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## The Heart of Light: Rights, Justice, and Representations of History and Conflict in the Congo

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The Heart of Light

Rights, Justice, and Representations of History and Conflict in the Congo

Senior Project

Submitted to the Division of Interdivisional Programs  
of Bard College

By

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May 2012

This paper is dedicated to my friends and family, my teachers, and everyone who helped me work through this. Thank you.

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## 1. Popular Representation and Justice

As I complete this paper, it has been close to two months since the release of the KONY 2012 video.<sup>1</sup> The video was put together by the organization Invisible Children Inc., to raise awareness about the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) from Uganda, and their leader Joseph Kony, and ultimately to try to rally international support to stop him, and return the many children abducted into his army home. Joseph Kony is wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on 23 counts of war crimes including sexual enslavement, rape, inducing of rape, attacks against the civilian populations, enlisting of children, enslavement, cruel treatment, pillaging, murders, and inhumane acts, most on multiple counts, and many of the additional charges being for crimes committed specifically at internally displaced persons camps.<sup>2</sup>

The video went viral on Facebook and Twitter after its release on March 5, 2012 and has since had over 100 million views, as well as stirring up lots of discussion. Almost as soon as the video was released, people began posting articles and on blogs, about issues surrounding the video. Information began to surface about the current military activities against Kony, and what Invisible Children was

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<sup>1</sup> *Kony 2012*. Dir. Jason Russel. Invisible Children Inc., 2012. *Youtube.com*. Web. 5 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4MnpzG5Sqc>>.

<sup>2</sup> The International Criminal Court, et al. "Warrant of Arrest for Joseph Kony Issued on 8 July 2005 as Amended on 27 September 2005." *International Criminal Court*. 2005. *International Criminal Court*. Web. 10 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.icc-cpi.int/iccdocs/doc/doc97185.PDF>>.

incidentally supporting: increased military mobilization, from the United States and the international community, in Central Africa, particularly of the Ugandan Peoples Defense Forces (UPDF) under President Yoweri Museveni, to stop Joseph Kony and the LRA. In 2009 President Barack Obama passed the Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act and since \$40 million dollars and 100 American special operations forces have been sent to gain intelligence, improve communications, advise and train troops in Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic and Southern Sudan.<sup>3 4</sup>

People posting on articles and blogs after the release of the Kony 2012 video were only posting bits and pieces of information, with conflicting facts, and in sorting through articles myself I have had a hard time following the exact chronology of events, or exactly what has happened and how. Some people were, for example, insinuating that Invisible Children had already been directly funding militaries, but that seems not to be the case.

Kony 2012: Part II – Beyond Famous, released a month later, apart from answering questions from many viewers, and explaining Invisible Children's progress so far, continues to advocate for action, particularly trying to get young people to put up "Kony 2012" posters in public spaces, and addresses some of the backlash against the original video and the organization.<sup>5</sup> The second video, however, addressed issues and controversies too quickly, and at the beginning, did

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<sup>3</sup> Lauren Finnegan. "U.S. Aims to Help Take Out the LRA." *Yahoo News*. Yahoo.com, 26 Feb. 2012. Web. 12 Apr. 2012. <<http://news.yahoo.com/u-aims-help-lra-162300607.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> Jason Straziuso. "U.S. troops fighting LRA in 4 African countries." *Army Times*. Gannet Company, 22 Feb. 2012. Web. 8 Apr. 2012. < <http://www.armytimes.com/news/2012/02/ap-us-troops-fighting-lra-in-4-african-countries-022212/>>.

<sup>5</sup> Ben Keeseey, et al. *Kony 2012: Part II - Beyond Famous*. Youtube.com. Invisible Children Inc., 5 Apr. 2012. Web. 5 Apr. 2012. <[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c\\_Ue6REkeTA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_Ue6REkeTA)>.

not take much care to address deeper issues. Most of the time was spent patting their own backs, encouraging continued support.

On March 21, 2012, Teju Cole, a highly respected Nigerian-American author, responded eloquently to reactions surrounding his seven-part post on Twitter about the Kony 2012 videos, albeit with much less attention.<sup>6</sup> In the fifth part of his seven-part Twitter response, Cole had suggested that “The White Savior Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege.” At first I only skimmed the March 12 article, and figured I had caught the drift. It got me thinking, but also to some degree seemed like things I’d heard before, reactions to the white man’s burden component of humanitarian aid. Later, as I felt persistently confused about my feelings, and those of others, towards this seemingly significant Kony 2012 issue I went back and read Cole’s article more carefully. His response discussed the inherent racism and ignorance of the video, and showed how much of the story had been neglected by Invisible Children.

Sometime shortly after the Kony 2012 video was released, and before the article by Teju Cole came out, Jason Russell, the director of Invisible Children, had a mental breakdown. Tabloids and news sources quickly posted video footage of Russell naked, marching up and down a street in California, cursing, yelling about the devil, clapping at nothing, and, allegedly, masturbating. Cole is kind enough not to mention the breakdown in his article. But here, amidst a mass of criticism, we see humanity, raw, and bulging at the seams, Russell spent some time in a psychiatric

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<sup>6</sup> Teju Cole. “The White Savior Industrial Complex.” *The Atlantic*. The Atlantic Monthly Group, 21 Mar. 2012. Web. 27 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/>>.

ward after that event. Perhaps Russell's big emotional experience was a bit too much for him, or perhaps he realized the truth in the criticism, but who knows really?

Regardless, his breakdown received much attention. For many, it was a laughable result of Russell's hubris, which granted the opportunity for a big "I told you so," a way to let the whole thing go, but without really looking at the problems. For others, those of us who had felt positively affected by the video, it was seemed to heed the image of Mr. Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. A man who's "white man's burden" took him over, and lead to his own demise, a sort of death.

