insults of her neighbours. In addition, "bella donna" means "beautiful woman" in Italian which also suits her well since she is strikingly attractive. This young woman full of life has a singular voice, that corresponds to her name and identity. It is beautifully poetic as well as chokingly coarse and direct. Belladone has a lucid voice because unlike some other characters she is a free spirit. She does not care what people think of her. In a way, her voice is bewitching because it captures the paradox that characterises her. For instance, she describes her sadness, and her loneliness as follows:

Depuis ma naissance, je suis en chute libre. Je ne sais pas vous décrire ça correctement. Il arrive que l'air me retienne un moment, je ne remonte pas pour autant, je reste un peu suspendue comme les sachets qu'on peut voir voler parfois au-dessus d'Élisabethville. Ensuite, je reprends ma descente fatale dans l'abîme où les poussées de ma mère m'avait propulsée, loin de sa biologie et loin de moi-même. Le drame avec les chutes libres, c'est qu'on ne peut pas s'y tenir compagnie, on ne peut pas s'y raconter des histoires, s'y reconforter toute seule ; on se voit tomber, c'est tout.

This extract is a good example of Belladone's writing and personality. The reality she describes is very sad, but the way she describes it is very beautiful. Her writing is like her, it has a mostly sad and brutal content but its appearance is bewitching. Her beauty is not the that of a queen but it is a beauty of streets, which is also reflected in her writing. The images she uses in the extract above make her description very poetical. However, they are not the images that are typically used in poetry; she compares herself to a thrown away plastic bag. Aanza makes Belladone's voice both sad and coarsely beautiful, which fits her personality. This extract also reveals how lonely she is. For her, falling does not seem to be the problem, it is falling alone that makes her so sad.

Belladone lives in Kafka's "bicoque" which was made from waste, like all the other houses in the Bronx. As a result, the neighbours can hear, smell or feel what happens in the houses next-

door. In fact, Belladone narrates a lot of scenes that she has not seen but has heard from her bedroom. She has a very informed and lucid point of view. As the daughter of Kafka and as the Bronx's only pharmacist she knows everything that is happening, yet the neighbours keep her away from their lives. Therefore, her vision is that of an outsider from inside the community. A paradoxical situation, but Belladone is full of paradoxes. Her unusual situation allows her to speak freely and critically about the Bronx. She is also an interesting source of information about Kafka, who is maybe the character that plays the most important role in the plot but he is not one of the narrators.

The third narrator is Belladone's next door neighbour, the Cheminot. As his name indicates, the Cheminot is a railroad worker. This means that he is a small piece of the copper industry, for the railroad in Katanga serves mainly to transport malachite, a green mineral containing copper. The Cheminot's identity seems reduced to his profession since that is how he is called. But in the book, he renounces his job and prefers to engage in the mining project. It is important to know, that in the current situation of the Congo, public servants' wages, such as railroads workers are more often than not left unpaid by the State. For this reason, and because he trusts Kafka's intellect blindly, the Cheminot was one of the first men to join Kafka in his project. Therefore, he refuses to be a pawn in the copper business by taking his fate into his own hands and trying not just to transport, but to find and sell copper himself. The Cheminot is a proud man. He gives a lot of importance to his role as head of the family. He has two wives, Chantale and Clothilde, who can be difficult to manage sometimes, and a lot of children. After an incident with the police, the Cheminot feels he has lost his dignity and his authority towards his family, hence he wants to recover it by earning a lot of money. That is what he hopes to do by working in the mine. It also gives him the opportunity to finally get some revenues from the copper that he usually transports out of the country without reward. The Cheminot gives a very masculine account of the story. This third narrator has another particularity. He makes a lot of mistakes when speaking French, which makes him both funny and sympathetic to the reader. His approximative use of French grammar never hinders the reader's comprehension but makes him unique in the sense that his language use is very different from the other narrators. It also attracts the reader's attention to the fact that French is not his mother tongue. In fact, in the Bronx, French seems to be nobody's mother tongue. It is a place where the inhabitants come from all over the Congo and where different languages cohabit.

As mentioned above, most of the book is not narrated by these three characters, but by "l'auteur inconnu". According to the radio program, the auteur inconnu is an inhabitant of the Bronx and

a dangerous sort of man. As a matter of fact, the host announces that he is being hunted by the police. Textually speaking, by contrast, the auteur inconnu is a third person narrator that has no identity. Therefore, he is a narrator that tells the story of others, unlike the three other narrators. Having four narrators narrating bits and pieces without an apparent logic make *Généalogie d'une banalité* seem like a chaotic maze, but in Aanza's text, the words seem to flow in a confused order, yet the story remains effortlessly understandable. The coherence of the text is maintained by two main factors. Firstly, as I explained when describing the narrators, they are each very different. As a result, their accounts of the story are complementary. Their relations to the facts are all different and therefore, they all bring unique information. This is true both of the character narrators and of the auteur inconnu. The latter brings an impersonal and unbiased point of view that would otherwise be missing. The first cohesion factor is the different point of views. The second one is thematic. Each of the three character narrators plays a key role in Kafka's mining project. Maureen is its investor. The Cheminot is its first digger. As for Belladone, she is an important part of why Kafka first launches the project. He wants to provide comfort to his children, Belladone and Séraphin. He has noticed that they want to enjoy their youth. He is hoping that if he gives them that opportunity they will realize the vanity of earthly pleasures and turn towards art instead. Each of these narrators reports on the role they played in the story and how it interconnected with their lives. The auteur inconnu tells all the other stories that revolve around the digging project and completes the stories of the three other narrators from an impersonal point of view.

In *Généalogie d'une banalité*, the main characters are from two different generations. Kafka, the Cheminot and Clothilde are from an older generation that knew a time when the Gécamines was not completely bankrupt, when a diploma was the promise of a job and a father could provide for his family. They lived in a time when modernity, which was symbolized by the Gécamines, brought jobs and even, for some, good living standards. As Rubbers explains in *Le paternalisme en question. Les ancêtres ouvriers de la Gécamines face à la libéralisation du secteur minier katangais*, the Gécamines, from 1920 until its decline, gave its employees the insurance of a regular income as well as providing them with lodging, food rations and free education for their children (23-27). The modernity embodied by the Gécamines was associated with a vision of the family where the father's authority depends on his ability to provide for his family (25). But in the 1990s this era was over, Belladone, Séraphin and Pako and his band have never known it. In their lives, women and children are generally the ones to contribute significantly to the family's budget, rather than the men (Jewsiewicki 16). As a matter of fact,

in the Cheminot's family it is his first wife, Clothilde, who seems to put food on the table by working in a nursing home, and in Kafka's house, Séraphin and Belladone both work in the streets. In the meantime, Kafka and the Cheminot are not receiving their salary from the State. Lubumbashi's golden age is long gone in *Généalogie d'une banalité*, and all that Belladone and Séraphin know of the Gécamines are its ruins.

The Congolese photographer Sammy Baloji took pictures of the Gécamines' infrastructure in 2005 (Figure 1). They show the empty industrial sites with grey run-down buildings contrasting with the bright blue sky and the Congolese sun. Bogumil Jewsiewicki, who dedicated his career to studying the cultural history and social memory of the Congo, looks at these pictures in relation with the generational gap explained above. In his article "Photographe de l'absence Sammy Baloji et les paysages industriels sinistrés de Lubumbashi", Bogumil Jewsiewicki explains that these pictures stage absence, the absence of workers, while at the same time, the buildings emphasise their ghostly presence (98). In this paradoxical cohabitation



Figure 1: Vues de l'usine de a Gécamines (Lubumbashi), 2005. CI. Sammy Baloji.

of presence and absence, Jewsiewicki sees of Sammy Baloji's generation's criticism of their fathers whom this generation accuses of having "eaten" modernity whose only remains are

these run-down buildings (98). The pictures show the ruin of the promise of modernity that was made to Kafka's generation and how Belladone and Sammy Baloji's generation pay the price of this failed attempt at modernity.

Sammy Baloji's pictures give an interesting visual account of the situation in which *Généalogie d'une banalité*'s characters live. From the Bronx, they see the slag heaps and the chimneys every day and they are reminded of the Gécamines' glorious past and of the modernity that has forgotten them. They are reminded that some people keep plundering their country leaving nothing for them. Because, as Belladone puts it, "ce pays appartient aux investisseurs depuis toujours. Étrangers de préférence." (39). The slag heaps are often mentioned in the book. They are part of the landscape in which the characters live. Therefore, the best person to explain these pictures might be Belladone, for she sees the ruins of the Gécamines every day:

Face au décor du terril, croyez-moi, tu ressens à t'étrangler les poumons que la brulante solitude où tu te consumes est une banalité tapie derrière des dos surhumains qui n'en ont rien à foutre, qui n'en auront jamais rien à foutre car ils sont trop occupés à créer des montagnes de scories.
(40)

To describe the sensation she feels when seeing the slag heaps, Belladone links her feeling of loneliness and abandonment to physical symptoms resembling those that miners often suffer from. For example, she mentions her lungs, which is an organ that the workers often hurt due to their constant exposure to dust. She also refers to burning heat, which is characteristic of miners' working conditions. Therefore, Belladone seems to identify with the miners' suffering. However, the miners also appear to be the ones causing her torment, for they are the ones creating slag heaps. In fact, Belladone creates a parallelism between the miners and the slag heaps. By using the metonymy "dos surhumains" to denote the miners, she dehumanises them while at the same time giving them monumentality. Moreover, the "dos surhumains" seem to denote the miners as well as the slag heap when she says that banality lurks behind them. Thus the miners stand for the slag heaps and the slag heaps stand for the miners "qui n'en n'ont rien à foutre" (40). They do not care because they are blinded by their thirst for wealth, the banality of which is often denounced in the book. The assimilation that Belladone builds between miners and the slag heaps is reminiscent of Jewsiewicki's analysis of Sammy Baloji's pictures. He explains that the pictures are characterised by absence, the absence of workers. But this absence is so obvious that it emphasizes what is not there i.e. the workers (Jewsiewicki 97-101). Therefore the Gécamines' ruins also represent the Gécamines workers. Moreover,

Jewsiewicki also explains how the pictures are an attack on the workers of the previous generation that exhausted modernity leaving nothing for their children, which matches Belladone's criticism of blinding greed. He states:

Sammy Baloji donne à voir comme vrai ce que tout le monde sait, au moins les Katangais de sa génération : la modernité a été « mangée » par les pères égoïstes au point où il ne reste rien d'autre que la mémoire de ce temps dont on a entendu parler mais qu'on n'a pas connu et dont il ne reste que des ruines. Plus cette absence de la modernité industrielle s'impose à eux, plus leur vie est engendrée par cette absence, plus les jeunes sont confrontés aux récits nostalgiques des pères sur ce qu'elle était. (Jewsiewicki 98-99)

Sammy Baloji's pictures and Aanza's *Généalogie d'une banalité* capture the generational gap between the old people who have known the golden days of the Gécamines and the young people who have not. Jewsiewicki explains that the fathers try to fill the gap by telling the stories of the Gécamines' golden days to their children, but it makes it worst (99). Aanza's novel is called *Généalogie d'une banalité*, the word "genealogy" underlines that the novel is interested in the causes of the accident, of the Bronx's situation, of the characters desperation. The downfall of the Gécamines and the generational gap it provoked is one of these causes.

Describing *Généalogie d'une banalité* is not an easy task. The book is made up of a web of voices that can seem as chaotic as the tunnel maze underneath the Bronx. But it is the cacophony of voices present in the text that allows for an intertwinement of points of views that comment on each other, which is one of the reasons why *Généalogie d'une banalité* is so fascinating. In addition, this web of voices conveys the complexities the Congolese socio-political context as the tunnels are from the earth into which they are built. Therefore, a good analysis of the text is impossible without some information about Lubumbashi, the political situation of the DRC and the workings of its mining industry.

Chapter 2

Genealogies of Exploitation

1. Exploited Land, Exploited Women, Exploited Men

*Frappez camarades,
La terre est une femme enceinte de votre avenir
(266)*

These are the first lines of the poem that the Bronx's school teacher, Kafka, wrote and that the children are reciting when the mine collapses. It is a metaphor that associates the earth and the female body, which is quite a common trope. However, the common ground that generally holds this metaphor together is fertility, which is seen as a characteristic of both women and earth. However, in this case, the metaphor is problematic because it is not grounded in fertility but in exploitation. The quote above urges people to destroy fertility because it tells them to hit a woman that is pregnant with their future. In other words, the quote suggests that they should kill their prospects for the future. Therefore, it reveals the fundamental unsustainability that characterises exploitation. The poem is addressed to the diggers that work in the mine and exploit the earth. But because it is associated with women it also conceptualizes women as exploitable.

In *Généalogie d'une banalité*, bodies are referred to by metaphorical denominations: the body is "une biologie", buttocks are "collines de l'humilité" and genitalia are "biologies sensibles". By using the hypernym "biologie" to denote a hyponym "body", the body loses its specificity, its privacy, and becomes part of a bigger whole, escaping control and ownership. Moreover, the term "biologie" straightens the body's link with science, which reinforces the idea of a body

that is not private and sacred but that is a public good. Finally, “biologie” can be understood as an exaggeration of the Western behaviour of labelling colonised bodies with scientific terms. Thus, it seems that Aanza reappropriates the African body by using his own denomination that mocks colonisation. By strengthening the bodies’ ties with science and colonisation Aanza reconciles the body with exploitation. Indeed, the bodies were exploited during colonisation and perceiving the body in a scientific way entails that it is not perceived as personal anymore. However, the term “biologie sensible” is very different from “biologie”. Indeed, it seems like an elegant alternative to “genitalia”. Moreover, the word “sensible” rehumanises the term “biologie” because it suggests a certain fragility and thus the capacity to feel. As for “collines de l’humilité”, it is even more different from the cold label “biologie” because it has a poetical dimension. In fact, it functions as a metaphor that links two elements that are visually similar, yet conceptually very different: hills and buttocks. The association between the words “collines” and “humilité” is unusual and surprising. But “humilité” brings the word “collines” into the realm of the individual because humility is a deeply human feeling, which, in this case, is connected with the fragility of the human condition. Moreover, this denomination connects the body to the landscape.

1.1. Woman and Earth: From Fertility to Exploitation

Généalogie d’une banalité features two important female characters in the Bronx: maman Clothilde and Belladone. These two women, and Maureen, are the only important women in the story but two of them are defined either as mothers or as prostitutes. Maureen seems to escape this scheme probably because she is white, rich, and does not come from the Bronx. The women of the Bronx, however, are determined by their relationships with men. It does not mean that they are entirely under the authority of men but rather that society defines them according to what they can offer to men. Clothilde is the Cheminot’s wife. She has a good job in which she is very appreciated and her husband trusts her to manage the household money. However, something seems to be poisoning her existence: she does not have a child and consequently, her husband deserts her bed and sleeps with his other wife. This creates major tensions in their household and all the neighbourhood can hear them arguing. During one of these quarrels, the Cheminot says: “Si une femme elle ne fait pas d’enfants, est-ce qu’elle est une femme ?” (110), which highlights how women are reduced to their ability to procreate. And it is precisely this ability which is compared to mining. Later in the quarrel, Kafka tries to reason the Cheminot by saying: “les enfants, c’est pareil au minerais, ça vient quand ça vient, mais ça vient

nécessairement” (111) and “le cuivre non plus ne sort pas de la terre au premier coup de bêche” (111). By using the metaphors of the mine to illustrate his point, Kafka introduces a vision of female fertility that is not connected to nature anymore but to men’s work. This shift from natural sustainable (re)production to human exploitation can be read as an allegory of what happened to Katanga’s soil.

The people of the Bronx moved from a respectful to an exploitative relationship with the land. One day, a digger dies in an accident in the mine. At his funeral, the neighbours have a debate about the mine. Some find that mining is a bad idea. One of the detractors of the mine argues that the diggers should not penetrate the earth by making galleries because “la terre est notre mère, elle ne doit pas être violée par des gens qui frétilent d’ambition mercantile”. Another neighbour adds “a-t’on oublié que l’identité de chacun part du village de ses parents, c’est-à-dire d’un bout de terre qui a un chef coutumier, des arbres poussant dans la chair des ancêtres et des esprits claniques?” (184). The neighbours themselves see the problem of land exploitation as a rupture from their traditional relationship with the earth. Then, Kafka explains how this rupture is a consequence of colonialism:

L’actuelle société congolaise [...] est à vocation libérale, parce qu’elle est entièrement la création de la machine économique coloniale, cette vaste exploitation du pays qui avait converti nos ancêtres en chercheurs d’or, en bêcheurs de richesse, en Américains en exode vers un Far-West paradisiaque... Que voulez-vous? Il y a longtemps qu’on a pourri cette terre en donnant à la vie une valeur marchande. (185)

This extract is the beginning of a statement in which Kafka tries to defend the mining project against its detractors, using colonialism to justify the mine. Indeed, the colonial history of the Congo is tightly linked to exploitation, as profit was the main aim of the colonial enterprise in the Congo. Moreover, the means used were radically violent towards nature and humans which were both treated as mere resources. As Kafka says, it is not land that has been corrupted by the market value but life itself. Kafka thinks that it is only normal that the Bronx’s inhabitants decide to do the same. The extract explains how colonialism imposed on Congolese people the change from a respectful to an exploitative relationship with the land on Congolese people. Kafka underlines that colonialism changed his ancestors and their relationship to their land since they were trapped in an eternal “exode vers un Far-West paradisiaque” that could never be reached. Aanza’s use of the term “pourri” to describe the consequence of giving a market value to life is revealing. Indeed, rotting is what happens to crops when they are neglected.

Therefore, it suggests that the land's new market value made people neglect agriculture and the intrinsic fertility of the earth.

Furthermore, the recurrent association that the neighbours make between the land and the body can also be traced back to colonialist ideology. In the 19th century, the first narratives about European explorers in Africa depicted an empty land in need of domestication. The Congo was seen as a chaotic and mysterious space which the Europeans had a duty to enlighten for the good of the natives and of humanity (Kapanga 29-30). In *Stories of women: Gender and narrative in the postcolonial nation*, Elleke Boehmer posits that images of this wild, untamed land were often conflated with images of the natives' bodies in colonial representations. She argues that both Congolese land and bodies were seen "as amorphous, wild, seductive, dark, open to possession" (*Stories of women* 129). They were spaces to be conquered, branded, penetrated and mastered at the convenience of the conquerors. This can still be seen in the description that the auteur inconnu gives of Kafka's vision of Lubumbashi:

Revendications, hargne murmurée ou jouissances morbides des gens qui de part en part se gorgent le mou depuis un siècle et se passent le flambeau pour la conquête de la ville. Ils la possèdent alors comme une chimère, ou comme la biologie d'une prostituée, ou comme une femme à qui on ne demande pas son avis, une à qui on arrache ses charmes et qui ne sait rien de ce qu'on en fait par la suite. Une ville minière somme toute. (168)

Kafka's conception of the city rests on the parallel between land and bodies already established in colonial texts. He compares the city to a sexualised woman body, that is possessed against her will by men. According to Boehmer's observations, in colonial texts bodies were often described by the explorers in terms of their sexual characteristics (*Stories of women* Boehmer 129). In the extract, both the female body and the land are sexualised. Indeed, the woman and the city merge into one being who is wrongfully treated and dispossessed of its charms. Thus the Bronx's attitude towards land and bodies can be seen as a heritage of colonialism. Ironically, in *Généalogie d'une banalité*, it seems that the land and the bodies have retained their dark, seductive qualities and that they are still open for possession. Indeed, Aanza's book seems to reveal all the ways in which the traditional association between the female body and the earth could possibly go wrong. If the city can be associated with a woman, then women can be associated to the city, which means that the common ground between the earth and women is not fertility anymore:

les biologies de ces filles étaient des espaces publics ; tout le monde venait y flatter sa solitude, l'instant d'une course acharnée qui est une boucle vers soi-même, leurs biologies aux courbes

enivrantes, palpitantes et ensoleillées étaient des voies illusoires, dérisoires, qui rédimaient et projetaient hors de la solitude, les biologies de ses filles étaient des rues (243).