In the midst of Cole's response I found myself feeling ashamed for having succumbed so readily to the propaganda of the Kony 2012 video. My initial excitement was embarrassing, and I felt betrayed. Russell gave some people a deeply emotional experience, something to believe in, and gave some others a scapegoat for systems so complex that most of struggle with words to explain them. As Cole took to explaining the problems with Kony 2012 he made any effort to stop Joseph Kony and the LRA by international institutions, state governments, militaries, or Invisible Children, fall within the direct narrative of post-colonial racism and the white man's burden. This approach conflates international law, and justice, with post-colonial structures, and greatly complicates the possibility easy solutions. While Invisible Children, and their agenda, leads directly to newly conventional means by which to deal with Kony, and the LRA, their perspective begs the question: Can justice be found through institutions with histories in



colonization, or will those institutions simply perpetuate exploitation? If not, what do we do about justice?

Justice acts like a conclusion to a story. After the protagonist has made it through the ups and downs of the story they reach a moment where they overcome the antagonist and come to a sort of retribution, at least, a reconciliation of what has passed, an ending, and in some ways, a new beginning. Narratives like the one of the Kony 2012 video makes justice seem like an easily tangible result, something that can be had from far away, with little connection, something that viewers, mostly in America, have the power to make happen.

Cole is quick to deconstruct it. By placing this easy scheme for justice in a critical context surrounded by allegations of racism and the tendencies of military regimes to hurt innocent people, and perpetuate colonialism, he dismantles a level of naiveté surrounding Invisible Children. Of course justice cannot be had that easily, and of course, any attempt by Americans or the west to “help” within Africa pays homage to colonialism and the white man’s burden. One of his main critiques was that the video, in raising awareness, did effectively create an emotional experience to urge action, but one that veiled pertinent histories, which change the narrative completely.

Cole posted a link to a reactionary video made by Ugandan journalist Rosebell Kagumire, who has spent time covering the LRA. She struggled with how Russell represented Ugandans as powerless and Americans as inhabiting the locus of change. She discussed how the people in the region need governance and

reconciliation, and how efforts must be taken to ensure communities are not affected by the violence of rebellion.<sup>7</sup>

It does not end the problem, we need to have some kind of sound, intelligent campaigns that are geared towards really real policy shifts rather than a very sensationalized story that is out to make just one-person cry and at the end of the day we forget about it. I think all about trying to make a difference, but how do you tell the story of Africans? It's much more important on what the story is actually, because if you are showing me as voiceless, as hopeless, you have no space telling my story, you shouldn't be telling my story if you don't believe I also have the power to change what is going on and this video seems to say that the power lies in America, that it does not lie with my governance, that it does not lie with local initiatives on the ground.

She starts to tear up as she says "you shouldn't be telling my story if you don't believe I also have the power to change what is going on." For her, a dramatic narrative about young, privileged white Americans portrayed as saviors is not only offensive, it is disempowering, it harks to colonialism, and the white man's burden.

It is interesting where power lies in this statement: with the people, and narratives, which give comprehensive, honest, and human meaning to people's lives, and with those who gets to create and tell them. Kagumire demands recognition of the work that has already been done and is still being done by Ugandans, and recognition of histories and the power of representation itself. Each representation acts like a naturally formed prism, for although their form is unique, colors shine when light hits it, which can be found other places, and connect. No representation is absolved of the world around it, and whoever controls the representations, and their means of proliferation, holds the power of exposure. To take that from an

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<sup>7</sup> Kagumire, Rosebell. *My response to KONY2012*. *Youtube.com*. Rosebell's Blog, 7 Mar. 2012. Web. 27 Mar. 2012. <<http://rosebellkagumire.com/2012/03/08/kony2012-my-response-to-invisible-childrens-campaign/>>.

individual, or a group, is to take power from them, to show them how their lives are, rather than to let them show you. How could the former ever be more honest? For Kagumire, justice is found in efforts to foster reconciliation among communities in northern Uganda, and in recognition of the problematic themes of the Kony 2012 video.

As those in the western world sit at laptops intellectualizing on Facebook and sharing videos about very complex and foreign issues that some of us think we understand there is little power for each of us individually. However, when there are over 100 million views of the video, and voices rally together, there is a lot of power. On March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2012 a group of 24 bipartisan United States senators introduced a resolution to increase support for the efforts against Joseph Kony. This power of Americans to have their voices heard, even get the government to react, is strong. If we consider the lack of historical background or current context of the conflict itself in the video, any recognition of colonialism, or the eagerness of anyone in American politics to gain popularity with youth, this strength can be portrayed as ignorant, racist, and misguided.

Justice then, becomes much less tangible. It cannot be had by a simple phone call to your senator or congressman, it cannot be had by simply empowering the UPDF, it cannot be had by a video made by white Americans. While young Americas get to feel like they are taking part in the process, they are basically raising fists with eyes closed. By attacking the sentiment of the video itself, and deflating what Invisible Children portrays as a means justice, the video's failure exposes a problem of international justice, that international institutions, or militaries, which provide

or enforce human rights, stop or fight criminals, and serve legally recognized justice, inevitably do so in the shadows of colonization, and most often without recognizing injustice.

Here, then, justice itself comes into question. Within what narrative can justice be had, and for whom? Within what system of justice, can antagonists be brought to judgment, and protagonists find reconciliation? Is it possible to do so beyond the scope of prevailing structures of power? The video takes the direction towards further militarization of an already conflict ridden zone, and empowering dictators and soldiers with histories of abuse, while actively ignoring any of the history of Museveni's coup for power, the following revenge killings in northern Uganda and the subsequent rise of the LRA.<sup>8</sup> If you start the story with Kony's abductions, rather than Museveni's rise, or even European colonialism, you obscure great structures of power, and change the dynamics of honest action. When honesty in the means of representation becomes a matter of context, it directs the means by which justice is sought. But, as each narrative is different, justice becomes fluid, and we have, simultaneously, many conflicting means and ends being acted out in the real world. What viewers take as justice is them doing their part to support Invisible Children, even while Ugandans reacted with anger at the video, throwing rocks at the organization's members who screened the video in Uganda.<sup>9</sup> There are