Here, public access is what holds the association between streets and prostitutes together. In this short extract, it is striking how many words used to describe women belong to the semantic field of streets: espace public, course, boucle, courbes, ensoleillées, voies. Therefore, it is difficult to picture anything about these women from this description. But this might be exactly the point because it shows that, in the eyes of the narrator, they do not exist as something else than a place that can be penetrated. As Kafka says in the book, the earth has received a market value, and therefore so have women. Women are a space to be conquered, exactly like the land. Aanza often refers to prostitution as renting a body, as one could rent a house, which reveals the capitalistic logic behind his conception of the female body. Therefore, it seems logical that the Cheminot sees his marriage to Clothilde as an investment. He paid her parents to marry her so he intends to get something in exchange: children.

1.1.1. Eudoxie and Valérien: a Hole Is a Hole

Aanza subverts the metaphor of the female body and the land yet a bit more when his characters associate a woman, Eudoxie, not to the mine, but merely to a hole. Indeed, when Valérien finds his wife, Eudoxie, sleeping with their neighbour in the mine, he confronts his neighbour, not about his wife, but about his mining hole:

Ce trou m'appartient... Tu as débordé dans ma propriété... Je vais t'enfoncer ça dans le crâne... Est-ce que je transpire dans ma terre pour qu'elle soit douce quand toi tu viens creuser, hein ? Je vais te trouer les yeux... Tu dois arrêter de convoiter les trous des autres... Je vais te trouer les yeux ! (253)

The association between the earth and the woman is symbolic and traditional. By contrast, the association between a hole and a woman is simpler because it rests on a visual resemblance. The mine hole is associated with the woman's vagina because they have something in common: they penetrate inside either the land or the woman. This graphic association is an exaggeration that mocks the sexualisation of the land and of the African body that was recurrent in colonial writings (*Stories of women* Boehmer 129). Therefore it is very far from the original metaphor that associates earth with women because they are both fertile. The metaphor is exaggerated and grotesque. As a result, it is both pathetic and funny to see two grown men using it seriously. It seems that the metaphor runs so deep that Valérien cannot go out of it to express his anger about a subject as serious as adultery, which is quite comical. The lexical field related to digging

is omnipresent in Valérien's speech: trou, enfoncer, terre, creuser, trouser. Even the violent threat that he makes against his neighbour has the word "trouer" in it as if he could not think of something else than making holes. This reveals his obsession with digging that is described earlier in the text:

tout à son trou, il [Valérien] ne louchait plus sur les femmes d'autrui, il ne bavait plus sur sa propre femme, ne se bagarrait plus pour des babioles, ne priait plus Dieu [...], [il] pembénisait² désormais tout le monde autour de lui en dehors du cadre du travail. (252)

Valérien's digging obsession is tragic but also funny or grotesque. These two extracts have something of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*, in which Charlie's character, a factory worker that tighten screws all day becomes mad and sees screws to tighten everywhere (00:14:00 – 00:16:30). Valérien can only speak of holes as Charlie Chaplin tries to tighten the buttons on a woman's clothes (Chaplin 00:15:30 – 00:16:30). Charlie Chaplin's film comically denounced the absurdity of a system that reduced humans to robots. In *Généalogie d'une banalité*, it is the absurdity of a system that leads Valérien to dig all day every day with the false hope of finding minerals that is denounced. It is a system that does not care about individuals but reduces them to "biologies" or pieces of machinery. Vincent de Paul, an old man living in the home where Clothilde works used to dig in the mines that provided copper to the Allies during the war. He explains that:

Quand la machine en sentit le besoin, elle dut se débarrasser d'eux, les machines ne gardent pas longtemps les mêmes pièces, sinon elles calent, elles se coincent par saccades avant de se rompre et de s'immobiliser complètement, donc, elles se départent des pièces usées ou défailiantes (107).

This extract shows how men are reduced to small pieces of the Congolese economic system i.e. "la machine", which are easily sacrificed for the good of the system. The health of the machine is more important than the workers since the extract anthropomorphises the machine, who can feel ("quand la machine en sentit le besoin") whereas it reduces the workers to pieces. It almost seems like getting rid of the workers is a tough decision for the machine ("elle dut"). Consequently this extract shows how the exploitation of men is legitimized by the idea that it is all for the greater good of the system. In this extract, the parallel with *Modern Times* is, once more, illuminating. Chaplin's character became mad, precisely because his work did not treat him like a human being, but merely as a cog in a production machine. *Modern Times* was

² The author defines this term in a note at the end of the book. The note reads: « mettait de côté, en frangolais ».

screened for the first time in 1936, yet it seems that it still reflects some aspects of today's society.

The character of Belladone has another interpretation of Valérien's behaviour. According to her "il ne voulait pas souffrir d'avoir à poser la biologie de sa femme comme un champs de bataille" (262). This is a more humane theory in which Valérien is simply too sad, too upset, too proud to speak directly about Eudoxie. Interestingly, Belladone's explanation does not go against the earth-woman metaphor. On the contrary, she explains that fighting about Eudoxie, rather than about a hole, would transform Eudoxie's body into a battlefield. As a result, Belladone perpetuates the pervasive metaphor that associates females bodies to the land. In the case of Eudoxie, her body is associated either to a mine, or to a battlefield, which are both ravaged landscapes characterised by destruction. In addition, mines and battlefields are masculine places where women are not usually welcome.

1.1.2. Belladone la Reine des Fourmis

The best example of the subversion of the earth-woman metaphor is probably Belladone herself. In the Bronx, she is treated in a manner that recalls the colonial behaviour described above. She is seen as an Other, both wild and dangerous and extremely seductive and sexualised. This can be read as an exaggeration and a mockery of how colonials considered and treated African people. Indeed, *Généalogie d'une banalité* often mocks colonial ideology. Since Kafka found her as a child, the neighbourhood hated and feared her as if she was cursed by a dark malediction. When her body changes and the way men look at her changes too, which feels like a relief. Her difference was a curse but it is also what makes her beauty unique. In the end, there does not seem to be a difference between her malediction, difference, and her blessing, beauty. Belladone was born of the union of two people of different skin colours, probably a Congolese woman and a foreign businessman. Therefore, she illustrates what is happening to her country. Belladone's complexion is a reminder of her origin, which reflects the impact of foreigners on the Congo's economic and political scene. This is suggested by Aanza when he associates Belladone's curse to the Bronx's artisanal mine:

Un homme cherchant de l'argent flirte avec le diable, et Belladone, [...] pouvait avoir tous les droits sur eux maintenant qu'ils vivaient sous la terre, dans le royaume de la malédiction qu'elle avait toujours portée dans sa biologie, on l'avait rejointe sur son terrain et elle était généreuse sur son terrain, elle donnait sa biologie et ne demandait pas beaucoup en retour (255).

This extract acknowledges the connection between Belladone and the problems linked to the Congo's mineral, for the mine is "le royaume de la malediction qu'elle avait toujours portée dans sa biologie". As if Belladone's unknown and mysterious origin, which is also her curse, was linked to the Congo's curse i.e. the constant plunder of its resources. Both Belladone and her country suffer from their beauty that men exploit and destroy out of greed. They are both penetrated and exploited without any respect. In this extract, Belladone appears as a mythical creature, a modern siren that lures men beneath the ground to ruin them. All her life, she was ostracised in the Bronx, everybody treated her with fear and loathing. When she became a woman, things partly changed because "sa biologie dégageait et répandait une désirabilité absolue" (148). But this only added to her bad reputation and to the distrust with which she was treated. Prostitution became her refuge (149), and the mine, where only men worked, became her "empire" (272). Of all the characters of the book, Belladone gives the impression of being the most lucid. It seems that Belladone understands very well how the Bronx works and she uses it to her advantage. She knows how women are associated with earth and that, as a consequence, digging is connected to sex. Therefore, she realises that the mine is the place where she belongs. There, nobody treats her as an "Other". The workers are always happy to see her, in fact, some of them go down the galleries with the sole purpose of sleeping with her (257). Beneath the ground, she became "la reine des fourmis", she rules over the workers (274). Thus, she has appropriated the corrupted woman-earth metaphor and used it to her advantage. She was able to do this perhaps because she recognizes herself in the land of the Bronx that nobody respects but that suddenly becomes the subject of an absurd and destructive greed. Indeed, this is the story of Belladone's life, becoming suddenly the object of the overwhelming desire of the Bronx's men. But neither their greed nor their desire are positive for the land or for Belladone.

1.2. Self-exploitation and Virility

Associating women with the earth in a metaphor corrupted by market value and exploitation is damaging to women, as well as to men. Indeed, if women are associated with the land and judged on their ability to provide sexual pleasure and children, men are judged according to their capacity of working that land. The mine, in particular, has a symbolic meaning which plays an important role in the story. It is a place that men enter in search of wealth but also in search of virility. The anthropologist Jeroen Cuvellier studied artisanal mining in the Congo and found that working in an artisanal mine was associated with "masculine working pride"

especially in the Congolese “context of economic crisis and rapidly changing gender relations”(5). Mining activities demand hard physical work (17) and present real risks (10) which are associated with virility. Furthermore, he argues that providing for the family is an important part of the masculine identity in the Congo (7-9), which Benjamin Rubbers traced back to the Gécamines’s golden days (*Le paternalisme* 25). Moreover, as explained above, the land is associated to the female body, therefore penetrating in the mine can be seen as a metaphorical equivalent for penetrating into a women. Entering in the mine is then a metaphorical demonstration of virility.

Each one of the three first diggers of the Bronx’s mine is also dealing with masculinity problems. Kafka struggles with the fact that he cannot provide for his children. Seeing his children put food on the table breaks his heart, which prompts him to find a way to remedy the situation, i.e. by digging. The Cheminot, on the other hand, sees his virility threatened for two reasons. Firstly, his wife, Clothilde, works in a home for old people and it is her job that brings money home. Secondly, on his fifth day of working in the mine, the police come and beat and arrest the Cheminot in front of his children (76). This is a hard blow for the Cheminot who feels that he has lost the respect of his children. Therefore, he thinks that his authority as a patriarch is threatened. The third digger is Tutu Jean. All the neighbourhood knows that his wife mocks the small size of his penis. Moreover, he used to work as a chauffeur and to beat his wife when he had problems at work. But he lost his job and now it is his wife that beats him. She also provides for their household. Both Tutu Jean and the Cheminot feel threatened by their wives’ jobs. Indeed as the Aanza explains:

Les femmes qui font le commerce sont devenues les cheffes de leurs familles, elles peuvent désormais tabasser leurs hommes, parce que c’est elles qui les nourrissent, les vêtissent, paient leurs tétées dans le vieux bus, paient leurs cachets contre la malaria, la syphilis, les amibes, l’éjaculation précoce ou la fièvre typhoïde à la pharmacie du Capitole. (178)

This extract illustrates the importance of earning money in the family dynamic. The one who provides for the family is also the chief. This confirms Rubbers argumentation about the importance of providing food and shelter for the household for the masculine identity of Congolese identity. Indeed, the extract highlights how money is a synonym of power in the Bronx families. It is not a coincidence that the first and most avid diggers, i.e. the Cheminot, Kafka and Tutu Jean, are all in situations which threaten their masculinity. It seems that they see the mine as a way of becoming rich and able to provide for their family, which would reassert their virility.

In the Bronx, traditional gender roles are, indeed, threatened. Belladone makes more money in prostitution than her brother Séraphin. Yet, Séraphin is creative, he starts all sorts of little businesses that seem promising but, despite his efforts, all his businesses fail. It must be noted that Séraphin went to university for a few years, but dropped out since a degree would not help him to earn money. After seeing his sister prosper, Séraphin decides to prostitute himself too. His first experience is rather encouraging but the second one goes wrong and Séraphin is devastated. Unlike the other men of the Bronx, Séraphin never took part in the mining project. This is probably because he is lucid enough to know that there is nothing to be found in the Bronx's mine. But if his land cannot be exploited, his body can, hence his attempt at prostitution.

2. The Bronx's Mining Exploitation or Kafka's Mimicry

Il [l'État] a donc choisi les Chinois les plus importants, ceux qui ont le plus de sous, de diplômes et d'adresses dans leurs carnets d'adresses, et leur a confié tout le cuivre, toute la terre susceptible d'en contenir. En retour, ils construisent des hôpitaux, des écoles, des bureaux, des hôtels et des routes pour emmener le cuivre en Chine. Le maître a été le premier à comprendre que l'État est malin, qu'il faut toujours suivre son exemple, qu'il faut jouer comme il joue, parce que l'État, au fond, a dit le Maître, c'est notre reflet dans un miroir collectif . (39)

2.1. Kafka's Mimicry As the Denunciation of a Corrupt State

Kafka starts a mining exploitation hoping that it will make him rich. His mining project is probably the most obvious manifestation of exploitation in the text. Indeed, the latter relies on the exploitation of the Bronx's soil and of the diggers, even if they work of their own accord. The most striking feature of the mining project is that it is organised like big corporation's mining exploitations. The extract above shows that Kafka understands how the Congolese copper industry works and it seems that it inspired him to create his own copper exploitation. The first step to create his exploitation, as any other capitalist business, was to find capital. To achieve this, he needed to go out of the Bronx where people are very poor. As a result, he asked Maureen, a white woman living in a rich neighbourhood of Lubumbashi. In the Bronx, Maureen would be seen as a foreigner. Therefore, Kafka's project is funded by an outsider, an investor, which is a typical corporate behaviour. With Maureen's money, Kafka bought food for the diggers. This strategy is reminiscent of the Gécamines' tactic to attract employees by providing them with stable food rations (Rubbers *Le paternalisme* 23). Kafka provides food, but not security. Indeed, the workers dig without any plan or logic and without any precautions, as is

often the case in artisanal mines. The people involved in the mining project show little consideration for the land in which they dig, which is often the case in Congolese mining exploitations. Therefore, Kafka's project resembles the other mining projects in the DRC. Nevertheless it also crucially differs from them in three crucial ways. First, the Bronx's mine is ridiculously small compared to other Congolese mines. Second, it does not contain any valuable ore, which makes no sense since mines are normally created to extract minerals from the soil. Third, the aim of Kafka's project is to make Congolese people and not foreign companies profit from the country's resources.

Being both very similar yet not exactly the same, like Kafka's mine that resembles yet differs from other Congolese mines, is what characterises mimicry according to Homi Bhabha. Mimicry is an important concept in post-colonial theory because it has to do with the fundamental ambivalence that defines the relationship between colonisers and colonised. As Ashcroft Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin explain

When colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to 'mimic' the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a 'blurred copy' of the colonizer that can be quite threatening. This is because mimicry is never very far from mockery, since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics. Mimicry therefore locates a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance, an uncertainty in its control of the behaviour of the colonized. (Ashcroft Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin 139)

This excerpt underlines the subversive potential of mimicry in which there is always the ghostly presence of mockery. Moreover, as Bhabha explains, in *The location of culture*, mimicry is "at once a resemblance and a menace" (127). Because if the colonised can behave exactly like the coloniser, why is he treated as an inferior? Thus, mimicry is also a threat to the colonial system of domination that rests on the assumption that the colonisers are superior to the colonised. As explained above, Kafka's mining project both resembles and differs from other mining exploitations in the Congo. Consequently, it can be seen as mimicry and its three particularities have an important subversive potential. Indeed, the small size of the mine shows that human-scaled mining is possible. The involvement of the local population demonstrates that mines can be exploited by and profit to the locals rather than to big corporations. However, the fact that there is no ore in the mine reveals that creating small, local mining exploitations is not easy, or, in fact, nearly impossible in the DRC current situation. It also displays the extent of the despair

that the people of the Bronx feel, and how it leads them to believe in Kafka's absurd mining project.

Indeed, there was never anything to be found in the mine. The only ore that the mining project yielded was in fact put in the mine by Pako. The latter controls the electric system of the neighbourhood which is mainly composed of copper cables which Pako decides to steal along with other goods made of copper such as train rails: "il avait vandalisé tout ce que les colonisateurs avaient construit de cuivre dans la ville" (268). Then, he puts them in the mine and pretends to find raw copper ore in the mine's galleries (268). His scheme is rather obvious: nobody had seen any trace of ore until he asks to be alone in the mine and suddenly finds entire bags of it. However unlikely his discovery is, none of the neighbours questioned the origin of the copper. Instead, the neighbourhood chooses to believe it and to start digging with even more energy in the hope of finding copper themselves. In the end, the mining project seems to be the subject of dark humour that mocks the Bronx for believing in the venture. But although the Bronx's people are mocked, they do not seem to be criticised. In fact, it is rather the absurd situation in which they live that is denounced in *Généalogie d'une banalité*.

In the Bronx, everybody is very poor, which seems illogical considering that Katanga is in one of the richest regions in the world in terms of minerals. This absurdity is captured in the story by Pako's subterfuge. He and his band of street kids stole copper from the city to put it in the mine. Ironically, this copper was probably plundered from the Congo in the first place. Then, in all likelihood, it was taken abroad and manufactured into rails and electric cables that were sold to the Congo at a higher price. This is something that the Bronx people are aware of. The Cheminot states that: "le cuivre, nous on le produit, ensuite il va en Chine et nous on achète les cables ils fabriquent dans le cuivre" (135). Thus, Pako puts back the copper almost where it came from. As a result, the Bronx profits from what was plundered from them in the first place. Together, Pako and Kafka create a simulacrum in which Congolese people profit from the Congolese resources. Which attracts the reader's attention on how the other mining projects fail to do so.

The Stanford anthropologist James G. Ferguson argues that mimicry can have a lot of different meanings (557). Ferguson investigated mimicry in the "transnational postcolonial age" where the borders between the First and the Third Worlds seem to gradually vanish due to the globalised market and to communication technologies. Ferguson argues, however, that this border is in fact still strong considering the enormous inequalities between the two worlds

(558). The American anthropologist posits that, in this new context, there are new forms of mimicry. In his article, he develops the conception of mimicry that aims at claiming "membership" in a global society from which the mimics feel rejected. In other words, Fergusson explains that mimicry is used to ask for equality and recognition from the First World. Fergusson's conception of mimicry seems equally valid to explain Kafka's mimicry because he claims the wealth and agency that the Bronx is constantly denied. According to Kafka, the Bronx is "la sphère des exclus" (171) and that is what he wants to change.

2.2. Of the Mimicry in Kafka's Name

As explained above, Kafka mimics other mining projects. But his mimicry extends to more than just mining. In fact, it is already suggested in his name. Indeed, he bears the name of a European writer, which suits him well. Kafka is unusually educated for the Bronx and he devotes his life to instructing others. He also has a passion for the arts. His French is very rich and accurate. All this justifies the choice of a European writer for his name. In addition, Kafka is sometimes called "le Maître" as school teachers were once called in France and Belgium. Therefore, Kafka can be said to mimic European culture. In this case, the subversive aspect of his mimicry does not lie in the differences, as Bhabha asserted, because it does not have disruptive power inside the diegesis. In fact, the subversion occurs at the level of the reader who recognises, in Kafka, some features of European culture and behaviour. Indeed, Kafka is characterised by his culture, but also by his greed. Originally, Kafka digs with the hope that the money he will gain will show his children the vanity of wealth and material possessions. He hoped that "l'argent leur [his children] fasse faire un détour vers la poésie, vers l'esprit" (119). The mining project was, therefore, just a tool to complete his life mission: bring education, culture and art to the Bronx. However, Kafka's motivation became corrupted along the way. Soon, finding copper became not a tool, but an obsession: "le cuivre était désormais la seule boussole de sa vie et son unique justification" (186). Kafka has something of Conrad's Kurtz: he symbolises culture and intelligence, but he is driven mad by the dream of the wealth that the Congo's resources could provide him. Therefore, Kafka's behaviour also mimics the ambivalent colonial discourse of the "mission civilisatrice" which colonial powers used as a justification to rule and conquer other parts of the world. Like Kafka, they said their aim was to educate the local population but, in fact, their actions resulted in the exploitation of the territories and people they ruled to satisfy their own greed. The end of the book judges Kafka severely since he pays a daunting price: he loses his daughter and many of his pupils. But their death is also the burial of all of

what Kafka has worked for in the Bronx: the mine, symbolising Kafka's greed, swallowed paternity, education and poetry. Indeed, it took his daughter, his pupils but also the poem that the school-children were reciting and that Kafka had written. In this respect, Kafka's fate differs from his model, Europe. Because he paid the price for his greed, which Europe never had to do. This crucial difference reveals an immense injustice: the Bronx is still paying the price of colonisation while Europe is not.

2.3. Kafka or the Bronx's State

As the extract at the beginning of section 2 suggests, Kafka does not simply mimic mining projects, he mimics the Congolese State. In the Bronx, the Congolese State seems to fail in all of its obligations. Therefore, its citizens have started to make up for its absence by their own initiatives. Belladonne explains that "après la guerre: chacun de nous est devenu l'État à sa manière." (44). Kafka, in particular, plays an important role in fulfilling the state missions. He created a school as well as a small clinic, therefore providing education and health care to the neighbourhood. In addition to that, he also provides leadership, since his opinion is respected by all the inhabitants of the Bronx. The neighbours call Kafka's house "le capitole", which is revealing of the place that Kafka holds in the Bronx's society. Given the fact that Pako furnishes the Bronx's electricity, the only important role that the State seems to retain is to provide jobs for its citizens. However, as the Cheminot explains in the book, the State is not paying their employees' salaries: "je suis fonctionnaire de l'État, même si les autorités elles pissent dans notre dignité quand elles refusent de nous payer un salaire à la fin du mois" (73). The Cheminot feels exploited for nothing because the State fails to fulfil yet another of its missions, i.e. paying its employees. Consequently, Kafka tries to remedy the State's shortcomings as he did for education and health by creating a mine that aims to provide its workers with a decent income. Kafka mimics the State and, as Bhabha explains, the mimic reproduces almost exactly his model but not quite (127). The two biggest differences between Kafka and the State are perhaps that Kafka successfully provides education and health care and that his intentions are mostly uncorrupted. Therefore, Kafka's mimicry dangerously threatens the State because it exposes its shortcomings. In the Bronx, Kafka is already considered as more important than the State: "l'État c'est le deuxième responsable. Après le Maître [Kafka]" (38).

Chapter 3

“Witnessing Sights Unseen”: Slow Violence in *Généologie d’une Banalité*

1. Nixon’s Concept of Slow Violence

In his award-winning *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon argues for the extension of the definition of “violence” to include a type of violence that usually remains unnoticed. To this purpose, he creates the term “slow violence” that he defines as a “violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2). Rob Nixon’s seminal book is a call to tackle a violence that is discreet and unfolds slowly, far from any media attention. His primary concern is towards actions that affect the environment, whether globally, such as climate change, or locally like toxic drifts. This alarms him particularly because the effects of such actions develop over years, decades or even centuries. Nixon states:

We need, I believe, to engage a different kind violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales. In so doing, we also need to engage in the representational, narrative, and strategic challenges posed by the invisibility of slow violence (2).

Indeed, slow violence, such as climate change, presents a representational challenge, which often hampers the motivation or decisiveness to tackle these issues. This is very well illustrated by the example of climate change. An article published on May the 8th in *The Guardian* explains that 5% of Americans do not believe that the climate is changing and that 13% do believe it

changes, but that change is unrelated to human activities (Milman Olivier and Harvey Fiona). Consequently, almost one in five inhabitants of the biggest economic world power (Spies Noé) does not believe in climate change, or that humans have a responsibility for it. To counter this alarming tendency, newspapers like *The Guardian* have chosen to change the way in which they talk about climate change (Chadwick Paul). By doing so, *The Guardian* tackles the problem of the representation of climate change, which Nixon is worried about. The newspaper decided to adapt its vocabulary to give a more accurate account of the urgency of the situation. For example, it advocates the use of “climate crisis”, “climate emergency” or “climate breakdown”, which convey a sense of alarm, instead of the more neutral “climate change”. Thus, *The Guardian* has heard Nixon’s call to make slow violence visible. But slow violence bears on issues other than climate change and its representational challenge can be addressed in a number of ways. Fictional works, such as *Généalogie d’une banalité*, are one of them.

Nixon’s *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* opens with two quotes. One of them is from a former president of the World Bank, Lawrence Summers, who suggests that the World Bank should encourage the migration of polluting industries to the “Least Developed Countries” (Nixon 1). According to him, African countries were “vastly under polluted” compared to Western countries. Hence he decided to balance scales by relocating polluting industries to Africa. This scheme had two advantages: it profited Europe and the US economically and it eased the discontent of European and American environmentalists by relocating pollution out of their sight. This example discloses the presence of slow violence in international politics but it also reveals the invisibility of slow violence. Indeed, if Lawrence Summers had suggested to place weapons of mass destruction in Africa, his proposal would have been met with considerable opposition because it would have been considered as a violent act. By contrast, it is because pollution is not considered as violence that his scheme could be made into reality. Therefore, Nixon argues that we need to rethink violence “complicate conventional assumptions about violence as a highly visible act that is newsworthy because it is event bound, time focused and body bound” (Nixon 3). Moreover, Summers’ idea highlights how the poor are much more likely to be casualties of slow violence than the rich (Nixon 1-3).

One of the most important challenges of slow violence is its representability. Indeed, slow violence is usually not perceived as violence because it is very slow and discreet. According to Nixon this issue can be addressed through imaginative writing:

In a world permeated by insidious, yet unseen or imperceptible violence, imaginative writing can help make the unapparent appear, making it accessible and tangible by humanizing drawn-out threats inaccessible to the immediate senses. [...] The narrative imaginings of writer-activists may thus offer us a different kind of witnessing: of sights unseen. (15)

This extract from Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* introduces a concern that is central to his book: the role of the writer activist. As explained above, slow violence presents a considerable representational challenge, which has a solution in the person of the writer activist. Nixon highlights the role that some writers have played in making visible problems and situations that do not make the front page. These writers are also activists because they are enraged by injustices and their work aims at righting wrongs (Nixon 7-8). Slow violence is generally absent from the media, which prefers more spectacular and eye-catching forms of violence. But in their novels and non-fictions, writer-activists can take the time to "make the unapparent appear" (Nixon 15), or in other words, to make slow violence visible. This chapter argues that Sinzo Aanza can be seen as a "writer-activist" because *Généalogie d'une banalité* makes slow violence apparent.

Nixon's writer-activist sees slow violence. In fact, he/she often experienced it. Slow violence is not as invisible as one thinks. Seeing it or not often a question of one's perspective of time. Indeed, noticing and addressing slow violence requires long-term vision. The other factor that makes slow violence visible to the eyes of a person or a population is whether or not they are directly affected by slow violence and the extent to which it damages them. For instance, the population of the Marshall Islands sees the slow violence that is devastating their country. Nixon explains that the Marshall Islands were the place where the United States effectuated their nuclear tests between 1948 and 1958. In 1956, it was declared the most contaminated place in the world, by far. These nuclear experiments might have been forgotten by the rest of the world, but not by the Marshall Islands. According to *Live Science*, the islands are still 10 times more radioactive than Chernobyl and Fukushima. In 2014, an article from *The Guardian* explained that The Bikini atoll were still unliveable, nearly 60 years after the last experiments. The experiments have also had devastating consequences in terms of health care. Indeed, Nixon reports that a lot of severely malformed babies were still being born well into the 1980s when the rest of the world had already forgotten about the nuclear tests. As this example reveals, not seeing slow violence is the luxury of those that are not directly affected by it.

2. (Neo-)Colonialism's Slow Violence

2.1. Neo-colonialism and Nixon's Slow Violence

Interestingly, the examples that Nixon uses to describe slow violence, i.e. Lawrence Summers' scheme to relocate polluting industries in Africa and the US nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands are clear examples of neo-colonialism. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, explain that:

although countries like Ghana had achieved technical independence, the ex-colonial powers and the newly emerging superpowers such as the United States continued to play a decisive role through international monetary bodies, through the fixing of prices on world markets, multinational corporations and cartels and a variety of educational and cultural institutions. (162)

Summers, as president of the World Bank from 1991 to 1993, has had an incredible influence on African countries considering the long lasting consequences of the relocation of polluting industries on the local environment. Similarly, the US played a decisive role in the current situation of the Marshall Island that remain the most radioactive place on earth. In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, discusses the discreet yet destructive consequences of neo-colonialism. He explains how big companies like Shell, Walmart, BP, ExxonMobil and Freeport McMoran cultivate a relatively respectable image in the West through greenwashing, advertising and donations. But Nixon denounces how “meanwhile, back on planet Earth, they persist with their profitable devastation of relatively impoverished, less regulated societies – societies that have little visibility and recognition value in the rich country media”(37). Nixon explains how it is crucial to find a way to make visible the behaviour of these companies and other “vast force fields of interconnectedness against the attenuating effects of temporal and geographical distance” (38). As neo-colonialism, colonisation has consequences that can only fully reveal themselves inside the framework of slow violence. In *Généalogie d'une banalité*, Aanza makes visible the unseable slow violence that infects the Bronx.

2.2. Unearthing the Lasting Damage of Colonialism: Slow Violence in *Généalogie d'une banalité*

In *Généalogie d'une banalité*, Aanza digs out the lasting consequences that still plague the Bronx. Indeed, Slow violence manifests itself in discreet yet non-negligible ways throughout the novel. For example, the vocabulary the Bronx's neighbours use is marked by colonialism. As stated in chapter 2, the use of the term “biologie” to call the body can be seen as the repetition

of colonial scientific labelling. It can also be seen as a way to distance oneself from one's body to make it easier to exploit it. Slow violence is also in the use of certain terms that cannot be dissociated from the colonial era such as "chicote", "évolué", "cordon sanitaire", etc. Aanza's choice not to use Lubumbashi's current name but its former colonial name, "Elisabethville", is a constant reminder of the city's colonial past. It shows how colonialism keeps erupting in the everyday life of the Bronx. The use of French in the book is also a heritage from colonialism. Therefore, the book is intrinsically defined by the DRC's colonial past.

The Congo's colonial past and Mobutu's dictatorship constantly manifests themselves in the book, when the reader least expects it. For example, when Belladone tells an anecdote about when Kafka, speaking to a journalist, mocks the *Mobutu Attitude*:

Adapter l'État comme un petit frère rajuste le pantalon de son grand frère trépassé, dépassé par la vie. C'est aussi la Mobutu attitude. Avant la guerre, c'était la dictature de Mobutu et tout le monde voulaient ressembler au dictateur. J'ai entendu le Maître le dire à une journaliste qui avait l'air bête et qui voulait savoir pourquoi les gens du quartier s'engoulaient et s'entêtaient à fourrager le sol. Le Maître a encore dit à la journaliste que la Mobutu attitude, ça date de longtemps avant la naissance de la maman même de Mobutu. Ça remonte aux blancs qui venaient se pavaner dans nos villages quand quelqu'un les avait nommé chefs de poste, administrateur, collecteur d'impôts, OPJ, agronome chef, chef de chantier routier, commis au volailles, maître chasseur, etc. (44)

In this extract, Belladone starts by denouncing the slow violence of Mobutu's dictatorial regime. Indeed, she explains that everyone wanted to be like the dictator, which gave rise to the "Mobutu attitude" that still persists today in the pervasiveness corruption and in entitled attitudes of "tout le monde". Indeed, the "*Mobutu attitude* [...] veut que tout le monde se prenne au sérieux, se prenne pour le Président de la République, pour Dieu" (39). But Kafka traces the slow violence of the "Mobutu attitude" back to deeper roots, i.e. to colonialism. The colonial administration had the habit of appointing people, of creating hierarchies and privileges. It gave sometimes far-fetched titles to every appointed person even if their job was not important. This is why, today, as Aanza suggests in the extract above, everybody thinks he deserves to be treated like a prince. The *Mobutu attitude* also entails the pervasiveness of corruption because Mobutu was known for being a very corrupted. Similarly, colonialism's slow violence emerges when Kafka takes a shower (121). He explains that his ancestors only bathed themselves when a dear one died but that the colonial regime imposed that they bathe everyday; making them "de perpétuels endeuillés" (121). It also erupts when Belladone explains that her neighbours think that she is a witch. She says that Kafka thinks that:

le problème de ma sorcellerie se trouve dans le besoin maladif que les vivants de l'Église ont de mater leur frousse de n'avoir que du vide derrière le nom de Dieu. Il dit que c'est à cause des missionnaires. Il paraît qu'ils volaient un Dieu dans tous les village, et ils disaient que désormais ce Dieu-là, il faut le chercher dans la Bible et dans l'Église. Les autres dieux, ils disaient que ça n'était pas des dieux, mais des démons, des méchants. (52)

For Kafka, “ce sont les missionnaires qui ont détruit le pays” (52). Kafka explains how deep the influence of colonialism on the Bronx neighbours runs; they have been forced to abandon their ancestral gods and values and adopt those that the missionaries told them to. He reveals that, although, missionaries have not stolen gods for a very long time, the violence of stealing them still persists today. He links Belladone's reputation of witchcraft, which has apparently no ties to colonialism, to what he feels is the real cause of her reputation i.e. the missionaries. The violence that the missionaries committed is so slow that it is almost invisible to the external viewer's eyes. But to Kafka, who has to suffer this slow violence every day of his life, it could not be more obvious.

3. Time and Slow Violence

3.1. The “Contemporary Politics of Speed”: the Number One Enemy of Nixon's Slow Violence

Time plays a critical role in making slow violence invisible. As Nixon explains:

The explicit temporal emphasis of slow violence allows us to keep front and centre the representational challenges and imaginative dilemmas posed not just by imperceptible violence whereby violence is decoupled from its original causes by the working of time. Time becomes an actor in complicated ways (11).

A lot of time often separates slow violence from its original cause. This makes it difficult to the observer to see the link between the past cause and the consequences that keep unfolding in the present. Thus, to make slow violence visible, it is crucial to change one's conception of time. Time must be seen as playing an active role in slow violence. Moreover, to perceive slow violence is to enter in to a deeper slower conception of time. As Nixon puts it: “to talk about slow violence, then, is to engage directly with our contemporary politics of speed” (11). We are in the age of speed. Technology allows us to move faster, to communicate faster and even to cook, bathe and clean faster. Consider an age without microwaves, electric stoves, running hot water and vacuum cleaners, not to mention cars and the internet. More and more movements have arisen to go against the dictatorship of speed that demands that we use technology to do

everything faster and to multi-task. The 2000s have seen the development of smart phones and of an increasingly connected, fast life. But it has also seen the rise of a multitude of slowness movement: slow life, slow cooking, slow traveling, slow reading, etc. To perceive slow violence one needs to move away with the “politics of speed” and see time as broad and slow, not just as something to compete with by going fast. The “politics of speed” does not just affect our personal lives, it also damages national and international politics. Indeed, Nixon explains how the shortness of electoral cycles entails that politicians focus on problems that they can solve while they are in office. They want the voters to see the outcome of what they have done before the next elections. The result of this situation is that critical, long term problems such as climate change remain largely unaddressed. As Nixon states: “how can leaders be goaded to address catastrophe when the political rewards of their actions will not accrue to them but will be reaped on someone else’s watch decades, even centuries, from now?” (9). Today’s politics of speed are incompatible with addressing or even just noticing slow violence.

3.2. *Généalogie d’une banalité*’s Perpetual State of Crisis: Making the Invisible Visible

Because the novel is set more than 50 years after the independence of the Congo, yet still reveals the violence of colonisation, *Généalogie d’une banalité* highlights precisely the slowness of colonialism’s brutal system. For example, in Chapter 2, I discussed how Kafka denounces the consequences that giving the Congo’s land a market value has had on the Congo and on the Bronx’s inhabitants lives (185). After a digger dies in the mine, a debate sparks in the Bronx about whether or not they should continue digging. While some neighbours think that digging constitutes a violation of their mother earth, Kafka tries to defend his mining project by tracing its origin back to colonial times:

L’actuelle société congolaise [...] est à vocation libérale, parce qu’elle est entièrement la création de la machine économique coloniale, cette vaste exploitation du pays qui avait converti nos ancêtres en chercheurs d’or, en bêcheurs de richesse, en Américains en exode vers un Far-West paradisiaque... Que voulez-vous? Il y a longtemps qu’on a pourri cette terre en donnant à la vie une valeur marchande. Au début c’était la nécessité de payer les impôts de l’administration coloniale, maintenant, c’est pour nourrir ses enfants de tout ce que le monde d’aujourd’hui peut offrir comme confort, parce qu’il faut bien qu’ils vivent dans leur temps, plutôt que de barboter dans la même boue que nos ancêtres. Nos coutumes et nos valeurs là-dedans, c’est de la bouille de manioc, un tas de fausses pudeurs purulentes dont nous nous évertuons à habiller le malaise de notre déracinement. Il faut dire les choses telles qu’elles sont : nous ne sommes plus enracinés,

et plus jamais nous ne le seront. Nous sommes des arbres que quelqu'un a coupés et qui pourrissent en surface. (185)

This extract is full of words and phrases related to time: *actuelle/ avait convertit/ ancêtres/ longtemps/ a pourri/ au début/ maintenant/ leur temps/ nous ne sommes plus/ plus jamais nous le seront* (185). All these words and phrases show the importance that time plays in the excerpt. They also create a recurring contrast between the past and the present. This extract shows the consequences in the present of actions that started in the past. Thus, it reveals the genealogy of the current situation of the Bronx. These consequences are not usually conceived as violence. They are rather considered as unhappy repercussions of past events. But Nixon's book explains how they are not just repercussions, but another type of violence that operates slowly across time. This extract illustrates how, even if colonialism in the DRC is situated in the past, its violence still persists today. Indeed, the change that colonialism imposed on the Congo is not reversible. There is no going back to the way the "ancestors" lived. There is no way an uprooted tree will go back to being rooted. The omnipresence of words and phrases referring to time highlights the violent reshaping of culture that was at the centre of colonialism. In his article about Fiston Mwanda Mujila's *Tram 83*, a Congolese novel which, like *Généalogie d'une banalité*, portrays life in a Congolese city today, Monaville addresses how colonialism changed the conception of time in the Congo. He explains that:

Le rapport au temps que les missionnaires, fonctionnaires coloniaux et autres agents d'entreprises européennes emportèrent dans les malles du colonialisme s'est révélé une des dimensions les plus marquantes de l'évolution des sociétés africaines du XXe siècle. Cette modernité [la modernité coloniale] reposait à la fois sur l'émergence de nouvelles catégories sociales (représentées par la figure du salarié masculin), l'invention de nouvelle culture urbaine (basée sur le métissage et la reconfiguration des identités ethniques) et l'émergence des nouveaux rapports de pouvoir (avec l'appareil répressif de l'État, mais aussi des formes de citoyenneté coloniales). Le rapport au temps induit par ce nouvel ordre social posait le présent comme rupture avec le passé précolonial et envisageait l'avenir comme horizon de changement et de progrès. (218)

The three characteristics that Monaville allocates to colonial modernity seem to be declining in Aanza's novel. Indeed, men no longer receive salaries, the new urban culture is the misery of the Bronx's slum and the new relationships of power are not new anymore. But the conception of time as always advancing towards progress has survived its context i.e. modernity. However, because of the decay of modernity, the colonial conception of time has entered into a crisis. Indeed, this conception of time depended upon a context where things change and evolve towards progress. But, Monaville posits that, today, Congolese people perceive crisis to be the

permanent state of things and not progress. He goes on to explain that “le future, autrefois conçu comme l’horizon de réalisation des promesses de la modernisation développementaliste, semble désormais hors de portée et alors que le passé a perdu son rôle d’intelligibilité” (218). Congolese people are stuck in a perpetual present that is very different from Nixon’s “politics of speed”. It is a state of stagnation in which nothing evolves and where time loses its meaning. In this state, slow violence is visible. This new conception of a time that stagnates, can be recognised in the excerpt from *Généalogie d’une banalité* above. Indeed, the image of Congolese people being uprooted trees posits that they were once rooted, healthy trees that grew higher and stronger every day. But imposed progress was replaced by stagnation in a perpetual present where the trees slowly rot without any perspective of change or improvement. They have no choice but to live in the present “il faut bien qu’ils vivent dans leur temps” (185), even if the present is problematic. Indeed, it is not possible to go back to being rooted since it would mean “barboter dans la même boue que nos ancêtres” (185). This phrase shows that the pre-colonial way of life is not given value anymore. Furthermore, it seems that this past is not relevant to their present any longer. Indeed, their “coutumes” and their “valeurs” (185) do not ring true, they seem fake or conceited. Colonialism has altered the way the Congolese people relate to time, which has had tragic consequences on them. These consequences only became visible after it was clear that the constant progress that modernity was supposed to bring would not become true. Thus the consequences of imposing a new perception of time were delayed in time. The decoupling that time provokes between causes and consequences is one of the reasons why slow violence is often invisible and ignored. Indeed, it is not always easy to see present events’ origins dating back from decades or centuries ago. But fictional texts, like *Généalogie d’une banalité* can make the invisible visible. Indeed, Aanza’s dense prose, full of references and figures of speech brings to light the delayed consequences of colonialism.