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<sup>8</sup> Barbera B. Brown, Ph.D., et al. "React and Respond: The Phenomenon of Kony 2012." *Outreach Council of the African Studies Association* (Apr. 2012): n. pag. Web. 3 Apr. 2012. <<http://concernedafricascholars.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Kony-React-Respond.pdf>>.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Flock. "Kony 2102 screening in Uganda met with anger, rocks thrown at screen." *The Washington Post*. N.p., 15 Mar. 2012. Web. 13 Apr. 2012. <[http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/blogpost/post/kony-2012-screening-in-uganda-met-with-anger-rocks-thrown-at-screen/2012/03/15/gIQADD98DS\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/blogpost/post/kony-2012-screening-in-uganda-met-with-anger-rocks-thrown-at-screen/2012/03/15/gIQADD98DS_blog.html)>.

community-based projects in Uganda, there is military action, increasingly, from local and foreign forces, there is the ICC calling for Kony's arrest, there is Invisible Children calling for awareness. All seek justice, but in various forms, with various ends, each obscuring another, and each constructing its own path towards some conclusion.

In his article, Cole says in regard to his tweets, "I did not write them to score cheap points, much less to hurt anyone's feelings. I believed that a certain kind of language is too infrequently seen in our public discourse. I am a novelist. I traffic in subtleties, and my goal in writing a novel is to leave the writer not knowing what to think. A good novel shouldn't have a point." Perhaps his problem with the Kony 2012 video is that it allows people to think that they know exactly what to think. But obviously, people thought many different things, despite the commonalities in the themes surrounding the video. Saying there should be no point turns justice inside out. If not action to catch Kony, if people cannot get behind international justice, behind human rights institutions, then what? Do we leave it alone? Should international institutions pull their militaries out, and try to let the communities reconcile themselves? Should President Museveni step down, while Barack Obama gives a speech about the role of American military and the CIA in every coup d'état they have ever been a part of? Should the presidents of every post-colonial nation publicly address their roles in African history, and the history all over the world? How do we act in the face of so much history?

In the Kony 2012 video, Jason Russell highlights and narrates one of the first lines from some unspecified document that Kony "is not fighting for any cause, but

only to maintain his power.”<sup>10</sup> To some extent, maybe, this is now true, but seemingly more from a more existential perspective. One could argue the same thing about most leaders with strong and active militant arms, from some perspective or another, with pointedly incomplete narratives.

Fortunately, another response Teju Cole cites in his article, by famed Ugandan scholar Mahmood Mamdani, begins by citing how, just before the Kony 2012 video itself was released, the Social Science Research Council of New York published a report that made it to the front pages in Uganda about atrocities committed in the Central African Republic by the Ugandan military while on the search for Kony.<sup>11</sup> He goes on to give some history of the mid 1990’s when 80 percent of the populations of the three Acholi districts in northern Uganda were forced into internment camps and suffered, at the hands of the UPDF, murder, bombing and burning of entire villages, first to force citizens to leave their homes, and then to get them to stay put in the camps, allegedly to protect them from the LRA.

The government was determined to find a political solution, and Parliament passed a bill in December of 1999 to offer the leadership of the LRA amnesty, if they laid down their arms. President Museveni, however, was not interested in amnesty and instead, got the ICC involved shortly after their formation in 2002; their first

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<sup>10</sup> *Kony 2012*. Dir. Jason Russel. Invisible Children Inc., 2012. *Youtube.com*. Web. 5 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4MnpzG5Sqc>>.

<sup>11</sup> Mutaizibwa, Emma. “UPDF in Kony hunt accused of rape, looting.” *The Observer*. N.p., 2 Mar. 2012. Web. 13 Apr. 2012.

indictment in history was against Joseph Kony. When asked about indicting the Ugandan military the Moreno Ocampo, the new ICC president, said:

The criteria for selection of the first case were gravity. We analyzed the gravity of all crimes in northern Uganda committed by the LRA and the Ugandan forces. Crimes committed by the LRA were much more numerous and of much higher gravity than alleged crimes committed by the UPDF. We therefore started with an investigation of the LRA.<sup>12</sup>

As continued talks with Kony failed, and militarization continued to be supported, it became apparent to Mamdani where the problem lies. “The reason why the LRA continues is that its victims – the civilian population of the area – trust neither the LRA nor the government forces. Sandwiched between the two, civilians need to be rescued from an ongoing military mobilization and offered the hope of political process.” The word rescued here heeds a burden that is not specifically a white man’s, but whose? Who could, or should, try to rescue these people from their situation? Not “the white man,” it seems, but what does that really mean? If international institutions cannot honestly cooperate with militaries, then who can stop Kony? Who can bring the children home? There is an oscillation around justice, how can acute Kony issues be dealt with, as well as the grander systems at play?

Like Rosebell Kagumire above, Mamdani seeks political power, and governance, and integrates the historical narrative into his work. Although perhaps less sentimentally effective than Kagumire’s video, his more comprehensive take is enlightening. It provides a political context in trying to sort out an effective means

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<sup>12</sup> Mahmood Mamdani. “What Jason didn’t tell Gavin and his Army of Invisible Children.” *Daily Monitor*. N.p., 13 Mar. 2012. Web. 27 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.monitor.co.ug/artsculture/Reviews/-/691232/1365090/-/item/0/-/2ibo3q/-/index.html>>.

for people to have their voices heard, to a point where they can effect change, and not have their lives constantly suppressed by further militarization, or theft of voice. But still that word, rescued, incurs helplessness, a lack of agency. Who is to rescue? The people victimized by the conflict themselves? How do you talk about activism, humanitarianism, or rights, rescue, without sinking into the white man's burden narrative? And most importantly, how do we all act in the face of it?

Mamdani is conscientious enough to remind viewers of the humanity of a marginalized group of people. "The 70 million plus who have watched the Invisible Children video need to realize that the LRA – both the leaders and the children pressed into their service – are not an alien force but sons and daughters of the soil. The solution is not to eliminate them physically, but to find ways of integrating them into (Ugandan) society." This humanity is crucial, lest we forget the circumstances of the LRA's struggle, the people whose lives have become intertwined with it, and their agency and power as Ugandan people, and as humans. I imagine, considering the history of Kony's rise, that he, at some point, felt burdened with a need to speak out for his people, to fight for his community, for his land, for his ideals, to rescue his people from government oppression, from military violence.