4. The Media and Slow Violence

4.1. The Media’s Incapacity of Addressing Nixon’s Slow Violence

As explained above, slow violence is rarely perceived as violence. Indeed, slow violence’s time frame is so large that it does not fit the usual definition of violence and neither does it correspond to the type of violence that the media likes to cover. Slow violence is not visual or spectacular or shocking and therefore it does not get any media attention. The media generally focuses on violence that is sensational and hyper-visible (Nixon 13). In this respect 9/11 has had a considerable impact on the common perception of violence. The 9/11 trauma was

occasioned not only by the terrible loss of human lives but also by the striking images broadcast for hours on every television channel. In an article about 9/11 trauma in literature, Georgiana Banita, posits that “television and other visual media may produce trauma in the sense of belatedness of response, visual saturation, and repetitive working-through” (3). She also explains how the television is ubiquitous in the representation of the 9/11 trauma and argues that television made the witnessing of the trauma a domestic and intimate act (2). Moreover, she posits that mediatisation has become one of terrorism’s main features since 9/11. The intense media attention received by 9/11 has reinforced the tendency to only represent very visual and disturbing violence in the media. Indeed, the 9/11 images are still present in the minds of those who witnessed it and serve as a reference to which the viewers can compare new violent images and as a reference that the media seek to attain when representing violence. Slow violence is the opposite of the 9/11 images since it generally does not offer any type of spectacular images. Fortunately, literature, unlike the media, is interested in slow violence.

4.2. Slow Violence on the Radio: Aanza Makes the Impossible Possible and the Invisible Visible

In *Généalogie d’une banalité*, slow violence does end up in the media, which is very unusual, according to Nixon. Indeed, the Bronx’s story Bronx reveals a lot of slow violence and it is broadcasted by the radio. It was not the radio’s intention to discuss slow violence. On the contrary, it merely wanted to talk about a spectacular accident that is typically violent: the mine collapse. But the radio reveals it unintendedly through the Bronx’s story. In his novel, Aanza creates a discrepancy between the radio’s coverage of the incident and that of the narrators. The radio aims at reporting on the collapse, “nous allons faire la Généalogie de cette actualité malheureuse” (10), while the narrators only rarely evoke the event. Rather, they focus on their everyday life and on the process of building the mine. They do not seem to explain why the accident happened. Indeed, their narration is full of information and events that are only very loosely connected to the mine collapse. This allows the narration to show that the “Généalogie” of an incident like this one is more complicated than one can anticipate. This is because they connect the event to its very old causes and thus to very slow violence. Unlike the radio, the narrators from the Bronx understand that the causes of the accident are very complicated and very old. They have their roots in the history of the country. Therefore, instead of telling the story of the sensational violence that happened here and now, they tell the story of a violence that lurks all around them and that no one addresses.

5. Immobile Displacements

5.1. Nixon's Environmentalism of the Poor

Nixon highlights how the poor are much more likely to suffer from slow violence. He explains how the environment of some poor populations is intrinsically slow violent. Such violent environment are the result of the alteration of a natural traditional environment. Nixon calls these traditional environments *vernacular landscapes*, which he defines as:

A vernacular landscape is shaped by affective historically textured maps that communities have devised over generations, maps replete with names and routes, maps alive to significant ecological and surface geological features. A vernacular landscape, although neither monolithic nor undisputed, is integral to the socioenvironmental dynamics of community (17).

As Nixon explains, *vernacular landscapes* are invaluable for their inhabitants. It is a place in which a community has its roots, and that is significant in terms of culture and history. But these landscapes are compromised when they are transformed into official landscapes, which Nixon defines in these terms:

By contrast, an official landscape – whether governmental, NGO, corporate, or some combination of those – is typically oblivious to such earlier maps; instead, it writes the land in a bureaucratic, externalizing, and extraction-driven manner that is often pitilessly instrumental (17)

An environmentalism of the poor is created when “an official landscape is imposed on a vernacular one” (Nixon 17). In this situation the community's ancestral ties to its land are compromised when a company or an administration inflicts exploitation or extraction to the land. In this situation, Nixon posits that communities can be displaced without moving. Indeed, he broadens the definition of displacement in the same way that he broadens the definition of violence:

I want to propose a more radical notion of displacement, one that, instead of referring solely to the movement of the people from their places of belonging, refers rather to the loss of the land and resources beneath them, a loss that leaves the communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable. (Nixon 19)

Nixon explains how extraction, exploitation, capitalism can destroy a community's tie to its land to the point where this community can be considered as displaced. Moreover, according to Nixon, displacement often plays a central role in slow violence since they “smooth the way for amnesia” and “simplify violence and underestimate, in advance and in retrospect, the human and environmental costs” (7). Displacements, whether mobile or immobile, should always be

considered as slow violence. But immobile displacement is a type of slow violence that is particularly vicious and invisible because the loss of a *vernacular landscape* weakens a community's ties to its culture and its history. This has dramatic effects on the members of the community but is also makes it easier for them to forget how it was before, that is to forget their *vernacular landscape*, and thus the extent of the violence that they have suffered and continue to suffer from.

Généalogie d'une banalité, is set in an environment that has suffered and still suffers from the "global resource wars" (Nixon 17), which motivate extractivism and often create *environmentalisms of the poor*. Indeed, the Congo has been plundered even in the precolonial age for slaves, then in colonial times, for its ivory, its rubber and for its minerals, which are still plundered today (Hochschild 287-288). In fact, Nixon compares today's situation to that described by Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* (120). He underlines the continuity between the colonial and post-colonial eras. Indeed, for him, colonial ideology and its inseparable counterpart, extractivism, still characterise the DRC. Interestingly, colonialism and extractivism seems so closely intertwined for Nixon, that he does not hesitate to state that the current plunderers of the Congo are "a mix of international and indigenous colonialists" (120). Furthermore, colonial and post-colonial extractivism in the Congo has imposed an official landscape on the vernacular Congolese landscape.

5.2. The Bronx Has Lost Its Roots

Aanza shows very well how the Congolese vernacular landscape was corrupted by an official one. When Kafka explains how giving their land a "valeur marchande" has rotted it, he reveals how an official landscape was imposed on their land, which had dramatic consequences. It converted Kafka's ancestors to "chercheurs d'or", meaning that they stop treating their land in the way they always had and started looking at it for its extractive potential. For Kafka, the "valeur marchande" that was attributed to his land is the reason why the Congo is in this situation today, and it is also the reason why the Bronx residents should continue digging in the mine. Kafka only advocates reproducing what his ancestors were taught to do as "chercheurs d'or" and what colonials came to the Congo to do and what foreign companies still come to the Congo for.

The Bronx inhabitants are displaced. Some of them literally, the Bronx is a place when people from all over the Congo end up living. But all of them are what Nixon would call "displaced

without moving”. Indeed, the Bronx is a place that has lost of its vernacular landscape. Kafka seems to feel displaced without moving since he explains that he is not rooted anymore. This metaphor is a perfect illustration of Nixon’s “displacement without moving”. There is no mention in the text that the trees have been moved. But they are still “displaced” because they cannot access the soil’s resources that make their lives possible..The living conditions in the Bronx are dreadful, it is barely inhabitable as it is. After all, it was built in the former *cordon sanitaire*, on the ruins of colonialism. But Aanza makes Nixon’s definition of displacement “a loss that leaves the communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable” (19) literal. By this explanation, Nixon did not mean that being displaced meant living in a place where it was literally impossible to live. Yet, Aanza makes it real when the inhabitants of the Bronx start digging under their houses until the neighbourhood collapse and becomes literally inhabitable.

As Nixon explains, losing one’s vernacular landscape is not only the material loss of resources caused by extraction. It is also the loss of what the land meant to the community. Once again, Aanza makes this clear when Kafka deprecates his cultural heritage calling it “*un tas de fausse bouillie de manioc, un tas de fausses pudeures purulentes*” (185). Vernacular maps have been created and passed from generation to generation but Kafka does not seem to value the way of life of his ancestors, indeed, he does not want to go back to “*barboter dans la même boue que nos ancêtres*” (185). The Bronx’s residents have been disconnected from their vernacular landscape by displacement, colonisation, wars and extractivism. This loss converted them into “*chercheurs d’or*” who have lost their traditional ties to their land.

Chapter 4

The Grotesque

1. Definitions of the Grotesque

1.1. Wolfgang Kayser and the Origins of the Grotesque

The grotesque is a concept that is difficult to define. In conversation, it is used in so many contexts and with so many meanings that it seems to lose its signification. In theoretical approaches, the term has been debated for years, probably because of the fundamental ambivalence and extreme quality of the grotesque (Thompson 10-11). It is with Wolfgang Kayser's *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (1957) that the grotesque became a field of scholarly attention (Thompson 11). Before his publication, the grotesque tended to be disregarded as disharmony or crude humour. Kayser explains that the word "grotesque" comes from the Italian word "grotta", that means "cave" (19). Kayser states that the grotesque was born from a painting found in a cave in Italy during the fifteenth century (19). In *The Modern Satiric Grotesque and Its Traditions*, John R. Clark reports that these paintings:

represented elaborate knots and festoons of floral decorations, designs oddly transforming into snakes, satyrs, mythological animals as well as human figures or parts of human appendages. Hence, [it was] an art that unconscionably mingled and interfused human, animal, vegetable and mineral in eerie and nightmarish fashion. (18)

This style was soon imitated by Italian painters of the Renaissance, which called this new artistic style "la grottesca" (Kayser 20). The illustration on the following page is an example of pictorial grotesque from the Renaissance. It is the work of the engraver Agostino Veneziano who was born in Italy in the late 15th century, precisely when the cave's paintings were

excavated (Kayser 19-21). The description that Clark makes of the cave paintings also seems to suit Veneziano's engraving. The renaissance grotesque, such as Veneziano's engraving, did not respect the basic principle of mimesis and realistic representation, which, at the time, was perceived by some as transgressive (Thompson 12). Thompson explained that this attitude towards the grotesque remained common across the centuries (12).



Figure 2 : Veneziano Agostino. *Grotesque ornamental panel*. Engraving. ca 1520. Victoria and Albert Museum. London.

Furthermore, Kayser describes the grotesque as: “not only something playfully gay and carelessly fantastic, bus also something ominous and sinister in the face of a world totally different from the familiar one” (20). Thus, for Kayser, the grotesque's mingling of the human with nature can convey something deeply frightening or horrifying. Indeed, Meindl explains

that the Kayserian grotesque's represents a "familiar world in the process of dissolution or estrangement, diffusing an aura that instils insecurity, revulsion and terror and causes the disintegration of our sense of soundness, symmetry and proportion" (15). In fact, the Kayserian grotesque plays, sometimes laughingly, sometimes horrifyingly, with the absurdity of existence. The effect that the grotesque provokes in its reader or viewer is at the centre of Kayser's definition of the grotesque. According to him, the grotesque thrived during romanticism and modernism because, in these eras, it became deeper, but also more uncanny and bleak (Meindl 16).

1.2. Bakhtin's Theorisation of Rabelais's Grotesque

In *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin gives a more positive definition of grotesque based on the analysis of Rabelais' work. His definition puts the body at the centre of the grotesque. According to him,

we find at the basis of grotesque imagery a special concept of the body as a whole and of the limits of this whole. The confines between the body and the world and between separate bodies are drawn in the grotesque quite differently than in the classic and naturalist imagery. (315)

As this extract explains, the grotesque questions the separation between the body and the world. It undermines the integrity of the human body as something completely different from the world. Indeed, the grotesque body mixes with the world (310). Furthermore, the grotesque body is associated with death because death is when the body stops belonging to a human being and becomes part of the earth. But it is not seen as negative or frightening. On the contrary, it is perceived as positive, because it is connected to the birth of something or someone new, to the circle of life. Dieter Meindl explains that the Bakhtinian grotesque body is "a vessel through which life flows as it pursues its eternal process of self-renewal" (17). Therefore, the grotesque body is not seen as belonging to the realm of the individual. Another feature of the grotesque body is that it is unfinished and in constant evolution. Bakhtin describes the grotesque body as something intrinsically positive, but its connection to death and its blurry limits with the world is also disturbing and scary.

The parts of the body that symbolise the contact between the body and the outside world are a keystone of the grotesque. The body parts that stick out, like the nose, the penis, the breasts, the potbelly or any deformations, as well as the parts that go in, such as the mouth, the anus and the vagina, play important roles in the grotesque imagery (316). The actions that involve a

material exchange between the body and the world or that undermine the boundaries between the two are also strongly associated with the grotesque. These are actions such as eating, sweating, drinking, copulating, growing old, dying, being sick, dismembering, etc. (317). The grotesque body is tightly linked to nature and the cosmos. It can merge with natural elements such as mountains, rivers or seas (318).

Another characteristic of Bakhtin's definition of the grotesque is that it often inverts or connects the high and the low (307). Consequently, the grotesque often stresses the body's low material condition. The mouth, for example, is very present in the grotesque because it symbolises the start of food's journey from up to down, towards the anus. Moreover, high, spiritual acts, symbols, or people are associated with materiality or corporeality, i.e. the "low". For Bakhtin, the grotesque is deeply ambivalent: it can contain, in one image, both a negative and a positive pole. Therefore, when the grotesque associates high objects with their "low" corporeality, the objects are not reduced to their lower level. On the contrary, they retain both their high and their low aspects. The grotesque is a logic of the opposites, of "the contact between the upper and the lower level" (Bakhtin 309). The Bakhtinian grotesque desacralizes the high by underlining how the high cannot exist or be separated from the low.

1.3. Of the Differences Between Bakhtin's and Kayser's Grotesque

In the introduction of his book, *American Fiction and the Metaphysics of the Grotesque*, Dieter Meindl explains the differences between Bakhtin's joyful and Kayser's sinister definitions of the grotesque. Firstly, he puts forward that they have studied the grotesque in different periods of Western culture: Kayser focused on romanticism and the twentieth century while Bakhtin concentrated on the Renaissance and the Middle Ages (19). Indeed, Bakhtin himself says that the grotesque, from the romantic period onward became more and more bleak (Meindl 20). For Bakhtin, today's grotesque has forgotten its joyful and carnivalesque past (Meindl 20). Secondly, he stresses that Kayser developed his concept of the grotesque on aesthetic grounds, whereas Bakhtin's concept is built from "an existential premise supplied by the notion of the totality of life" (18). According to Meindl, Bakhtin's grotesque is defined by its metaphysical and existential dimension, i.e. the fact that it has a positive view of death as part of the renewal of life (18). Finally, Kayser explains that the divergence between the two authors' definitions of the grotesque is, to some extent, transcended by the ambivalent nature of the grotesque that provokes both laughter and anxiety (19). Indeed, Bakhtin stresses that "we must take into consideration the importance of cosmic terror, the fear of the immeasurable, the infinitely

powerful” (334). According to him, cosmic fear is pervasive in mythologies, religions, philosophies and even languages and systems of representation. He explains that this terror is best represented in the grotesque by the material lower body stratum, for example, in defecation. This representation transforms cosmic fear into laughter or even into a “gay carnival monster” (334). As a result, Bakhtin posits that, in the grotesque, “fear was conquered by laughter” (335). This shows that fear and laughter are both essential parts of the grotesque, but their role and importance vary across time and space. Therefore, Bakhtin’s and Kayser’s views of the grotesque are not mutually exclusive (Meindl 19).

1.4. Rémi Astruc’s Anthropology of the Grotesque

Theorists like Bakhtin and Kayser have focused on the grotesque as an artistic mode. Yet, in his 2010’s *Le Renouveau du Grotesque Dans le Roman du XX^e Siècle. Essai d’Anthropologie Littéraire*, the anthropologist Rémi Astruc explains that the grotesque inside a work of art conveys the grotesque already present in the world. Therefore, the literary or artistic grotesque was born from a real phenomenon. Astruc argues that the real-life grotesque is rooted in the disturbing experience that humans have of alterity and change. He explains that it is difficult for humans to understand how they evolve and change at every instant while remaining the same person. It is also difficult for humans to comprehend how others are the same, i.e. human beings with the same physical and mental capacities as all human beings, and yet different, they are not them. Thus, the grotesque has to do with the experience of living one’s identity inside a society. According to Astruc, alterity and change are both difficult to understand logically and painful to experience in real life. He explains that the grotesque is an instrument that allows humans to express and represent the discordance of reality i.e. change and alterity. In other words, the grotesque is the rendition by the imagination of the practical illogicality of the real world. The grotesque is a framework that makes it possible for humans to conceive alterity and change by allowing two to be one via the use of hybridisation, doubling and metamorphosis. The grotesque responds to the anthropological need for a tool to deal with changing identity and alterity (Astruc 55-61). In other words, Astruc demonstrates why the grotesque exists and how it is used to perform a precise anthropological function, i.e. coping with the illogicity of alterity and change.

1.5. The Grotesque in the African Context

Although Kayser, Bakhtin and Astruc have different interpretations of the grotesque, their work has something in common: they all focused on the grotesque in Western literature or Western art. As a result, the grotesque that Kayser, Bakhtin and Astruc describe in their works can only be partially relevant to the African context. In *On the Postcolony*, Achille Mbembe explains that Bakhtin's grotesque is both relevant to and partly invalid in the African context. It is relevant because what Bakhtin describes as grotesque is very present in the Postcolony, which Mbembe defines as "a given historical trajectory—that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonization and the violence which the colonial relationship involves" (102). Indeed, Mbembe argues that the grotesque and the obscene cannot be dissociated from the post-colonial system of domination (102). This goes against Bakhtin's idea that the grotesque offered a "second world" for the people, away from serious official spheres (Bakhtin 5). Bakhtin's grotesque is a place of resistance for ordinary people against a dominant culture. By contrast, Mbembe posits that the grotesque is present both in the popular and in the official spheres of the Postcolony. In this context, the grotesque is not an act of resistance against a dominant culture. In fact, Mbembe argues against using dichotomies or binary categories about the grotesque.

In her article, "The Grotesque Body of The Postcolony: Sony Labou Tansi And Dambudzo Marechera", Flora Veit-Wild develops another interesting aspect of the African grotesque. She explains that the grotesque in African texts is used to expressed the already existing grotesque of African societies. Her work agrees with Astruc's in the sense that they both think that the grotesque as a literary style is a response to a real-life grotesque. But Astruc's definition of this real-life grotesque is centred on the individual whereas Veit-Wild's definition is at the level of the community. According to her, in using the grotesque, writers only aim to express the "grotesque irrationality of power" that is at play in a large part of Africa. She explains that:

socio-political developments in these areas [Francophone, Lusophone, and Anglophone Africa, Latin America and Southern Asia] have produced a literature that reacts to the absurd with absurdity, to the grotesque with grotesqueness, and to the terrifying with black humour. (228)

Thus, the use of the grotesque, of black humour and of the absurd in *Généalogie d'une banalité* can be seen as reaction to the grotesque, absurd and sometimes terrifying reality that Aanza depicts in his novel. In this respect, Veit-Wild's interpretation of the grotesque resembles Kayser's who also thought that the grotesque was a reaction to absurdity, but not to the

absurdity of power in Africa. He posited that the grotesque played with the absurdity of human existence (Meindl 16).