One of the most profoundly confusing things to me was that I kept hearing the LRA had no purpose, and seemed to arise out of nowhere. I got the opportunity to ask a newly college graduated Ugandan woman, who has been working with Invisible Children Inc., about the rise of Kony and the LRA. She said, as is described on the Invisible Children website, that Kony took over a militant group from his cousin after her exile to fight government oppression, though the woman I spoke



with omitted the final detail. Saying Kony simply arose to gain power, and is still just fighting to maintain it reduces the circumstances and makes Kony ultimately responsible, as if simply stopping him will fix the problems. Seeking power, rising to it, maintaining it becomes criminal in itself. If you want to look at power this way, you could say the same about Museveni, Russell and Obama. Maybe more than power they simply fight to maintain their own existences, and maybe, in Cole's words, they seek to "have a big emotional experience that validates privilege," to really feel like they are effecting change, making a difference, and maybe, amidst all the violence, and corruption, at least doing something right.

It seems like everyone is looking to blame someone or something, to find some cause for their own discomfort with the fact that there are children being abducted into militaries, rape being used as a weapon of war, the destruction of communities and the taking or maiming of lives. From every perspective there is a cause, the story has to start somewhere, the degree within which it is framed gives a beginning and an end, a means to move through. But when there are so many conflicting ideologies, so many different answers to different problems being conflated, and history being shown in different ways, what do we make of justice? How do we approach rights?

The third response Cole cites is by Ethiopian-American novelist Dinaw Mengestu. He was part of a team of journalists who joined UN officials to meet with Joseph Kony and the LRA in 2006.<sup>13</sup> He talks about seeing the ghostlike faces of

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<sup>13</sup> Mengestu, Dinaw. "Not a Click Away: Joseph Kony in the Real World." *Warscapes.com*. N.p., 12 Mar. 2012. Web. 27 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.warscapes.com/reportage/not-click-away-joseph-kony-real-world>>.

soldiers, and comparing them to their ex-soldier counterparts rebuilding their lives and communities in villages and camps across Uganda. Invisible Children talks about this too, but only in the context of their efforts, as if they are the only means for bringing change. Mengetsu talks about how:

The idea behind a name such as 'Invisible Children' is on par with the sentiments of the first colonists who claimed to have discovered the New World and Africa: we didn't know about it, therefore it didn't exist. The children of Uganda were never invisible to their families, and their communities, who long before the first flood of NGO's to the region, worked for years to protect them.<sup>14</sup>

Simply making Kony famous will not stop the problem and, like Osama bin Laden who took ten years and two wars to kill, the U.S. could, and likely would, end up bumbling around Africa violently through a massive amount of terrain, searching for a man who will be hard to find, let alone kill, or ideally bring to court. However, when the conflict with the LRA has persisted as long as it has, and efforts have failed in the face of peace talks again and again, perhaps, the families work to protect themselves were not enough. Again, how do we act? Most importantly, he says

I've spent my career writing, researching and traveling through Africa, and what I am always astounded by is how little I know. I couldn't explain to my son, much less offer a solution to, any of the conflicts I've worked on, anymore than I could explain to him why so many people are poor or homeless in America, why our public schools are failing, or why we don't have better healthcare... If we care, then we should care enough to say we need to know more, that we don't have any easy answer, but that we're going to stay and work until we find one.<sup>15</sup>

No easy solution works. Militarization has historically proven very problematic, particularly as we continue to arm groups with histories of human rights abuses, or of alignment with colonial powers, and charge only a few

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

individuals with problems that are symptomatic of much larger systematic and institutional issues. When, over the course of history, so many people have been integrally involved, and responsible in various ways, when fingers point all over, there is no clear answer. Drawing this kind of light reduces the very nature and tangibility of solutions, or at least begs much more complex ones.

It is offensive to realize that perhaps the most widely viewed piece of humanitarian propaganda of all time, the Kony 2012 video, was so artfully crafted to draw on deep emotional connections, in a way that inhabited planes of colonialism. It removed voices from important actors, the people of the LRA, the people of the affected areas, and success stories that are absent of Invisible Children's hands. Invisible Children also makes it seem like raising awareness and rallying international political support is the right path to solving all of the world's problems, and does not draw attention to the problems with those kinds of action themselves, or the problems with seeking solutions in that way. Teju Cole puts it bluntly as he begins to wrap up:

Let us begin our activism right here: with the money-driven villainy at the heart of American foreign policy. To do this would be to give up the illusion that the sentimental need to "make a difference" trumps all other considerations. What innocent heroes don't always understand is that they play a useful role for people who have much more cynical motives... Success for Kony 2012 would mean increased militarization of the anti-democratic Yoweri Museveni government, which has been in power in Uganda since 1986 and has played a major role in the world's deadliest ongoing conflict, the war in the Congo. But those whom privilege allows to deny constellational thinking would enjoy ignoring this fact.

I have grown up with an exceptional amount of privilege. I was born into a wealthy family in America, I have been educated in private schools, had private

tutors, I am white, I speak English, as well as a French and Spanish, and I have a trust fund. When I saw that Kony 2012 video I cried. It made me feel like all the work that I was doing on this project could be for something. For me it seemed like a success, or at least felt like it. Once more educated voices began responding I felt ashamed. How had I, who have spent the better part of a few years studying conflict and oppression in the Congo, succumbed so easily to this propaganda? Its not, as Cole says, that I enjoy ignoring “constellation thinking,” in fact I strive for it. The Kony 2012 video was not constellational in its breadth, and has been rightfully criticized as such. In order for the video’s narrative to be successful it requires cultivating this ignorance, and its emotional power managed to trump my own ability to reason.

This desired mass of context and history should overshadow the humanitarian problems at the heart of the issue. The violence, the abductions, the mutilation, and the rape persists, and Kony is still out there in the Jungle. It is absolutely right that we must recognize the past, as much history as possible and, as deeply as we can, the structures at play, however there must be action. Simply because a violent criminal has a personal history of being abused, or that police have a tendency to be bigoted and use excessive force, and then incarcerate people in a corrupt prison industrial complex, does not mean that that criminals should not be taken off the streets.

I have always wanted to help. I’ve been afforded many opportunities, I come from a family that has been involved in the founding of the Peace Corps, funding and engaging in democratic politics, and supporting human rights and humanitarian

organizations, but my life has not been devoid of its own problems. My parent's divorce turned my life inside out, and I have been educated in a way that makes everything I have benefited from unjust. In many ways, my upbringing made it seem to me like I had not only the a priori ability, but a duty to do everything I can to help those less fortunate than myself. When something seemed to wrap up that feeling in such a concise and powerful way, with such a simple answer, it was overwhelming.

All the post-Kony 2012 fervor helped me realize something again, which I already knew in less detail. With my privilege I inhabit a locus of power that has directly benefitted from colonialism, slavery, genocide, and oppression the world over. I do not know how to solve the world's problems, and I will not be able to fulfill some burden, or find some personal validation, by doing everything I can to "help." However, I will stand against Cole's presumption that the privileged alone seek a big emotional experience for validation. I must stand up for my own dignity, and know that everything I have learned, and work for is not simply part of a greater system of oppression, or that if it is just for emotional validation, then I am one of all who seek the same thing, in different ways, through different systems.

I must be more careful of my own egotistical, patronizing, post-colonial, or even racist, tendencies, as they are integrated into my existence, and the institutions I have benefited from. I will try as Teju Cole said, in the final of his seven tweets, to "deeply respect American sentimentality, the way one respects a wounded hippo. You must keep an eye on it, for you know it is deadly." It is however important to remember, that Kony's sentimentality is also deadly, as is Museveni's, and Obama's, and that all of these things must be held in account.

It is this American sentimentality that perhaps best represents post-colonial ambitions in this day and age. Such a seemingly beneficial, or at least harmless video, helped to raise very important issues in the public about representation, history, oppression, race, rights, and justice. The ideas and responses conjured, although not new, are unparalleled in their exposure, scope, and time. These issues need to be more broadly drawn, not only about Uganda and the LRA, but towards other places, and other issues, with similar histories of representation, colonialism, and conflict.

One issue, however, is that colonialists initially benefited by working with and through pre-existing African institutions. The slave trade existed within Africa long before it was exported. And who knows how long what we now consider war crimes have been committed all around the world, with no connection to American sentimentality, or colonialism. Colonialism did not simply bring atrocity into a place that was pure beforehand; the West, and the white man, did not simply pervert Africa. The issues are always bigger than that.

The LRA has recently been operating primarily in the northern Democratic Republic of Congo. In the Kony 2012 video the narrator seems to conflate the LRA with other problems in the Congo, but does not give the historical background for problems there either. Although there are similar themes, the specifics are not addressed. It seems, the Congo serves more of a symbolic purpose placing Kony in the “heart of darkness.” He becomes a lost man, breathing inexplicable violence, and savagery, and settling into old, fictional, European narratives about Africa. The Kony 2012 video, and its responses, serve as a window into representations of history,

conflict, and violence, and how, in trying to think constellationally, can justice also be had?

None of the authors above, however, who critique the Kony 2012 video, and its aftermath, give reference to the work of European and American academics who have done important work. In ignoring them, the authors above marginalize the role of academia in the western world on this topic, simply because its authors are American and European. In this paper, I try to address the ways that history and conflicts in the Congo are represented by a handful of American and European academics whose works are revealing and significant. In light of the post-colonial critiques, there is still a legitimacy of academics that stretches beyond race and nationality. It is now essential, in exploring their representations, to frame them within a racial, and colonial consciousness, as otherwise their works could be construed as a form of the “white man’s burden” and delegitimized. With this history in mind, academics can become a refuge for analysis and information, where even mistakes will foster progress, and racism will cause response and deconstruction.

Ultimately, the intellectual space bears the most potential for informed understanding, and whilst conscious of the historical oppression, should be an open space, where people from all over the world, of every race and nationality, can come together to hash out problems and try to come up with solutions. To ignore anything is to obscure something, and the more that can come together, the more complete a framework there is to work within.

## 2. Western Academia Representing the Congo

Representations change the way people think the world. Representations of history and conflict have come into a critical light recently as never before. When talking about complicated issues it is important to discuss the forms in which these catalysts are proliferated. Form affects how people receive information, and what they can do with it; it affects the scope within which they can feel about it, and I believe, ultimately, drive the types of action and solutions people seek. In this project I will explore the ways the history has been represented, and its implications for understanding, and action. In this paper, I will explore works by Jean-Pierre Chrétien, Adam Hochschild, and Jason Stearns surrounding the Congo, its history, and conflict in the region. By comparing these authors we can see what they do successfully, and where their works are lacking, so as to help hash out how to effectively represent the Congo as outsiders.

The Congo is an example of a place that has undergone severe oppression and exploitation. It has seen many struggle, and fight, to control and secure it. Throughout the years, many millions have died violent deaths, or deaths that could have been prevented in secure circumstances. This struggle is one the world needs to know about.

Representations of the Congo have often been controversial. By portraying his actions in a humanitarian light, King Leopold II of Belgium was able to obscure the internal slave trade he ran in the Congo and later, the first human rights movement spawned to try to stop it. As the representations increased in their



breadth and scope, more of the picture became clear, in the aggregate sense, and thus provided a greater framework to inform action. Each representation has the ability to expand ones available reality, and change the way people think about rights, justice, and the world, but each representation also follows a narrative structure that is pointed, effectively urging action or direction in one way or another. It is only by comparing these representations with each other, by compiling and sifting through different sources of information, that we are able to discern the most seemingly honest truth.