2. The Grotesque in *Généalogie d'une banalité*

Généalogie d'une banalité is, in many respects, a grotesque text. It contains a lot of the features of the Bakhtinian grotesque, in particular, of its grotesque body. *Généalogie d'une banalité*'s grotesque, is more Bakhtinian than Kayserian even though it is not as light and funny as in Rabelais. Indeed, the grotesque, in Aanza's novel can be funny, but also sad and horrifying for it reflects a reality that is sad and horrifying, as Veit-Wild explains. *Généalogie d'une banalité*'s grotesque also seems to correspond to Astruc's theorisation of the anthropological dimension of the grotesque because identity is a central theme of Aanza's novel. Indeed, the Bronx affirms its identity and its difference through the voices of the narrators.

2.1. Aanza's Grotesque Is African

Généalogie d'une banalité seems to corroborate Mbembe's argument that the grotesque is present in both official and popular contexts in Africa because it shows examples of official uses of the grotesque. The Cheminot describes a funny incident:

Tu sais que les étudiants ils font caca partout? [...] Mais les autorités elles sont contentes, elles sont fières des cacas des étudiants. Un jour, le président même il est arrivé dans l'université et il a dit je ne vois pas le caca des étudiants, donc l'air est grave. Est-ce que quelqu'un il veut faire le coup d'État contre moi? Est-ce que moi le président je suis dans un piège ici? Est-ce que vous affamez les étudiants pour qu'ils se révoltent contre moi? Et le président il a fait une réunion du conseil de sécurité, et la maire de la ville il a dit que président nous allons acheter demain la farine pour le bukari des étudiant. Et demain, on a donné le sac de bunga a chaque étudiant, avec le Thomson et l'huile végétale, et les étudiants ils ont recommencé à déposer le caca partout pour remercier les autorités. (134-135)

It seems completely absurd that the president should care about the students' dung. However, Mbembe explains that faeces are intrinsically linked with the mouth and the belly because they all take part in eating and digesting. Moreover, in the Postcolony, powerful men are also fat men. Therefore the act of eating but also of defecating are linked to power and dung is something worth talking and worrying about (107). Thus, the authorities are proud of the students' faeces because it is a sign of their ability to provide food for them. Mbembe argues that, in the Postcolony the grotesque is a part of the discourse of power. He states that

We need to uncover the use made of the grotesque and the obscene not just in ordinary people's lives but (1) in the timing and location of those occasions that state power organizes for dramatizing its own magnificence; (2) in the actual materials used in the ceremonial displays through which it makes manifest its majesty; and (3) the specific manner in which it offers these, as spectacles, for its "subjects" (cibles) to watch. (Mbembe 104)

In *Généalogie d'une banalité*, the State and the authorities are largely absent as explained in chapter 2, which explains why the narration does not contain many examples of official celebrations of power. The radio does not include many instances of grotesque either because it does not really celebrate the rulers even if it constantly defends them. But the behaviour of the Bronx' community shows that the discourse of power and prestige is associated with the grotesque. The Cheminot, as the only male narrator, provides numerous examples of the association between prestige and power. For instance, he explains that he hates to throw up in public because if you ate well, you lose good food, and if you did not, people can see that "tu mets de la misère dans ton ventre" (84). This would reveal that you are too poor to feed yourself properly. The radio provides an example of the opposite situation. After a short break, the commentator comes back and tells about the good meal "Julia Roberts" who is reading the story had for lunch. In light of Mbembe's work on the grotesque, the radio's comment about food is not innocent. It is a statement about wealth and social standing. Indeed, Mbembe explains that every time that a mouth, a phallus or a belly are mentioned it is "a discourse on the world and on death, a means of auto-interpretation, and of negotiating that interpretation and the forces that may shape it" (107). Therefore, these three parts of the body can never be referred to without a political connotation. Mbembe underlines the importance, for African leaders, to be overweight, because it reveals their wealth as well as their capacity to enjoy themselves (107). Indeed, Maureen reports that :

Ce pays est d'ailleurs ahurissant pour les rondeurs de ses dirigeants et de ces citoyens qui ont réussi en general. Kafka dit que ta biologie doit être bien ronde pour en imposer, si tu n'es pas rond, rondouillard, volumineux, tu n'es nulle part, tu n'existes pas et on ne te considère pas, on ne te voit pas. (27)

By using the word "ahurissant" Aanza underlines the grotesque absurdity of the relationship between power and weight in their country. Kafka repeats four times the implication of not being fat: "tu n'es nulle part, tu n'existes pas et on ne te considère pas, on ne te voit pas" (27), which is an exaggeration that reflects the exaggerated incongruity of needing to be fat to be respected in politics. Another important symbol in the imagery of power is the phallus. Mbembe

states that “the male ruler’s pride in possessing an active penis has to be dramatized through sexual rights over subordinates, the keeping of concubines, and so on” (110). At a more modest level, this behaviour can be identified in the Cheminot’s sexual life and in how he speaks about it:

Elle pensait moi, je suis un vrai mâle, avec un pilon dans la culotte, à cause que mes deux femmes et Chantale elle raconte que moi, je les assomme toutes les nuits avec mon Antonov et ses deux réacteurs qui pompent les litres de vin de palme jusque dans leurs têtes tu dirais l’embouchure du fleuve Congo. (76-77)

In this extract, the Cheminot talks about his sexual life in grotesque, exaggerated and dramatized terms. Dramatized, because he reports what his wives said; and grotesque because the boundaries between his body and the world fade in his mouth. His penis becomes a huge aeroplane, his sperm is transformed into wine and his ejaculation is the mouth of the Congo river. But, as Mbembe explains, every reference to the phallus is a statement about status and power. In this case, the Cheminot asserts his superior status in relation to his wives and to other men.

The grotesque is present both in the way the author represents the Bronx and in the way he recreates official speech. Therefore, it differs from Bakhtin’s theorisation of the grotesque. This is probably due to the different origins of the grotesque that Bakhtin and Mbembe analysed. Bakhtin focused on European texts from the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, while Mbembe studied the grotesque in postcolonial Africa. The differences in the use of the grotesque in the two contexts reflect the particularities of these contexts. Mbembe explains that post-colonial Africa is “chaotically pluralistic”, which entails that “it is in practice impossible to create a single, permanently stable system out of all the signs, images, and markers current” (108). The rulers do not own or control the discourse of power. It also means that these “signs, images and markers current” (108) have fluid meanings that are constantly reinvented by the rulers and the ruled who thus reshape the mythology of power (108). As a result, Mbembe argues that the Postcolony is the regime of unreality, le *régime du simulacre* in French. For Bakhtin, the outburst of ribaldry provoked by the grotesque is directed against the rulers and the official discourse. By contrast, Mbembe argues that derision and vulgarity are an integral part of the official discourse in the Postcolony. Thus, even when the people use derision and vulgarity, they do not mock official speech, they reproduce it. Although there are not many examples of the grotesque in the official speech in *Généalogie d’une banalité*, it still seems that Mbembe’s argumentation is valid in the book. The grotesque does not seem to be a way of escaping the

official world or to subvert it, but it rather appears that it is part of the everyday imagery of power and of identity and alterity problems.

2.2. The Bronx's Bodies are Grotesque Bodies

One of the most important characteristics of the Bakhtinian grotesque body is that the boundaries between the world and the grotesque body are fading, allowing for the body to mix or fuse with the world (Bakhtin 310). Therefore, the grotesque focuses on the parts of the body that express that connection with the outside world i.e. parts that allow the outside to go in (the orifices) and parts that protrude out of the body into the world (the nose, the penis or any other excrescence). In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin states that

the artistic logic of the grotesque image ignores the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body limited space or into the body's depth. Mountains and abysses, such is the relief of the grotesque body; or speaking in architectural terms, towers and subterranean passages. (317)

In *Généalogie d'une banalité*, bodies are called "biologies", buttocks are named "collines de l'humilité" and women's curves are "du relief", which corresponds, almost exactly to what Bakhtin describes above. The use of this vocabulary blurs the boundaries between the world and the bodies. Indeed, the terms "biologie", "colline" and "relief" are usually used in relation to nature. Moreover, the extract above posits that "subterranean passages", which are central in the novel, correspond to the "relief of the grotesque body" (Bakhtin 317). The underground is deeply connected with the grotesque because of the very origin of its name. As explained above, the name "grotesque" comes from the Italian word for cave i.e. "grotta" because an Italian cave that contained antique paintings with grotesque features. Moreover, the fact that these paintings were hidden in the cave suggests that they were underground art, in other words, a form of art that was not commonly accepted. This coheres with Bakhtin's argument that the grotesque comes from popular culture, which is usually disregarded (5). In *Généalogie d'une banalité*, subterranean passages are ubiquitous, since they make up the mine at the heart of the story. Moreover, the Bronx's bodies, especially female ones, are associated with the mine and its numerous galleries. As discussed in Chapter 2, this metaphor is pervasive in the novel. For instance, the two first lines one of Kafka's poems keep recurring in the text. They say "frappez camarades, la terre est une femme enceinte de votre avenir" (73). These verses are grotesque for various reasons. First, because they abolish the separation between women and the earth. Second, they do not focus on the female body as a whole, but on one of its orifice: the vagina.

Finally, by talking of the earth as an impregnated woman, the verses allude to reproduction and thus to the circle of life, which is characteristic of the Bakhtinian grotesque. Therefore, the use of a particular vocabulary and of a repeated metaphor makes the Bronx's bodies grotesque.

2.3. Deformed Identity, Deformed Body

In *Le Renouveau du Grotesque Dans le Roman du XX^e Siècle. Essai d'Anthropologie Littéraire*, Rémi Astruc stresses the importance of the body in the grotesque :

Le corps est la toute première donnée anthropologique : expérience immédiate de soi, de l'autre, des frontières entre soi et l'autre, il est naturellement le point nodal de la question de l'identité et l'altérité et il est la matérialité de ces notions abstraites. Le corps est d'une certaine manière notre seule réalité : nous ne vivons que par le corps. (69)

He further explains that the grotesque artificially reconstitutes the link between the human body and the universe that disappeared in modern societies. He states that "le corps grotesque est par excellence ce lieu de passage et de relations avec l'ensemble de l'univers : celui-ci est ouvert sur l'extérieur, en perpétuel mouvement interne et externe" (71). In this respect, Astruc and Bakhtin have the same vision of a grotesque body that connects with the universe. Astruc's explanation of the role of the body in the grotesque is useful to understand and interpret Aanza's use of the grotesque in *Généalogie d'une banalité*. For instance, in the following extract Maureen, the white woman that invested in the mine, undergoes an identity crisis that Aanza describes in grotesque terms. All her life, Maureen has been considering herself superior to the people living in the Bronx which she describes as a "quartier minable" (16). However, her feelings change when she faces serious financial difficulties. Her money problem is what spurs her to accept Kafka's proposal to invest in the Bronx's mine. This makes her realise that "il n'y a que l'argent qui sépare les gens" (218). Knowing that she is no different from the Bronx's residents, Maureen has to reconsider her whole identity:

Maureen sentit quelque chose se rompre indistinctement au tréfonds d'elle. Elle ne put saisir tout de suite ce qui arrivait à sa biologie alourdie. Ses jambes semblaient s'enfoncer dans la terre et elle poussait comme un arbre, la lumière du soleil la traversait et la trempait, en plus de la fluidité de l'air frais des journées de jardinages qu'elle appelait affectueusement sa petite semaine, elle sut que c'était cela devenir un arbre, être planté dans cette terre et se nourrir de sa lumière et de sa glaise, des chairs pourries et des os décomposés des gens qui sont morts, elle se confondait à cette terre-là qui remontait dans ses veines pour faire d'elle un bloc immuable, identique à ce qui l'entourait, à la misère qui l'entourait... Elle devenait une misère maquillée et parée de bijoux, une misère parfumée, une misère habillée avec la classe de ceux qui savent distinguer le tissu du

sac, la couture du tressage, le style des tristes coupes ou l'art de l'artisanat, tout cela était porté par la boue qui ravalait les racines mêmes de la plante qu'elle était devenue. (215)

The way she expresses this identity change confirms Astruc's interpretation of the grotesque. According to him, the grotesque is a tool to handle the difficulty of understanding and coping with shifting identities. Thanks to three privileged operations, coupling, hybridisation and metamorphosis, the grotesque enables the expression of the ambivalence of the self. These operations allow the coexistence in the grotesque of one's past self and one's present self. In the extract above, Maureen's identity change is expressed as a metamorphosis, which reflects her natural feeling of distress. She has the frightening sensation of losing control of what she is. Aanza describes how her body is turning into a tree, which also exemplifies how the grotesque blurs the boundaries between the body and the world. As a matter of fact, the cave painting that inspired the name "grotesque" depicted precisely human, animal and floral forms mingling together (Clark 18). Moreover, the excerpt also alludes to death and the circle of life, which is at the core of Bakhtin's conception of the grotesque. Maureen explains how, like a tree, she feeds on the decomposed bodies that make up the soil in which her roots are. Hence, death enables Maureen's tree to live and to grow. As explained above, death, in the grotesque, often has a positive connotation because the grotesque stresses how it is intrinsically connected to life. However, the words that Aanza chooses to describe the dead bodies, such as "chairs pourries" and "os décomposés" (215) insist on and exaggerate the abject aspect of death.

Aanza uses the grotesque to explain how Maureen's identity change made her feel. However, as Astruc explained, the grotesque is also a way to cope with alterity. In the extract above, Maureen's identity change leads her to reconsider her relationship to others and especially to the inhabitants of the Bronx. The boundaries of her body fade and she becomes a part of nature but also a part of the misery that has always surrounded her. She explains how she is identical (*identique*) to her environment, i.e. misery. But not any misery, Aanza compares Maureen to "une misère maquillée et parée de bijoux, une misère parfumée, une misère habillée avec la classe de ceux qui savent distinguer le tissu du sac, la couture du tressage" (215). Aanza reverses the desacralization of the high that characterises the Bakhtinian grotesque by sacralising the low, i.e. misery. In other words, Aanza associates the abject, the misery to sophistication, luxury and wealth. Following her grotesque breakthrough, Maureen says that she is filled with shame and that she now feels close to Lubumbashi's Africans (215). Although the book does not explain why Maureen feels ashamed, it seems that her revelation leads her to regret her past life, and particularly, the way she used to treat the blacks and the poor of Lubumbashi. She feels

that her life was maybe not as pure as she thought : “Maureen souhaite être marquée, pour toujours, du sceau de la déchéance et de la déreliction” (215). Furthermore, the fact that she metamorphoses into a tree shows that her relation to the place she lives in evolves. In fact, she grows roots, which feeds from the good (sa lumière et sa glaise) and the bad (des chaires pourries et des os décomposés des gens qui sont morts) that is found in the soil. This shows how she deeply reconnects with her environment and its history since, in the passages before and after the extract above, Maureen reflects about the history of her city. This suggests that Maureen gains a critical understanding of colonialism, which leads her to a certain form of repentance.

2.4. Tutu Jean: a Body Out of Control

Before living in the Bronx, Tutu Jean worked as a chauffeur for the President of the Republic. But he had serious difficulties in doing his job:

Distingué chauffeur du président de la République, avec les cravates, les chemises blanches, les chaussures bien lustrées par un cirage et les courbettes référentielle qui vont avec. Les autres chauffeurs de la présidence de la République lui avaient jeté un sort : il [Tutu Jean] avait subitement envie de faire caca, chaque fois que le Président montait dans le véhicule. Sa biologie lui échappait, elle se déréglaient et les fluides grondaient comme du tonnerre dans son ventre. (173)

Tutu Jean’s problem is deeply rooted in the grotesque. Bakhtin highlights that the bowels are an important part of the grotesque imagery. He explains that the bowels demonstrate how the body is never finished and always in the process of being created and creating another body (317). In this extract, Tutu Jean’s bowels refuse to obey him. According to Astruc, the grotesque can express how the body can be mysterious and treacherous:

Or cette dimension secrète du corps se trouve également traduite par le grotesque qui fait de lui un élément suspect, susceptible de faire défaut, capable de trahir son propriétaire, de se transformer sans son consentement, de lui échapper pour paraître obéir à une volonté mystérieuse et extérieure – jusqu’à la trahison suprême qu’est la mort. (Astruc 73)

Each time that Tutu Jean drives the President, he mysteriously loses control over his bowels. This could reveal his real opinion about the President. It seems that his disgust for the government materialises against his will when he is in presence of the President and leads him to defecates uncontrollably. His body reveals his true feeling of disgust towards the Congolese authorities. For Tutu Jean, this situation is very stressful and even slightly horrifying, which, for Kayser, is characteristic of the grotesque. Indeed, as Meindl explains the Kayserian

grotesque combines “attractive and repulsive element, comic and tragic aspects, of ludicrous and horrifying features” (14). Meindl argues that either the bright or the dark pole of the grotesque can be highlighted. The following extract shows that Tutu Jean’s situation takes a more comical than sinister tone:

Le Président recevait un autre président et ils avaient pris le chemin de l’hôtel où les attendaient les autres membres du gouvernement, un banquet et les journalistes pour la suite du programme de cette visite officielle. D’abord, le Président demanda à Tutu Jean de baisser les vitres. Mais l’odeur était trop forte, si forte qu’elle étouffait Tutu Jean lui-même :

- Tutu Jean, ume nyamba ? Est-ce que tu as sali ton pantalon ?
- Oui, Président !
- Arrête la voiture.

Le Président invita alors son distingué visiteur éclaboussé par la puanteur du rectum de Tutu Jean à descendre pour changer de voiture. (173-174)

Bakhtin explains that dung connects humans to the cosmos since it links their bodies to the earth. Dung, thus, makes the cosmic closer and more intimate, which is scary. But he argues that the fear of the cosmic is both expressed and defeated by the grotesque, thanks to its comical nature (335). Thanks to its comical dimension the excerpt above vanquishes cosmic fear as well as the fear of losing control of one’s body. The comical dimension of the extract owes a lot to the clash between the prestige and reputation of the high spheres of power and the smells of the lower stratum of the body. This is highlighted by the vocabulary used to describe the unpleasant event. Not one of the words used is unappealing while the situation they describe is nauseating. By contrast, the vocabulary is detached and sophisticated, which fits the official setting in which the event takes place. The distinguished synaesthesia of the phrase “éclaboussé par la puanteur du rectum de Tutu Jean” successfully conveys the revolting nature of the event. This is because it alludes to the graphical aspect of diarrhoea as well as to its smell, and its origin, the rectum. The discrepancy between a distinguished vocabulary and a disgusting meaning, and the discordance between an official context and a bodily necessity seem to reveal that the even the officials defecate and that the even the most politically correct official speech can hide disgusting truths. As Flora Veit-Wild explains, the grotesque in African literature is often used to express the grotesque reality of power in Africa. The absurdity of this extract seems to mirror the absurdity of the relationships of power in the DRC. Tutu Jean’s reaction to being in the presence of the President can be seen as an allegory of what Congolese people feel about the DRC’s authorities. By associating dung and power, Aanza suggests that power in the Congo is

not clean and pure but dirty and corrupt. Therefore, the author's use of the grotesque can be read as a denunciation of the perversion of the power relationships in the Congo.

2.5. Scatology that ties bodies together

Scatology holds an important place in the grotesque imagery. In *The Modern Satiric Grotesque and Its Traditions*, John Clark identifies scatology as one of the stratagems of the grotesque (116). The extracts above, about Tutu Jean, were already a good example of how scatology is represented in Aanza's novel. However, there are two other moments in the text where scatology, and urine, in particular, play an important role. When he was young, Séraphin had a problem. He tended to wet his bed, which unnerved his father. The night Kafka found Belladone, he put her to sleep next to his son Séraphin who immediately warned her that he wetted his bed. To his surprise, Belladone said that she did that too. And in the morning, as Belladone explains, "nous étions heureux du baptême d'urine refroidie qui avait scellé notre fraternité" (47). Belladone and Séraphin might not share blood, but sleeping in each other's urine made them family. A few years after the event, Kafka finds Vieux Z unconscious because he is inebriated. He asks Belladone to urinate in Vieux Z's mouth to save him. This technique is only supposed to work if it is a woman who urinates in the drunkard's mouth. But Belladone is very young and this act is, for her, what marked her transition from girl to woman. As these two examples illustrate, urine plays an important role in Belladone's life. In fact, it corresponds to the two times when Belladone's life changed: being adopted by Kafka and becoming a woman (55). Once again, the manifestation of the grotesque in the text corresponds to identity changes. Here, these moments are also important in terms of relationships, and thus, in terms of alterity. Indeed, Belladone's urine seems to tie her to people. It seals her kinship with Séraphin and foreshadows her love story with Vieux Z. As a result, the grotesque at play here brings the untouchable, invisible realm of human relationships into the realm of materiality. The invisible bond that links Belladone with Séraphin and Vieux Z is made visual and corporeal because it corresponds to the exchange of bodily fluids. Thus, the grotesque transforms something that is felt into corporeal reality. In addition, it associates "high" concepts such as siblinghood and romantic love with something "low" i.e. urine.

2.6. Belladone and Vieux Z or Life and Death

According to Bakhtin, the grotesque body is connected to life and death, to the circle of life. Consequently, it is not static and finished, but in constant evolution (Bakhtin 317). This also means that the grotesque body can never be conceived alone it is always linked to other bodies since the death of one body is the birth of another (Bakhtin 318). Thus, the grotesque body is essentially dual (Bakhtin 322). In *Généalogie d'une banalité*, an improbable couple seems to embody the circle of life: Belladone and Vieux Z. Kafka explains that “ses oreilles avaient entendu Belladone sortir ses propres mots pour dire qu'elle avait le cœur soufflé par l'amour et grillé par le désir d'une momie dérisoire, un zombie de l'insignifiance de Vieux Z” (210). By using the words “momie” and “zombie” to describe Vieux Z, Kafka associates him with death. Indeed, Vieux Z is very old and he does not have one tooth left in his mouth. As a result, he represents sickness and death. By contrast, Belladone is beautiful and young, thus, she personifies youth. But since she is a prostitute she also embodies the sexual energy usually associated with life. Oddly enough, of all the people she could fall in love with, Belladone fell for Vieux Z. Their union is grotesque because it unites life and death into a joyful couple.

Belladone and Vieux Z's union can also be perceived as a case of situational irony. As Cameron Shelley explains in her article “The Bicoherence Theory of Situational Irony”, situational irony “defies the normal way in which situations fit with their repertoire of concepts, that this misfit is noteworthy in some way, that it evokes a particular kind of emotional response, and, perhaps, that it has a special, moral significance” (775). This explanation can be applied to the relationship between Belladone and Vieux Z. Indeed, a young, beautiful woman and a toothless old man do not normally go together. Therefore, they represent a misfit in the habitual concept of couple. This can lead to a wide range of emotional responses. The reader will probably find it funny whereas it makes Kafka feel despondent. It can also have plural moral significations. It can be seen as a representation of the circle of life, as explained above; or as an illustration of the fact that love is blind; or as an unresolved Oedipus complex. Cameron Shelley explains that situational irony rests on the concept of bicoherence. Two elements are bicoherent if they are incoherent but belong to the same conceptual class (Shelley 779). Belladone and Vieux Z would normally be incoherent because they belong to two different conceptual classes, beauty and youth for the former, and old age and sickness for the latter. However, because of their romantic relationship, their differences are united into their couple. Therefore Belladone and Vieux Z's couple is both grotesque and ironical.

3. The Role of the Grotesque in *Généalogie d'une banalité*

The examples above show the pervasiveness of the grotesque in *Généalogie d'une banalité*. These examples also illustrate how the grotesque is used in a wide range of situations and in a lot of different ways. However, the themes of identity and alterity are present in many of the examples. Indeed, in Aanza's novel, both alterity and identity play an important role. In writing their story, the Bronx narrators affirm their shifting identities inside their community. Alterity is also at the core of the novel because the Bronx constitutes Otherness for the radio. Moreover, alterity is also an issue inside the Bronx since each character has to negotiate his identity in relation to the others around him. It seems that the grotesque is a way of exteriorising identity and alterity problems. As such, it corroborates with Astruc's anthropological approach of the grotesque.

Généalogie d'une banalité's grotesque is also a response to the grotesque aspect of the situation that Aanza depicts in his novel. Aanza's book is full of absurdity and exaggerations which only reflect all the absurdity of the Congolese situation. Digging under your house in the hope of finding copper and becoming rich seems absurd and far-fetched. But so does being extremely poor in one of the regions of the world that is the richest in minerals. Aanza's book is the product of the problematic situation of the Congo. His style is a way of revealing the sad absurdity that tragic events in the Congo that are merely "des banalités". Aanza's grotesque is sometimes funny, but it mainly makes his reader feel uneasy and sad because she/he can feel that it portrays a very dark reality.

The grotesque in *Généalogie d'une banalité* retains a very important characteristic of the Bakhtinian grotesque that Mbembe did not discuss in his transposition of Bakhtin's grotesque to the context of the Postcolony. The grotesque in Aanza's novel "lowers" some concepts that are usually considered as "high". This has been pointed out above in the discussion about the importance of urine in Belladone's life and for her relationships, for example. But there is one important use of "lowering" that has not been discussed yet: the lowering of the concept of literature. For example, the second chapter of *Généalogie d'une banalité* is called "de la littérature dans les ordures" (16). This degradation of the habitually prestigious notion of literature is something that recurs in the book. For instance, it gives the name of an illustrious writer, Franz Kafka, to a school teacher living in a third-world slum. Furthermore, the choice of Franz Kafka for one of the most important characters in the book seems far from innocent. Indeed, one of the most striking feature of Franz Kafka's work is the recurrence of the grotesque

mode. Moreover, this teacher, Kafka, creates poems “comme l’urine sort d’une biologie sensible qui s’est trop longtemps retenue” (37). By associating literature to urine, Aanza gives it corporeal materiality. Invisible words are given a shape, a texture and a smell. This literally brings down literature and speech in general since instead of coming out of the mouth, words now come out of the penis, i.e. the lower stratum of the body. This desacralizes literature. Therefore, it can be read as a political statement that posits that literature is not just for the elite but also belongs “dans les ordures” (16).

Chapter 5

The Power of the Radio

1. The Radio Show As a Means to Introduce Orality in the Novel

Généalogie d'une banalité is a novel like no other. One of its numerous particularities is that the book is the transcript of a radio show. But the radio show is only the frame narrative of an imbedded story told by four narrators that a radio speaker reads for the radio's listeners. The radio plays an important role in the Congolese media landscape. Indeed, as Gilbert Mubangi Bet'ukany explains in his article "Le parcours de la presse congolaise et le rôle de l'oralité comme relais de l'information en Afrique" in the Congo, "pour la grande majorité de la population analphabète vivant à la campagne, l'oralité et la radio restent les seuls moyens d'information" (2). A large part of the Congolese population has no access to the written press, or even to the social media because they cannot read or write. In this situation where illiteracy is the norm even in the adult population, orality is the main medium of communication and information. This observation even led Mamadou Gouro Sidibe, a Malien entrepreneur, to develop a voice-based social media available in numerous West African Languages, as related in an article called "Global Development: Illiterate entrepreneurs in Mali now have their own social media app" published in the *Los Angeles Times* on June 17th 2019. This social media, called Lenali, is designed to allow illiterate people to use it. Mamadou Gouro Sidibe's initiative shows the crucial role that orality plays in Africa. Aanza's choice of making the radio the main protagonist of his novel, enables him to put orality at the centre of his novel. Although his book is in written form, the radio frame makes every word in the book immediately oral. The central role of the radio in his book reflects the key role that it actually plays in the DRC. Moreover, by having a novel that is undeniably oral, Aanza conveys and renews his country's oral story-

telling tradition. By doing so, the author moves away from the canons of the Western novel and proposes a novel whose form is deeply influenced by the African context in which it was written. In *Généalogie d'une banalité*, Aanza appropriates the novel form and hybridizes it to enable it to truly convey the realities that he depicts in the book.

2. The Radio Show As a Grotesque Parody of the Congolese Official Speech

Généalogie d'une banalité's radio show can be read as a parody of the Congolese official speech. As a result every flaw, every absurdity, every incoherence of the radio's speech can be seen as the reflection of a problem in the Congolese official speech. As Flora Veit-Wild explains in her article about the grotesque in Africa, African writers merely "converted the absurd realities of the societies in which they lived into texts with an absurd, a grotesque, a mad quality" (229). The radio discourse in *Généalogie d'une banalité* is grotesque because it reproduces the absurdity of the Congolese official speech.

The radio show has a strange relation with the story that it reads. Indeed, the radio lacks the slightest respect for the story and its authors but it still decides to dedicate an entire day to reading it. This is the first incoherence of a long list of absurdities committed by the radio. Instead of being grateful to the authors of the stories they are reading for making their radio show possible, the radio thanks a Congolese minister: "Cette émission spéciale est un cadeau de Son Excellence notre ministre de tutelle et de la redaction de votre chaine nationale" (9). The radio thanks a member of the government for something that four members of the people have done, which is illogical and offensive. This seems to denounce how the Congolese official speech praises the government even when it does not deserve it. It also points at how the official speech underrepresents the people's achievements and merits while overrepresenting the government's. Thanking the wrong person is both ironical and grotesque. Ironical, because it attributes the right thing, i.e. gratitude, to the wrong people, i.e. the government and grotesque because the absurdity of thanking the wrong person only reproduces the absurdity already present in the Congolese official speech.

The radio attributes the credit for all the positive thing that are happening in the country to the government. By contrast, when the radio talks about something negative, it is never the fault of the government but that of the people. For instance:

Nous rappelons qu'il a été question, dans le grand reportage d'hier donc, de comment des citoyens de l'Est de notre pays ont aidé et continuent d'aider les pays voisins de l'Est à se prévaloir de nos productions agricoles et minières. Vous êtes nombreux à avoir été choqués par ces inciviques qui ont imposé ces pays de l'Est comme les plus grands producteurs mondiaux de notre coltan, de notre diamant, de notre pétrole, de notre or, de notre café, de nos patates douces et même de nos bananes et de notre bière de banane. (27)

In this extract, the radio speaks about the Eastern part of the country, which is devastated by the war and plunders. The radio blames the situation on Congolese citizens that the host calls “inciviques”, as he also calls the people of the Bronx. But the radio refuses to acknowledge even the smallest responsibility for what is happening in the East, which is absurd, for a State has a political responsibility for what happens in its country. The long and illogical list at the end of the extract, reflects how exaggerated it is for the radio, i.e. the official speech, to put all the responsibility of the problems in the East on its citizens. Indeed, the “inciviques” can hardly be the sole responsible for the plundering of coltan, diamonds, oil, gold, coffee, sweet potatoes, bananas and banana bier. The absurdity of this list reflects the absurdity of what the radio is claiming. It is ironic to call “inciviques” the people they accuse of plundering the East. Indeed, “inciviques” means not fulfilling ones duties as a citizen. But, as explained, in chapter 2, the Congolese State does not fulfil its duties as a State. It fails to pay its employees, to provide education and food to its people, and also to ensure the security of its citizens, particularly in the East. Therefore, the State calling its citizens “inciviques” is the pot calling the kettle black. Nevertheless, the radio does not hesitate to call itself “l'exemple de l'éthique et du civisme” (10). As Elara Bertho explains in her article about *Généalogie d'une banalité*,

Le lecteur comprend bien vite que l'artifice de la langue radiophonique est telle qu'elle masque en réalité un vide: l'abandon des quartiers par les pouvoirs publics la misère des bidonvilles, l'exploitation des ressources minières du pays par des promoteurs étrangers, les répercussions de la dictature de Mobutu sont ainsi passés sous un silence paradoxal. (Bertho 88)

The radio, and the government are far from being “l'exemple de l'éthique et du civisme” (10). But this is something that the reader understands very early in the book. Indeed, the absurdity of the official speech and its disrespect for the Congolese people is something that keeps recurring in the radio show. For instance, the story that the Cheminot, Belladone, Maureen and l'auteur inconnu tell is tragic. It ends with the destruction of the neighbourhood and with the possible deaths of diggers, school children and Belladone. The tragic fate of the Bronx reveals how the State has abandoned its citizens. But on top of that, the official speech is unable to show empathy for the tragedies that the Congolese people have to endure. When Belladone

explains that the mine collapsed over her (“la terre est tombee et je sais que c’est fini” 276) the comment that the radio makes after this extract does not show any sign of empathy:

À la une, douze okapis disparus depuis bientôt une semaine de la réserve d’Epulu viennent d’être retrouvés par une patrouille de Casques bleus. Quatre sont morts, visiblement par balle, six sont dans un état critique et viennent d’être transférés d’urgence à l’hôpital militaire de la base navale ougandaise du lac Albert. L’état des autres est plutôt satisfaisant, ils font route pour regagner la réserve où la sécurité a été renforcée. Les enquêtes se poursuivent pour savoir quel groupe armé est à la base de cet acte qui a choqué le monde entier. (277)

Instead, the radio talks about the tragic disappearance of okapis. They do not say anything about the possible deaths of all the people trapped in the debris of mine. The radio does not report on how many of them are still in there, how many are dead, how many are injured. By contrast, they report a lot of information about the okapis. In fact, it is frustrating for the reader not to know what happens to the victims of the mine collapse. But apparently, the radio does not have the same reading, for they do not think to or want to inform their listeners about the fate of the victims. Once again, this extract is both ironical and grotesque.

The radio’s statement seems ironic considering what precedes it. In fact, it consists in a particular type of irony in which irony is not intended by an ironist but caused by the situation. Therefore, it is usually called situational irony (Muecke *Irony* 28). Cameron Shelley theorised situational irony with the prism of cognitivism in an article called “The Bicoherence Theory of Situational Irony”. Her approach is very different from the traditional ones that usually focus on irony as a textual phenomenon. Shelley, on the contrary, theorises the irony that can be found in everyday situations. This suits our analysis because our extracts imitates real life situational irony even if it textualized. That is because the irony is unintended and seems to result from a coincidence since the radio host only speaks about the dead okapis because it is a news item, not because it could be linked to the mining accident. He does not make a link between the dead okapis and the dead people. The reader, however, cannot ignore the ironical relationship between the two.

According to Shelley’s article, “situational irony is recognized when the accepted interpretation of a situation displays a bicoherent conceptual structure, affords adequate cognitive salience, and evokes an appropriate configuration of emotions” (Shelley 778). Bicoherence is the contrary of coherence. In other words, two elements are bicoherent if they belong to the same class but incohere with each other or if they cohere with each other but belong to different classes (779). In our case, the two elements are the deaths of the people in

the mine and the deaths of the okapi. The facts are coherent, they belong to the same class (unfortunate events) because they are similar. Their bicoherence lies in the way these facts are exposed: disproportionately (782). Shelley defines disproportion as “a kind of negative association between two concepts in which each concept has the magnitude usually associated with the other” (282). This seems relevant to our extract because the death of four animals should hardly be considered as an “acte qui a choqué le monde entier”. Indeed, the strength of this reaction is disproportioned when talking about a few animals. However, it would seem much more appropriate if it commented on the deaths of the people in the mine. The strength is not the only disproportion between the two elements since the length of the statement about the okapis is also disproportioned. The reader is craving for more information about the victims of the mine collapse yet nothing is said about that. By contrast, he is given all the details about the discovery of the disappeared okapis which is of little interest to him.

According to Shelley’s definition of situational irony quoted above, the ironical sequence must be bicoherent but must also have “adequate cognitive salience” as well as evoking “an appropriate configuration of emotions” (778). Shelley explains that the recognition of a schema in an ironic sequence increases its salience (783). The analysed extract contains the recognisable schema of euphemism by exaggerated comparison. For example, it corresponds to the pattern of: “two people you know were killed in a car accident last week, but think of the hundreds of Rohingyas being massacred every day in Burma”. The purpose of such a schema is to euphemise the first event of the comparison by linking it to a more serious event. In this pattern, the link between the two events of the comparison is very thin and thus results in exaggeration. What makes our extract ironical is that it misuses this scheme while retaining its recognisable structure. It says “a lot of people died in the mine collapse but think of the four dead okapis” when it should say “four okapis died but think of all the people that perished in the mine collapse”. This incongruity between the way things are logically presented, according to our anthropocentric society, and the way they are actually presented is precisely what makes a sequence ironical according to D.C. Muecke (*Irony* 32).

However, one element of Shelley’s definition of situational irony is still missing: it must evoke “an appropriate configuration of emotions”(778). She explains that “the bigger the emotional response to the ironical sequence, the bigger the cognitive salience”, but she remains evasive on the nature of the emotions needed. Muecke confirms the importance of the emotional response by saying: “ironies will be more or less forceful in proportion to the amount of emotional capital the reader or observer has invested in the victim or topic of the irony” (*The*

Ironie 55). The more the reader is emotionally invested in the story, the more she/he cares about the victim, the harder will the irony strike him. In the extract above, the topic is the possible deaths of the Belladone, Kafka's school children and a lot of mine workers, which is highly emotional. Therefore, the extract fulfils all of Shelley's criterion of situational irony.

Ironie sequences similar to the extract above are frequent in *Généalogie d'une banalité*. It allows Aanza to denounce some aspects of the DRC current political reality in a subtle and amusing way. Here, he shows the indifference of the Congolese political class, that the official radio channel broadcasting the show stands for, to the suffering of the Congolese people. Because the irony is the result of the reader's pragmatic work (Muecke *The Ironie*), the denunciation is only implied, which allows for the extract to keep a relatively light tone considering the gravity of the facts. According to Linda Hutcheon, irony provokes emotional reactions (2). As a result, it has a strong potential for political contestation (Hutcheon 15). The emotive charge of irony allows it to touch its reader's feelings, thus, transforming the political contestation into something emotional. Consequently, it reduces the gap between the reader and the political issues that the irony contests. However, irony allows the reader to keep his critical distance (Steele 90), which differentiates irony from other emotion engaging political discourse strategies. Therefore, the extract conveys a strong political statement. The extract's political dimension is not explicit which enables the excerpt to retain its light, fictional dimension.

The irony that is described above can be seen as grotesque irony. This irony is grotesque because it rests on absurdities and incoherencies that express the real absurdity and incoherencies of the Congolese official speech. Indeed, this extract is coherent with Flora Veit-Wild's interpretation of the African grotesque. According to her, the African grotesque reflects "the absurdity of power in modern [African] states through driving narration itself ad absurdum". Thus, the absurdity and the incoherence of the radio's comments only reflects the absurdity of the Congolese official speech. This extract consists in the grotesque exaggeration of how the Congolese government does not care for its people. It prefers to mourn the disappearance of four okapis rather than of a dozen of its citizens. Moreover, this extract is also grotesque in the Bakhtinian sense of the term. Connecting a human catastrophe to an animal one brings the realm of humanity down to the level of animality. As explained in the chapter about the grotesque, the movement from up to down is at the core of Bakhtin's interpretation of the grotesque. This connection between the human realm and the animal realm undermines the limits as well as the sacredness of the human body. The redefinition of the boundaries between the human body and the world, is the key characteristic of the grotesque body,

according to Bakhtin (315). Furthermore, the extract that is presented is both funny, because it is absurd, and sad and horrifying because it shows how little the government cares for its people. The hesitation between laughing and crying is yet another characteristic of the grotesque. But, as Flora Veit-Wild explains, the grotesque absurdity of the government caring more about okapis than about Congolese citizens expresses the real absurdity of how little the government cares about its citizens.