We have reached a time where communications technology and infrastructure allows exposure on an unprecedented scale and representations to be reacted to quickly, and publicly. Through these conversations, ideas develop in the public space that change lives and direct progress. It is important to deconstruct the ways narratives are shown as to figure out best to represent them, ultimately, with the goals of raising awareness, fostering justice, and upholding rights.

There are, of course, many different ways of doing this. We have seen the way that the Kony 2012 represented the LRA conflict in Uganda, and some of the problems with it. Although video is powerful the most prevalent representations, and the most educated, informed, and broadly scoped have been books. Books have more space and allow more time to coherently articulate narratives that advocate different responses to inform action. Most of them do their best within this narrative to framework, and it is important to understand how scope affects reaction.

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a tool used by the United Nations to track development within and between nations throughout the world. It uses four

indicators for three dimensions, which are calculated together to give the HDI. The three dimensions are health, education, and living standards.

The health dimension uses the statistic of life expectancy at birth with a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 83.4 years. The educational dimension is measured by a mean of two statistics, years of schooling for adults aged 25 years, and expected years of schooling for children of school entering age. Living standards are judged by gross national income (GNI) per capita.<sup>16</sup>

The United States ranks fourth out of 187 countries. The average life expectancy is 78.5 years, the mean years of schooling for adults is 12.4 years and the expected amount of schooling for school age children is 16 years. GNI per capita in the United States averages at 41,761 (in 2005 international PPP adjusted \$). The current HDI is .910. This is compared to what the UN considers very high human development, .889 in 2011, and the global average of .682.

To put the average in perspective, Thailand has an HDI of .682. they are ranked 103 out of 187 countries, have an average life expectancy of 74.1 years, 12.3 expected years of schooling for children under 7, and average 6.6 years of schooling for adults over 25. Their GNI per capita in 2005 international PPP adjusted \$ is 7,260.<sup>17</sup>

The Democratic Republic of Congo now ranks at the bottom of 187 countries evaluated by the UN. It's current life expectancy from birth is 48.4 years, the mean

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<sup>16</sup> United Nations Development Program. "Components of the Human Development Index." *Human Development Reports*. United Nations Development Program, n.d. Web. 4 Dec. 2012. <<http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/hdi/>>.

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Development Program. "Thailand: Country Profile: Human Development Indicators." *International Human Development Indicators*. United Nations Development Program, n.d. Web. 4 Feb. 2012. <<http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/THA.html>>.

years of schooling for adults is 3.5 years and the expected years of schooling for school age children is 8.2. The gross national income per capita is \$290 (in 2005 international PPP adjusted \$). The current Human Development Index for the Democratic Republic of Congo is .286<sup>18</sup>, having steadily declined an average of .4% annually since 1980, except in 2011 where it saw a rise of .4%. The HDI for Sub-Saharan Africa, on the other hand, has risen since 1980 from .265 to .463, and Rwanda, its neighbor has risen from .275 in 1980, to .429 now. Unlike its neighbors, the Democratic Republic of Congo is ranked lower than the rest of the world; even these basic indicators open a door to the unique situations of the Congo.

This brief, statistical framework allows readers to compare between countries, but gives no first hand accounts, and little history, or background information, to ground the numbers. Inherently, the narratives here must be pointed to support the United Nations agenda. They want people to be able to understand the quality of life in the Congo in terms of simple numbers, and be able to compare it to their own, and other's; ultimately however, they reflect the ways the UN interacts with the Congo, through peacekeeping missions, maintaining refugee camps, and in trying to compile information and represent the conflict on a broad scale for the purposes of international justice systems, and development. Most of their work however does not make it to the public eye, and most who have not studied development have no framework within which to understand the numbers. Perhaps more importantly, without knowing the history, it can make

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<sup>18</sup> Compare this number to the highest ranking, Norway with .943

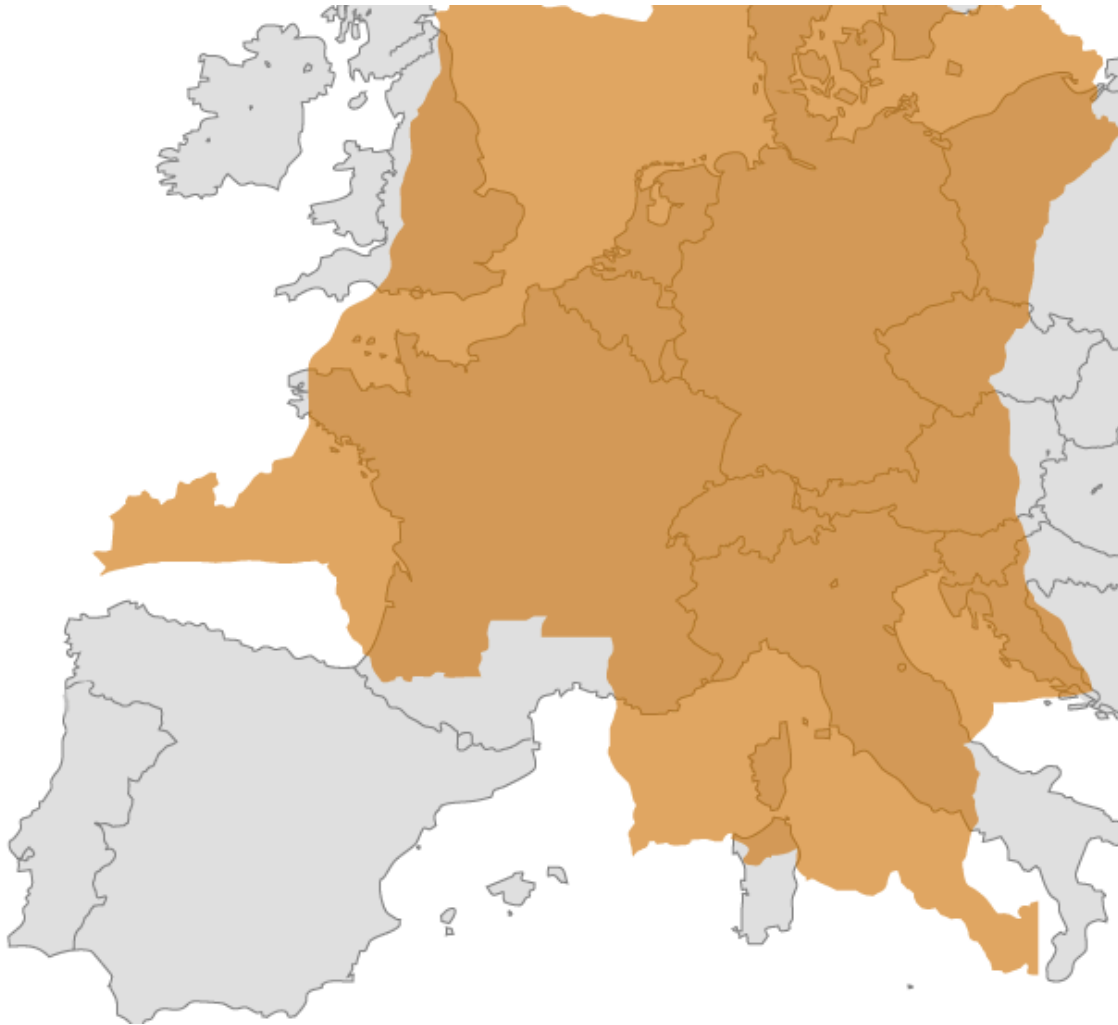
informing opinions very difficult. The United Nations does not mention their own history of interaction with the Congo.