As explained above, the radio does not respect the narrators of the Bronx. It does not give them any credit for writing the story they are reading in their show. It does not respect the Bronx either, even if this neighbourhood is at the heart of the story. In introducing the Bronx's story, the radio describes the Bronx as an "abomination" and a "maudit quartier" (9), while describing its inhabitants as "[des] inciviques d'Elisabethville qui n'ont pas arrêté de penser que ce pays c'est le cabinet de leur cousin, ou même le champs de maïs de leur grand-mère" (9). The attitude of the radio towards the Bronx posits the Bronx and its inhabitants as *Other*, which reveals the reproduction of a feature of colonialist ideology. In, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*, Elke Boehmer explains that the European colonisers characterised the colonised as "secondary, abject, weak, feminine" and colonials defined themselves by opposition to that (80-81). Aanza mocks the radio for mimicking some typically colonial behaviour. Indeed the radio's reproduction of colonial behaviours is incoherent because the radio often makes passionate statements against colonial ideology. After Maureen speaks of her childhood in colonial Congo, the radio states:

Quelques petits paragraphes supprimés pour lecture malveillante de l'histoire de notre chère nation. Nous allons diffuser un extrait du discours intemporel de notre héros national en guise de rectification. Nous vous prévenons par ailleurs qu'aucun ressortissant étranger n'a le droit de revendiquer la terre de notre pays, à moins que les autorités compétentes ne lui accordent la nationalité. (14)

This extract shows how the radio ignores and even denies the country's colonial past. The host says that Maureen has a "lecture malveillante de l'histoire" (14) of the DRC, when all she does is telling memories dating back to the Congo's colonial past. It seems that even mentioning the country's colonial past is unpatriotic and subversive to the eyes of the radio. It is striking how the radio feels threatened by the smallest thing that the narrators say. This attracts the reader's attention on the power of words. In this extract, the radio wants to use words, i.e. Lumumba's famous independence speech as a "rectification" (14). But Lumumba's speech only reveals how the promises of the independence have been tragically betrayed. Indeed, Lumumba's speech

speaks of a country where the government is good to its citizens and privileges the interests of the Congo and the Congolese people over foreign interests. Unfortunately, the situation that Aanza's novel describes is one where foreign companies and foreign investors as well as the Congolese leaders are the only one whose interests are looked after by the government. When the radio says "qu'aucun ressortissant étranger n'a le droit de revendiquer la terre de notre pays" (14), it seems ironical since the government allows foreign companies to exploit the Congolese mines. The narrators of the story make that very clear because they speak a lot of the Chinese that they describe as the ones making money from the mines. The nonsense of the radio's attitude towards the country's colonial past only mirrors the incongruities of the real Congolese official speech.

3. The Radio v.s. The Bronx: a Textual Battle

3.1. The Radio's Domination Over the Bronx's Story

The radio's censorship and its constant eruption in the story reveal how to its eyes, the Bronx's story presents a subversive threat. The radio censors parts of the story that it judges dangerous and its commentaries aim at rectifying what the narrators say, or at diffusing the subversive threat that their narration presents. Therefore, the radio's othering of the Bronx, and its indifference to the suffering of the Bronx's neighbour can be read as a way of undermining the narrators' credibility. After Belladone explains how the mining project started, and how it is related to the situation of the country that "appartient aux investisseurs étrangers" (38) and to the downfall of the Gécamines, the radio states:

Extraits supprimés pour lecture abusive de la situation sociale du pays et interprétation bancale et zigzagante des dispositions légales définissant l'État, comme les prérogatives du gouvernement. Référez-vous, pour ces notions, à l'interview magistrale, ô combien substantielle et brillante, du professeur conseiller du chef de l'État au collège de la Justice et de l'État de droit qu'interrogeait notre confrère Tutu Ignace-Chrysostome Tumba Ditalala wa Ngogi Kabiji. (40-41)

In this extract, the radio tries to diffuse the threat that Belladone's explanations present by advising the audience to listen to the official speech. If the radio deems the Bronx's story dangerous, why does it broadcast it? The radio says that it is for journalistic and informative reasons. Yet the radio has something to win from broadcasting it, i.e. attracting a larger audience. As Anna Holmes explains in her *New York Times* article "Who Gets to Tell Other People's Stories?", there are two motivations one can have for telling someone else's story: empathy or exploitation. As she puts it: "empathy is about deepening connections. Exploitation,

about filling one's pockets" (Holmes 27). She develops what empathy is, explaining that it rests on respecting and maybe even understanding other points of views. In the extract above, it is clear that the radio does not respect or try to understand Belladone's point of view. On the contrary, the radio rejects Belladone's views completely. The radio says that what Belladone explains is not true, thus, it does not respect her opinion. According to Holmes (27), if the radio does not tell the Bronx's story out of empathy, it must do so for exploitative purposes. She explains that telling a story out of exploitation is telling a story for self-interest. Exploitation seems to be the radio's motivation for telling the Bronx's story. Telling it presents two advantages for the radio. The first is that it can boost its audience. The radio, at the beginning of the show is very proud to announce that reading the Bronx's story will make up "la lecture sans doute la plus longue de tous les temps" (9). The second is that it provides an occasion for the radio to criticise and mock the Bronx and its story. The show gives the radio a certain control about the facts of what happened in the Bronx. It seems that the Bronx's mining catastrophe is common knowledge among the auditors of the radio show. Telling the story on the national radio allows the official speech to control and even to appropriate the story of the Bronx's mining project. In editing, commenting and censoring the story the radio controls and appropriates the story.

The Bronx has an opinion about the radio, and how it uses their story. Belladone explains that:

Le Maître disait que la seule chose qui l'a fait douter de la poésie, c'est la pornographie. Pas seulement celle des gros cons qui déversent toute l'animalité de leur bas ventre sur les visages effrontés de grosses connes à la biologie bafouée. Il dit que c'est surtout la pornographie des médias. Quand vous masturbez les cervelles des gens avec les malheurs des autres êtres humains. Vous vous dites : les auditeurs se pâment du plaisir vicieux d'entendre les emmerdes des pouilleux du Bronx, donc, on s'éternise avec force détails sur les emmerdes des pouilleux du Bronx... (62-63)

In this extract, Belladone reveals, once again, how lucid she is. She knows why the radio tells her story. She compares the radio to pornography, which points to the indecency of using other people's pain in order to please an audience. This comparison is also grotesque. It brings communication and story-telling, down to pornography and to the low bodily reality of masturbation. By saying, "vous masturbez les cervelles des gens", she reduces the brain, the intellect to the sexual act of masturbation, which is grotesque. She insists that the pain comes from other human beings "des autres êtres humain", which humanizes the victims of the media. By contrast, she calls those profiting from that pain "des gens", "les auditeurs". In addition, by

mentioning poetry in opposition to pornography, she alludes to the fact that there is another way of talking about pain. Indeed, Kafka uses poetry to express his pain and to address the difficult issues of the Bronx. Kafka's poetry is empathic and respectful but it is also complex and powerful. None of these adjectives can be used about pornography or the media. But Kafka is not the only one that is able to be poetic. This extract, written by Belladone, is poetic in the sense that it uses metaphors, images, original words, etc. This contrasts with the dull and unimaginative prose of the radio. The rich, poetic text of the Bronx seems to be an act of resistance against the "pornography" of the media and the official speech. Belladone's concern rings very true in today's context of over-mediatisation. In an article published in 2016 by the internet newspaper HuffPost, Emily Jenab expressed her concern about *the Human of New York* phenomenon: "Perhaps my discomfort lies in the mass production of certain stories: in the creation of pain for consumption, in the capitalization of the intricate details of a marginalized person's life." Today, catastrophes, terrorist attacks, epidemics are so mediatised that they sometimes seem to be reduced to entertainment, which is what Jenab and Belladone both denounce. If other people's pain is used to entertain, it means that both the broadcaster and the audience profit from it. The broadcaster makes money and the audience is diverted, entertained, masturbated, to use Belladone's words. For Belladone, this is what the radio is doing when it tells her story.

3.2. The Subversive Potential of the Bronx's Story

As explained above, the Bronx's story is deemed dangerous by the radio. There are two main reasons why the radio feels the Bronx's story is a threat. The first is that the Bronx's narrators expose the shortcomings of the State. They complain about how the State fails to pay the salaries of the civil servants. They expose the corruption of the judiciary system. They explain how they have to rely on themselves to provide their neighbourhood with electricity, health care and education. They reveal how the Chinese are the only ones profiting from the mines. But most of all, they disclose how the State has abandoned their neighbourhood, their city and even probably their country. In chapter 2, I explained how Kafka made up for the State's shortcomings by providing education, healthcare, leadership and even a mine to the neighbourhood. On top of revealing the flaws of the State, the Bronx's story also shows how to take the situation into one's own hands, which threatens even more the State's authority. The second reason why the Bronx's story is dangerous for the State lies in the inherent subversive quality of writing. In colonial times, in particular, writing was associated with authority and

writing about a land was associated with owning that land, as Elleke Boehmer explains in *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*. She states that “the text, a vehicle of imperial authority, symbolized and in some cases indeed performed the act of taking possession” and that “colonial settlement [...] was expressed textually”. Thus, writing can be a way of asserting one’s claim on a territory. Christophe Dony explains that “language not only justified the enterprise of colonization; it attested to the occupation of the land by the colonizers as they renamed the native places. Language also allowed settlers to impose fixed meaning on people, nations and cultures” (95). By telling the story of the Bronx, the Cheminot, Belladone and the auteur inconnu posit that the Bronx is theirs. Indeed, Elleke Boehmer posits that in the postcolonial context “writing is an integral part of self-definition” (*Colonial & Postcolonial Literature* 229) and plays an important role in the making of a national identity. In *Généalogie d’une banalité*, it does not create a national identity but a local one. The identity that the Bronx asserts in its text does not respect the State’s authority. This textual attack to the State is answered textually by the radio program. The Bronx’s story and the radio program can be read as competitive claims to the Bronx’s territory that both try to assert their legitimacy and authority. Therefore, *Généalogie d’une banalité* reveals the power of writing, or since the novel is characterised by orality, of story-telling. Aanza’s novel is not just about the dreadful situation of the Bronx. It is about stories competing with each other and trying to influence reality. It is about a show of strength between four narrators and the official speech. The power of story-telling is acknowledged in the novel when Maureen explains how an invented story changed the fate of her family. When she was a child, her family had a bad reputation among colonials because his father, as a landscape architect, worked with black people and always smelled of fertiliser. Maureen suffered from her family’s lack of standing in the community until one day, she invented a story that changed everything. She told everybody that her father had built the most wonderful secret garden for her family out of the love he had for his children and his wife. Suddenly, his father became popular because Maureen’s story made him appear like the most perfect father and husband. This made Maureen realise that “avec un peu d’imagination, on pouvait avoir l’ascendant sur les autres et les maintenir à sa botte” (213), which is exactly what the radio is trying to do: maintaining the State’s authority over its people.

Chapter 6

Généalogie d'une banalité: Minor Literature or Miner's Literature?

In the Chapter 3, I explained that naming an important character of the book after the famous writer Franz Kafka was relevant because his work is characterised by the use of the grotesque. However, this choice has another important implication. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have written a seminal book about Franz Kafka's work, called: *Kafka pour une littérature mineure*. In this book, they define the notion of "littérature mineure", minor literature to describe Franz Kafka's singular prose. Interestingly, this notion also seems well-suited to describe the story told by the narrators of the Bronx. For the purpose of clarity, the famous writer will be referred to hereafter by his full name, Franz Kafka, whereas the character in the book will simply be called Kafka.

1. The Bronx's Story As Minor Literature

According to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, minor literature "n'est pas celle d'une langue mineure, mais celle qu'une minorité fait d'une langue majeure". Minor literature has to do with the atypical language uses that a minority makes of a major language. The minority uses a major language but lives in a place that makes this usage difficult - for instance, in a place that is far off from where this language is the mother tongue of a large population. Franz Kafka was part of such a minority, the Jewish population of Prague and he wrote in German. But Deleuze and Guattari's minor literature, as the literature of minority in a major language, also seems to match a lot of postcolonial literatures. Minor literature is best defined by its three characteristics: the

detritorialisation of its language, the political dimension that it gives to everything, and its collective value (Deleuze and Guattari 29-33). These three characteristics make minor literature singularly different from major literatures. Its language use, in particular, is unusual and very meaningful. Minor literature has the unthinkable capacity of “creuser la langue” (Deleuze and Guattari 35), of transforming major languages through minor uses. Moreover, minor literatures are intrinsically collective and political which makes them significant and always relevant.

1.1. The Deterritorialised Language of Franz Kafka and of the Bronx’s Narrators

Deleuze and Guattari explain that Franz Kafka’s language is deterritorialised because he wrote in German even if he lived in Prague, where most people spoke Czech. As a Jewish German-speaker living in Prague writing in German seemed to be impossible. Indeed, the German-speaking Jewish community of Prague was cut off from German-speaking masses of Germany. This minority, was, therefore, prone to have strange or minor uses of the language. They were, in a sense, foreigners in their own language. However, writing in another language than German was yet another impossibility for Franz Kafka because he did not feel a sense of belonging to the Czech territoriality. The Jewish population of Prague usually spoke Yiddish as well as Czech, but the former was disdained and the latter often forgotten or repressed. Therefore, it is German that was used for official purposes, as a *langue de papier* (Deleuze and Guattari 31, 46). Finally, not writing was also an impossibility because “la conscience nationale impossible ou opprimée, passe nécessairement par la littérature” (Deleuze and Guattari 30).

The situation of the writers of the Bronx is comparable to Franz Kafka’s. They write in French but they are very far from the French-speaking masses in Europe. In her dissertation “Le français à Lubumbashi : usages et représentations” (2015), Irène Ngoie Kyungu Kiboko studies the use of French in Lubumbashi. She explains that the communities living in Lubumbashi are plurilingual because they alternate between their mother tongues, ethnic languages, national languages and the official language, i.e. French. She states that in Lubumbashi, there are people from all over the country and that at least 250 languages are spoken in the DRC (106-107). The use of French in *Généalogie d’une Banalité* is justified by the fact that French remains the only common language in the country (Ngoie Kyungu Kiboko 107). In Aanza’s novel, French is the mother tongue of none of the narrators, except Maureen. Thus, using French, which it is not their mother tongue and which cut off from the French-speaking territoriality seems impossible to the narrators of the Bronx. Indeed, in *Généalogie d’une banalité*, l’auteur inconnu

explains that the French language “est demeurée étrangère aux yeux de tous les congolais” (96). But they are forced to transcend the impossibility of using French because their story is broadcasted on the national radio, where only a fraction of the audience would understand their mother tongues. The national radio makes it impossible for them to write in any other language than French. As a result, French is a *langue de papier* for the inhabitants of the Bronx, as German was for the Jewish inhabitants of Prague. The French used by the narrators of the Bronx is full of strange uses influenced by the local culture and the numerous other local languages. For all these reasons, French, in *Généalogie d'une Banalité*, can be considered as deterritorialised, which means that the book fulfils the first characteristic of minor literature.

1.2. Everything Is Political In the Bronx

According to Deleuze and Guattari, in major literature, all concerns are individual and none is indispensable to the plot. Because they are situated in a social milieu that merely serves as background, these personal concerns remain in the personal realm. By contrast, minor literature stories are set in small, closed spaces that make every individual concern immediately political. As a result, the individual concerns of minor literature are enlarged, scrutinized and indispensable because they are the epicentre of the story. In his journal, Franz Kafka writes:

Ce qui au sein des grandes littératures se joue en bas et constitue une cave non indispensable de l'édifice, se passe ici [au sein d'une littérature mineure] en pleine lumière; ce qui là-bas provoque un attroupement passager, n'entraîne rien de moins ici qu'un arrêt de vie ou de mort. (Franz Kafka, cited in Deleuze and Guattari 31)

The cave analogy made by Franz Kafka is striking since *Généalogie d'une Banalité* brings to light what happens underground, in the mine. More broadly, it shows a reality that is generally overlooked. Indeed, Maureen calls Lubumbashi “la banlieue des grandes villes du monde entier” (13), which highlights that it is not usually the centre of attention. Furthermore, the Bronx consists of a very small, closed environment where personal concerns take political dimensions. For example, it is a simple argument that sparked the whole mining project. When two neighbours, Tutu Jean and Vieux Z are arguing about a banana peel, Vieux Z accusing Tutu Jean's goat of eating the banana peel that he kept for his piglet, Kafka overhears their argument and says:

Quand est-ce que vous allez être intelligents dans cette poubelle du genre humain que vous appelez votre quartier? Il y a des Chinois partout qui achètent les minerais. Et vous essayez de vous couper les biologies sensibles pour des peaux de bananes ? [...] Putain, faites quelque chose

du cuivre qui paresse sous vos pieds. L'argent des Chinois, c'est tout bêtement pour vous faire oublier ces peaux de banane, les pourceaux et les chiques qui lanternent avec vos guiboles au-dessus d'un pactole... (37)

This extract is absurd, the neighbours are fighting about a simple banana peel. In French, the expression “mettre une peau de banane sous les pieds de quelqu'un” means to set a trap for someone. Consequently, the banana peel argument of this extract could be a literal metaphor pointing to the disastrous situation in which the Bronx is trapped. As the extract shows, every little personal concern in the Bronx becomes the preoccupation of the whole neighbourhood. The argument that two neighbours are having in the extract above is not considered to be their own private business. Indeed, two characters that are outside of the argument intervene: Docta and Kafka. Their intervention is facilitated by the rudimentary architecture of the Bronx that allows the neighbours to hear what happens inside their neighbours' houses. For instance, it is Belladone that tells the story of the argument in the extract above. She explains why she is able to do that:

C'est l'absence de plafond et de la porte sur le faux chambranle de ma chambre qui m'a laissée suivre la dispute entre Vieux Z, notre voisin quatrième bicoque à gauche, et Tutu Jean notre voisin deuxième bicoque, toujours à gauche. (35)

The particularity of the *Généalogie d'une banalité* is that the local population's personal concerns are political inside the Bronx, but they also reach outside the spheres of the neighbourhood's political life. Indeed, as shown by the extract above, a simple argument about a banana peel extends to a discussion about the geological resources of the Congo and who profits from them. Kafka's statement is as much about the political situation in the Bronx, i.e. the poverty and the conflicts between the neighbours as it is about the country whose resources profit the Chinese instead of the local population. In *Généalogie d'une Banalité*, simple, everyday life events can trigger reflections about colonialism, post-colonialism, the attitude of the NGOs in the Congo, or of the status of the national heroes' mothers in history. Therefore, *Généalogie d'une Banalité* also possesses the second characteristic of minor literature.

1.3. Collective Enunciation or the Rareness of Literary Talent

The third characteristic of minor literature is that everything in it takes on a collective value (Deleuze and Guattari 31). Deleuze and Guattari argue that “parce que les talents n'abondent pas en littérature mineure, les conditions ne sont pas données d'une *énonciation individualisée*, qui serait celle d'un « maitre » et qui serait séparée d'une *énonciation collective*” (31) In minor

literature, there is no literature of the “masters” in which the enunciation is individual. The rareness of talents in minor literature entails that “ce que l’écrivain tout seul dit constitue déjà une action commune, et ce qu’il dit ou fait est nécessairement politique” (Deleuze and Guattari 31). In the context of minor literature, Deleuze and Guattari posit that literature is “l’affaire du peuple” (32) because it is invested of the role of the collective enunciation and even of a revolutionary enunciation. In minor literature, the political field contaminates the very “énoncé”. Therefore, it is an appropriate space to “prendre le relais d’une machine révolutionnaire à venir” (Deleuze and Guattari 32). Indeed, in minor literature contexts, literature creates active solidarity in the community. The enunciation moves away from a “lone wolf” point of view and makes room for the voices of the whole pack (Deleuze and Guattari 31-33).

Similarly, in *Généalogie d’une Banalité*, the Cheminot, Belladone and l’auteur inconnu do not tell their own stories, they tell the story of their neighbourhood. Even if the Cheminot and Belladone are the only ones to have a voice in the story, Kafka, Tutu Jean, Vieux Z, Clothilde, Eudalie, Prophète Zabulon, Valérien and Pako are not secondary characters. It is the reunion of all their personal stories, tied together into an intricate web that is the essence of the book. This is facilitated by the scant architecture that, as mentioned above, lets the neighbours overhear each other’s conversations. In addition, the auteur inconnu continually changes focalisation and moves from one character’s thoughts and impressions to another character’s adventures, which allows the reader to get to know different perspectives and impressions. Furthermore, in the eyes of the radio, the testimonies of the Cheminot, Belladone and l’auteur inconnu seem to be the testimony of the Bronx as a community. Their narration represents the whole Bronx at a national scale. As a result, *Généalogie d’une Banalité* fulfils the third characteristic of minor literature as well as the first and second ones.

2. A Fictional Minor Literature Inside a Natural One

The narration of the Bronx is, as explained above, minor literature. But its conditions of production are fictive. Indeed, the Cheminot, Belladone and l’auteur inconnu did not really write the story. Therefore, the Bronx’s story is only a fictive minor literature inside the larger frame of the book. Presenting minor literature inside of the diegesis makes its characteristics noticeable to the reader. The mise en abyme of the Bronx’s narration both highlights its context of production and makes it easier for the reader to dissociate himself from the enunciation. As a result, the reader can critically examine the enunciation of the text. The distance also allows him or her to notice the text’s characteristics such as the deterritorialisation of the language and

the pervasiveness of the political. Moreover, the mise en abyme creates a contrast between the minor literature of the Bronx with the official speech of the radio. This opposition is an additional way of calling attention to the particularities of the enunciation of the Bronx's story. This results in a greater awareness of the collective enunciation, the pervasiveness of the political and deterritorialised language of the book.

Généalogie d'une banalité as a whole, can be considered as minor literature. The argumentation above remains largely valid for the book as a whole since the Bronx story constitutes the majority of the book. However, it was not written in the same context and it also contains the radio show transcript. Nevertheless, it was written in the Congo, therefore its French is as deterritorialised as the narrators are from the Bronx's. The radio only adds to the political dimension of the book because it is a direct critique of the official speech and because it is in opposition to the Bronx's story. By creating a multi-voice narration that conveys the ideas of the community rather than the thoughts of a single person, Aanza creates a collective enunciation in the Bronx' story. The radio show transcript's enunciation is also, to a lesser degree, collective because the show reflects the ideas of all the editorial committee of the radio and of the government since the show is broadcast on the national radio. Thus the combination of the radio show and the Bronx's story reflects the thoughts of yet a larger number of people.

3. Two Minor Literature Writers: Franz Kafka and Aanza's Kafka

There is a textual layer of *Généalogie d'une banalité* that has not yet been mentioned in the present chapter: Kafka's poems. Again, as the Bronx's story, they could be considered as an instance of minor literature inside the diegesis. They, indeed, fulfil the three characteristics that define minor literature according to Deleuze and Guattari. First, their language is deterritorialised, for the same reasons as the rest of the text. Second, everything in the poems is political. Third, their enunciation is collective. To illustrate this point, I will use the poem that Kafka recites after the extract above where Kafka intervenes in Tutu Jean and Vieux Z's argument:

Inlassable pays
Et nous défilons
A fleur de ta peau
Comme des ombres irréflechies
Et tu es une patrie liquide.
Qui coule avec ton fleuve

Et tu passes constamment
 Ne fais que passer
 Et ne charries
 Que nos rêves de toi
 Et les battement de nos cœurs
 Inlassable pays
 Tes fils sont des épaves

(37-38)

This poem accurately reflects the political dimension and collective enunciation of Kafka's poems. Indeed, it is a statement about how the country moves ahead, but leaves its citizens behind. The poem completes what Kafka says about copper in the extract above because digging is a way for him to change this dynamic and catch up with his country. The poem is written in the first person of the plural "nous", which indicates that he does not speak for himself but for the Bronx or even for all his fellow citizens. He expresses the collective feeling of being left out, of having no control over a country that keeps on moving ahead uncontrollably as a river or as time itself. It is also a love declaration to a country that is as wonderful as the great river Congo. It is a country that is close to its inhabitants who walk "à la fleur de [sa] peau". But this wonderful country is also destructive and it drowns its own future. In this poem Kafka, like Aanza in *Généalogie d'une banalité*, manages to declare his love to his country as well as to show everything that is wrong with the Congo. This poem is about a country that is both superb and deadly. That is "liquide" as the magnificent Congo river, but also "liquide" because impossible to have a hold of it and to keep up with it. The river is so rough, that those who try to navigate on it sink and the river drowns them. By drowning its "fils", the river, i.e. the country, drowns its future. This poem is ominous because in digging the mine, Kafka buries his daughter, Belladone, and his pupils. Therefore, he buries the neighbourhood's future in the debris of the mine collapse.

4. Of the Limits of the Comparison Between Franz Kafka and Sinzo Aanza

According to Deleuze and Guattari, all languages deterritorialise the mouth, tongue and teeth from their primary function: eating. Indeed, eating and speaking are incompatible. Yet eating and writing are even more incompatible because writing produces something that is capable of competing with food. As a result, they argue that writing is fasting (36). Food and fasting are a recurrent theme in Franz Kafka's work. Normally, languages are reterritorialised in meaning.

But Franz Kafka's German is an exception, because "on abandonnera le sens, on le sous-entendra, ou n'en retiendra qu'un squelette ou une silhouette en papier". In his work, Franz Kafka deterritorialises sounds:

Nous l'avons vu, le pialement de Grégoire qui brouille les mots, le sifflement de la souris, la toux du singe; et aussi le pianiste qui ne joue pas, la chanteuse qui ne chante pas, et fait naître son chant de ce qu'elle ne chante pas, les chiens musiciens, d'autant plus musiciens dans tout leur corps qu'ils n'émettent pas de musique. Partout la musique organisée est traversée d'une ligne d'abolition comme le langage sans d'une ligne de fuite, pour libérer une matière vivante expressive qui parle pour elle-même et qui n'a plus besoin d'être formée. (Deleuze and Guattari 38).

This extract shows that sound and musicality are an important theme in Franz Kafka's novels. However, this theme, as well as the theme of fasting, is absent from *Généalogie d'une banalité*. Moreover, Aanza's language does not seem to completely abandon meaning. For example, Deleuze and Guattari explain that Franz Kafka "tue délibérément toute métaphore, tout symbolisme" (40). Indeed, metamorphosis, which is a famous characteristic of Franz Kafka's work, is the opposite of a metaphor for it is literal and not figurative. Franz Kafka has "un usage intensif et assignifié de la langue" (41). As explained in the chapter dedicated to the grotesque, Aanza uses metamorphosis. However, he does not kill metaphors. *Généalogie d'une banalité* is full of metaphors and some of them hold important places in the book, as the one associating the female body with the land. Even Maureen's metamorphosis discussed in chapter 3 is figurative. She does not literally change into a tree. Her metamorphosis is metaphorical since it represents a transformation that occurs inside of her. Therefore, Aanza's use of French differs from Franz Kafka's use of German even if they both write minor literature. Aanza does not kill "toute métaphore, tout symbolisme" (Deleuze and Guattari 40) but *Généalogie d'une banalité* is unusually literal. Aanza's novel is not limited by the rigidity of absolute realism. On the contrary, it contains many fantasies and exuberances, which can be read as literal metaphors. In the chapter about the grotesque, there is an extract from *Généalogie d'une banalité* where one of the neighbours, Tutu Jean, works as a chauffeur for the President and has diarrhoea each time the President steps in his car. This can be read as metaphor expressed literally. Tutu Jean's disgust for the President could be expressed by Aanza in a metaphor where Tutu Jean would feel like or think about defecating when seeing the President. But Aanza goes a step further and Tutu Jean literally defecates when in contact with the President. Even the heart of the plot i.e. the neighbours digging under their houses can be read as the literal realisation of a metaphor where people destroy their homes and their lives chasing money.

Furthermore, Aanza's minor use of French has a significance that is absent from Franz Kafka's because of the postcolonial context in which it was written. Indeed, the problem of which language to write in is different because the major language is the language of the coloniser. French was imposed on the Congolese population, which is not the case of German for the Jewish people of Prague. However, in "English and the African writer" Chinua Achebe argues that English was one of the good consequences of the colonisation in Nigeria because it allows his literature to be understood by a much larger number of people than if he wrote it in Igbo or in any other African language (Achebe 345). This is also true for French in the Congo. Nevertheless, French remains the language of the oppressor. This has two important implications in *Généalogie d'une banalité*. First, some expressions or words cannot be detached from their colonial past. For instance, the word "chicote" is important in terms of colonial memory. Indeed, Marie-Bénédicte Dembour argued that the chicote functions as a symbol of Belgian colonialism in the Congo. Second, some minor uses of the language can be seen as more than the result of deterritorialisation. Using French differently from its major use can be conceived as a technique of resistance to colonialism via the appropriation of the colon's language. As Elena Rodriguez Murphy explains in her article "The Anglophone African Novel as minor literature: from transliteration to appropriationn Nigerian writing", Achebe succeeded in Africanising English thanks to a creative use of rhythm, register and vocabulary in *All Things Fall Apart* (511). Thus, minor French uses in *Généalogie d'une banalité* can be a tool to Africanise the text. Chinua Achebe explains that an African writer might never be able to use English as a native but that achieving this level is not desirable because it would mean the loss of what makes the African writer different. Indeed, the latter should use English as a tool to be understood by larger group of people but also as instrument to convey the particularity of his own experience via minor uses (Achebe 347). For instance, in *Généalogie d'une banalité*, orality is very important. The whole book is the transcript of a radio show, which means that every single word is in fact spoken. Moreover, the narrators express themselves in a spoken manner. This Africanises the text because it moves away from the Western conventions of the novel genre. Orality also allows the presence of many minor uses that would normally not appear in a written text. The book even contains certain words and expressions in African languages. The particular structure of *Généalogie d'une banalité*, with a radio show as a frame narrative, and four narrators telling a chaotic, spoken story, contributes to the Africanisation of the text. Indeed, Aanza moves away from the canonical structure of the novel and creates a unique, maze-like novel. One could perhaps argue that Aanza makes a minor use of the novel genre's conventions. By not respecting the Western conventions of the novel genre, Aanza

distances himself from Western literary tradition. According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “la production intellectuelle occidentale est, de maintes façons, complice des intérêts économiques internationaux de l’Occident (14). Therefore, the form of Aanza’s book takes its distance from a literary tradition that profits to the West both economically and politically. This is congruent with the content of the book which shows the reality of those who are left out from progress and who carry the burden of globalisation. Indeed, Aanza shows the dark side of the current global economic system in which the eighty richest people on the earth own as much as the 3.5 billion poorest (Demos 16). The inhabitants of the Bronx are part of these 3.5 billion.

5. Minor Literature or Miner’s Literature?

In *Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure*, Deleuze and Guattari play with the polysemy of the French word “mineur” that means both “minor” and “miner”. They say that “la littérature mineure creuse le langage” (35) and that the minor literature author writes like “un chien qui fait son trou, un rat qui creuse son terrier” (33). Therefore, it seems that a minor literature writer is also a miner that digs the language. In *Généalogie d’une banalité*, the narrators are literally implicated in a mining project. The Cheminot, in particular, is both a miner and a writer. The Bronx’s story is a miner’s literature as well as a minor literature. Moreover, if digging the language deterritorialises it, one can wonder if digging the earth does not also result in a type of deterritorialisation. Deleuze and Guattari explain that writing and speaking deterritorialise the mouth, the tongue and the teeth because they were primarily meant for eating. Similarly, the land has a nourishing function. Since the origins of humankind, humans have depended on plants, roots and fruits to feed themselves. But mining deterritorialises the land because it is not possible to mine and to grow food on the same parcel of land. Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari posit that writing is more deterritorialising than speaking because it produces something that can compete with food. This is also the case in mining: copper can compete with food. In fact, it has already won the competition since the land is used to excavate copper rather than to grow food. Thus, it seems that the Bronx’s land is, to a certain extent, deterritorialised. Of course, precautions are necessary here since the French word “déterritorialiser” comes from “territoire” which means territory and the particle “dé” that comes from Latin and means “absence, privation”. Thus, a deterritorialised territory is a paradox. Nevertheless, the story of the Bronx seems to be as much minor literature as miner’s literature because it is the literature of a deterritorialised land as well as of a deterritorialised language.

The narrators of *Généalogie d'une banalité* dig holes under their houses, but they also dig holes into the grand narratives of the Congolese official speech. As Elara Bertho states in her article “Cacophonies de la mémoire et éblouissements impériaux (Sinzo Aanza, *Généalogie d'une banalité*)”, Aanza’s book “offre alors l’image d’une littérature opérant par ce que l’on pourrait appeler un “forage” des grands récits collectifs” (90). She explains that “au détour des labyrinthes urbains et miniers, Sinzo Aanza invite à relire l’histoire de la ville, et plus largement celle du Congo colonial et postcolonial. Il propose de forer, de percer les discours établis” (90). Indeed, the Bronx’s story reveals the reality that the official speech, embodied by the radio host, tries to hide. The Bronx’s narrators dig holes into the radio’s interpretation of Congolese history and of the story of the mining accident until it collapses and it leaves it to the reader to reconstruct his own interpretation of history and of the story. Aanza’s novel is about piercing holes through the wall of official speech and looking through these holes to see a multitude of other perspectives on reality. *Généalogie d'une banalité*’s narrators dig into their land as well as into their country’s official speech. Aanza’s novel is both minor literature and miner’s literature.

Aanza describes Lubumbashi as la “banlieue des grandes villes du monde entier” (13). Indeed, Lubumbashi, and its surroundings, is a place that supplies resources for the whole world. The Congo furnishes the world in coltan, which is an indispensable material to make electronic devices. It also provides a lot of copper and other minerals, but the inhabitants of Bronx are excluded from the wealth that is generated from the extraction of these minerals. In fact, the DRC possesses half the world's known reserves of cobalt and has a steady economic growth, its population, however, has one of the lowest income per capita in the world (Kavanagh). The Bronx story is about giving a voice to those that are forgotten by globalisation. If Lubumbashi is la “banlieue des grandes villes du monde entier” (13), maybe its inhabitants can be seen as the miners of the whole world and these miners are not being paid for their hard work. The resources of their country are being plundered by foreign businessmen who become immensely rich by exploiting the Congo’s soil. As Belladone says “ce pays appartient aux investisseurs depuis toujours. Étrangers de preference” (39). The Bronx people are forgotten by globalisation but they cannot forget globalisation since they are paying its price. Our current economic system destroys their land and their lives. Thus, *Généalogie d'une banalité*, is a miner’s literature in which the poorest people on the planet denounce the system that exploits their body and their land for the profit of a small portion of the earth’s population.

Conclusion

In *Généalogie d'une banalité*, the Bronx inhabitants literally destroy their homes and their future, embodied by the school children that were swallowed in the mine collapse, in its desperate attempt to take back some of the wealth that was stolen from them. The novel explores some of the causes why the Bronx people dig under their houses until their neighbourhood collapses. It looks at why in the Congo, the loss of human lives has become a “banalité”. Aanza draws a web of stories that try to explain what made the absurd mining project of the Bronx possible. The novel is based on true events, which makes the funny behaviour of the Bronx inhabitants tragic. The present dissertation had a purpose similar to that of Aanza’s novel: it aimed at revealing how a book relating such a troubling reality is made possible by a certain context. It was animated by the will to show how Aanza’s novel is a political reaction to the current economic, social and political situation of the DRC. As explained in chapter 1, the situation of the Bronx is very much a product of Lubumbashi’s recent past and the tumultuous history of the Gécamines. This company soared in colonial times and provided good living standards to its employees, standards that would never again be met. Under Mobutu’s regime the company slowly declined to the point that it is almost non-existent today, leaving its ex-employees to their own device and their children knowing only the stories the time when fathers could provide for their families. In the Bronx, fathers struggle to bring food to table while their children turn to the streets to make a living. Chapter 3 exposes the discreet violence that lurks in the Bronx and whose origins Aanza reveals. This violence was born decades, or centuries ago and it still poisons the lives of the Bronx inhabitants. Aanza makes the invisible violence of colonialism, that still unfolds discreetly and slowly, visible.

As the quote opening the dissertation revealed, literature has an amazing potential for political analysis. But literature does not address politics in the same as a political treaty would, thus the

present dissertation discussed how vocabulary, style and structure can be used to make political statements. As far as vocabulary is concerned the dissertation discussed, for instance, the implications of Aanza's choice to call bodies "biologies", buttocks "collines de l'humité" and genitalia "biologies sensibles". It can be read as the appropriation of the colonial practice of labelling that Aanza subverts by giving a poetic dimension to these labels. Aanza's decision to use the former colonial name of Lubumbashi, Elisabethville, instead of the current name of the city is a good example of how Aanza uses the memory of words to disclose how the Congo's colonial past is still very present. As the American novelist William Faulkner once said, "the past is never dead. It's not even past".

Généalogie d'une banalité's style is used for political purposes and it is pervaded by the grotesque. The grotesque entails a particular perception of the body as something not completely separated from the world but mixing with it. This reflects how bodies in the Bronx are not treated very differently from how the land is treated, i.e. they are all exploited. This appears in the text through the use of recurrent metaphors. The grotesque also allows Aanza to make some of his metaphors literal. For example, the Bronx inhabitants literally destroy their homes and their future pursuing wealth when the mine collapses in the school children and swallows their houses. The absurdity of their course of action only reflects the absurdity of the situation which they live in. They are among the poorest people of the planet but they live in a region whose soil is one of the richest. Aanza's use of the grotesque also reveals the central role that the grotesque plays in the official and popular discourse of power. A powerful Congolese man is fat, he eats a lot, drinks a lot and boasts about his sexual prowess. The grotesque that the imagery of power contains points to the corruption of power relations in the Congo. The grotesque is also what makes the book amusing and horrendous at the same time, for grotesque imagery is often funny but the reality it mocks is appalling.

The complex and compelling structure that Aanza creates in his novel also has political implications. The book is not only a denunciation of everything that goes and went wrong in the Congo, it is also a love declaration his country. This is encoded in the structure of the book where the radio anchors the book into orality, which Africanises it. Aanza writes a resolutely Congolese novel that moves away from the Western traditions of the genre thanks to orality and polyphony. But the structure, with the radio show as a frame also mocks the Congolese official speech and denounces how the Congolese political class does not care about its people. Meanwhile, the story embedded inside the radio show is full of affection for a population that is trying to stand up for themselves. As chapter 4 has found, their story-telling can be seen as

an act of resistance against the official speech and the government, for the story reveals how the State abandoned the Bronx inhabitants. The Bronx is a place forgotten from the authorities where the inhabitants, and Kafka in particular, try to make up for the absence of the State. Kafka mimics the State in his mining project, but also in his school, in his small clinic and in the authority he has in the Bronx. The Bronx, because it so independent threatens the State by telling its story that both reveals the State's shortcomings and the resourcefulness of the population.

Généalogie d'une banalité is a novel that is resolutely African, but it can also be considered as an example of minor literature. Aanza, in his novel, makes a minor use of major language that is deterritorialised. His French is very different from the one spoken in Belgium and in France. The context of minor literature in which *Généalogie d'une banalité*, means that everything that Aanza says in the book is political. There are not a lot of published writers writing in French in the Congo, this gives Aanza's voice an important resonance as the spokesman of an entire a community. But *Généalogie d'une banalité* is not just an instance of minor literature it is also miner's literature. Aanza's book digs inside the French language to use it in a way that is unique and very literal. Aanza does not hesitate to have a narrator that makes a lot of grammatical mistakes. In fact, his narrators are poor miners that dig holes inside the official speech to propose their own vision of the Congo's history and memory, as Elara Bertho's article about Aanza's novel reveals. *Généalogie d'une banalité* gives a voice to miners whose body and whose land are exploited by the current global economic system but that do not receive any of the profit of their exploitation. It is a miner's literature that denounces the dark side of our global capitalist, consumerist society.

There is more to Aanza's *Généalogie d'une banalité* that this dissertation could reasonably cover. Hip hop aesthetics are an undeniable part of Aanza's style. The book is full of citations, it is fragmented, it mocks official speech, it is polyphonic, it uses a lot of long lists all these characteristics show how hip hop must have had an important influence on Aanza's style. This is alluded to in the book, in the name of the neighbourhood "the Bronx", which is also a New York neighbourhood famous for being the place where hip hop music emerged in the 1970s. The two Bronxes have similarities, they are both poor neighbourhood disregarded by the State but where original artistic productions thrive. Hip hop has always been a place of contestation and it would be interesting to analyse how it is present in *Généalogie d'une banalité* and what is the political statement behind its use. Similar questions have been asked about Fiston Mwamba Mujila's *Tram 83*, which is another novel about the Congo that uses hip hop

aesthetics. It would be very interesting to analyse Aanza's novel in relationship with Mwamba Mujila's and with the work of the photographer Sammy Baloji, whose pictures are discussed in chapter 1 and of the hip hop singer Baloji. Furthermore, *Généalogie d'une banalité* was written in French, but the influence of African languages in Aanza's writing is undeniable. In fact, words or small expressions in African languages frequently appear in the text. It would be enlightening to analyse what are the African languages that influence Aanza's use of French how they do so. This would give a better understanding of how Aanza Africanised the text and appropriated French.

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