In 1960, the Congo gained independence from Belgium and democratically elected its first president, Patrice Lumumba. Less than a year later, the United States and Belgium backed a coup d'état, in which the Lumumba was assassinated. This set off a number of rebellions, which had gripped nearly half the country by 1964, and various attempts at secession. When the US Air Force, Belgian paratroopers, and white mercenaries organized by the United States and South Africa joined together to put down the uprising, the United Nations sent in 20,000 peacekeeping troops.<sup>19</sup> The United Nations, perhaps best than most other international bodies, represents the shadows of colonialism, and with these types of details we see it, without that it makes their representations seem benign, whereas they actually point towards a type of action with that legacy. I am not saying everything the UN does is colonial, or racist, but in order for them to proceed honestly, that history should be easily available, to help inform how the numbers in their Human Development Indexes reached the places they are now.

Simplistic representations are reductive temporally, and historically, and they are also reductive spatially. The Congo is often treated as a homogenous zone, and the phrase "the Congo," although generally taken to represent the DRC, could be the river, or could refer the Republic of Congo, just north of the river. It incurs a Heart of Darkness type of reduction, where there is just "The Congo."

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<sup>19</sup> Jason K. Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: the Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2011. Print. 334



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This is an overlay of a map of the Democratic Republic Of Congo over western Europe. It is approximately 2/3 the size and is made up primarily of dense jungles, plains, swampland, and mountains to the east. The average rainfall can make travel on the mostly dirt roads nearly impossible much of the year. It resides to the south, mostly, of the Congo river, west of Lake Albert, Lake Edward, Lake Kivu, Lake Tanganyika, and Lake Mweri, which all sit on its borders between

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<sup>20</sup> Theodore Trefon. "Analysis: DR Congo elections open new wounds." *News Africa*. BBC, 20 Dec. 2011. Web. 6 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-16251401>>.

Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania.



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The Congo is one of the world's areas richest in natural resources, now estimated to have \$24 trillion worth of untouched raw materials, including cobalt, copper, niobium, tantalum, petroleum, industrial and gem diamonds, gold silver,

<sup>21</sup> Vidiani.com. "Large detailed physical and administrative map of Congo Democratic Republic with all cities, roads and airports for free." *Maps of the World*. Vidiani.com, 2007. Web. 8 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.vidiani.com/?p=8105>>.

zinc, manganese, tin, uranium, coal, and timber.<sup>22 23</sup> The population is over 73 million.<sup>24</sup>

The history behind the current situation of the Democratic Republic of Congo is immensely complicated, and involves incalculable actors, in a broad range of spaces throughout time. We are fortunate to live in a day and age of some very advanced academics, who have taken on grand challenges. Jean-Pierre Chrétien, has tried to show as complete a history of the Great Lakes region of Africa as possible. In order to do so, he does not approach the situation from a Congo state or conflict oriented perspective, but rather approaches history geographically, and titling his book *The Great Lakes of Africa: Two Thousand Years of History*. His focus surrounds the lakes, Lake Albert, which forms part of the border between Uganda and the DRC, Lake Victoria in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, Lake Kivu which forms part of the border between Rwanda and the DRC, and Lake Tanganyika which forms part of the border between the DRC, Burundi and Tanzania. By focusing on this geographical region, Chrétien is able to explore trends and commonalities between groups from all over, not just within one specific, modern nation. He is able to focus on the long-term histories, using archeological evidence, and things like ecological trends and phenomenon to help explain the environmental circumstances of social life.

Chrétien is also able to illuminate a broad spectrum of social dynamics through many different histories in a historiographical sense. In doing so he is able to write a

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Trustfull. "A Man With a Vision: President Joseph Kabila Kabange." *Emerging Markets*. Forbescustom.com, n.d. Web. 16 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.forbescustom.com/EmergingMarketsPgs/DRCongoP1.html>>.

<sup>23</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. "Congo, Democratic Republic Of The." *The World Factbook*. Central Intelligence Agency, 13 Apr. 2012. Web. 19 Apr. 2012. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cg.html>>.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

history that is conscious of the ways history itself has been used to excuse oppression, how the immensely fluid nature of history must be kept in account in order to show the truth amongst it.

No author spends the amount of time Chrétien does on the long-term history, or regional information and it allows him to take account of important details that others don't. The objective of his book, as described in his preface, is "to offer a synthesis of research contributions from various sources."<sup>25</sup> He takes concrete examples, from primary resources, as well as the research of other academics, and brings them together, comparing and contrasting, illuminating assumptions and disproving incorrect theories, to sift out the truth, as far as it can be grasped. In the process the history becomes fluid, and events like the Rwandan genocide feel like another piece of a greater puzzle. This is an honest portrayal, for although the genocide was unique in its scale and timeframe, throughout the years there have been many, many massacres in the region. In some ways, it can seem reductive, to represent the genocide this way, but within the narrative framework, and goals of Chrétien's book, it makes sense.

Perhaps one of the most common examples of misunderstanding Africa surrounds the Rwandan Genocide. Many people think that it was tribal warfare, the result of a timeless ethnic conflict, and was as simple as one side trying to kill off the other. It was, obviously, much more complicated than that, and Chrétien is able to situate the event within a great portion of history.

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<sup>25</sup> Jean-Pierre Chrétien, *The Great Lakes of Africa: Two Thousand Years of History*. New York: Urzone, Inc., 2003. Print. 9



He begins, in his first chapter, by examining the ancient human settlement of the Great Lakes Region of Africa. He is careful to be conscious of the racially based understandings that have dominated academic literature of the region, and draws from, for example, archaeological research to guide his readers away.

The region has two main rural systems: banana gardens and fisheries in the low riparian plateaus along Lake Victoria to the east (and along the depression of Lake Tanganyika) and a mixture of cultivation and cattle herding in the western mountains (Rwanda, Burundi, southwest Uganda, and the Kivu plateaus).<sup>26</sup>

From the beginning of the book Chrétien is careful to use as much of the non-racialized academic literature as possible, and deconstruct the racist ones. He begins to elude to future developments in his book, like one that becomes central towards the close, the Tutsi-Hutu divide. When he does refer to racialized histories he is sure to relate them to the context in which they have been written, and described. "The peopling of central and eastern Africa is generally summarized in a single expression: 'Bantu expansion.' Nonetheless, we should remember that the region was not empty before this event, which is generally thought to have occurred at the dawn of the Christian era."<sup>27</sup> He exclaims how "Bantu" is really a linguistic term, referring to various languages in a vast and diverse region, even though it came to represent a people whose emergence in history conveniently coincides with that of the Christians. Time and again, throughout his book, Chrétien exposes misinterpretations like this; misunderstandings and generalizations have become engrained in the historical narratives of these African societies, through projections of, usually racist, European understanding of a place they do not understand.

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* 25

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.* 43

Chrétien is not immune from these projections himself, but he uses them in a different way, with a different end. For example, he identifies different groups in the area, their locations, and subtle differences, and similarities, in their politics, language, and economy occasionally, though rarely, using European references. “Traveling from Uganda to Burundi, one encounters languages as different (and similar) as Portuguese, Spanish and Italian, if a such a comparison can be made.”<sup>28</sup> His words, however, are far less reductive, contextualized amidst the massive volume of resources, particularly as compared with the previous concept of “Bantu expansion.” Effectively, they allow those of us more familiar with European social dynamics to be able to get a better grasp, without too closely associating so as to racialize the difference. He is conscious of the danger in drawing such comparisons, and takes caution.

Although the languages in the region are of Bantu origin, there are many families and divisions of the language that are not mutually intelligible. In order to discuss the language, as well as the inherently racist and incorrect ways they had been studied in the first place, Chrétien discusses a Rhine Philologist Wilhelm Bleek, who studied the Bantu languages in the area.

Opposing the Bantu languages to those that use gender, notably the Indo-European ones, he termed the system of classes ‘nonnatural.’ This system, he added, kept its users stuck at an incoherent stage, unsuited to acceded to poetry or to philosophy.

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* 46

The grammatical form of their language does not offer their imagination with the superior spirit that the form of gendered language transmits, with irresistible force, to the thought of their speakers.

According to nineteenth-century German linguistics (from Jacob Grimm to August Schleicher), who dominated “Bantuist” studies with Carl Meinhof’s *Grammatik* until the mid-twentieth century, these African languages were at an inferior level of evolution.<sup>29</sup>

With Bleek, most of the people in the region became Bantu peoples, either “forest Bantu” in the west, “savannah Bantu” in the east, “old” and “young” Bantu. This reduced history to an almost species like characterization with waves of migration. Chrétien does not make a moral judgment on what he finds, perhaps in a nod to a can’t-change-the-past kind of mentality, but more likely towards an a priori understanding that we as readers will understand that what he is showing is wrong, in the moral sense. By using bit’s and pieces, causally, he is able to collage something we can understand, rather than making a distinctly ideological argument. This is different than Cole’s explicit approach. He might even call Chrétien racist for not coming right out, and using more accusatory language towards the racism.

For Chrétien, it is crucial to bring together and pull apart the pieces along the way, leaving in the pages what truth there is to orchestrate a history through historiography. In this way he is able to slowly develop a type of understanding that

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* 48-49

utilizes many perspectives to show what is below the surface. It is, however, surprising to me that there was no reference near this passage to anthropologies and activities of Germany, particularly as it related to the Holocaust. Maybe he thought this sort of reference would stray to far from his focus, but perhaps the inclusion of these kind of references would help broaden his history even more and bring in the important and much better known moral component of that genocide. Regardless, within the context of his book, Chrétien is very particular to show the how small ruptures, throughout time, became chasms of inequality and violence. Essentially, by not focusing directly on one conflict, one actor, or one country, he allows himself the space to show, with as much context as possible, how institutions and conflicts developed in the region over the long term.

For example, in explaining the origins of the Hutu-Tutsi dichotomy, he is careful to draw pieces together. For example, he introduces the Hamitic hypothesis, which basically said that civilization, in the region, as opposed to savagery, could be attributed to a diffusion of Middle Eastern influences into the region, which came in the form of people from Egypt descending southwest and subjugating the Great Lakes Bantu population. It was a race-based hypothesis that would become a rationale for systems of oppression. The United Kingdom's first head of the Uganda protectorate was the most influential spokesman of this hypothesis. According to the hypothesis, Bantu peasants could be identified by craniology, and could be distinguished from "semi-Caucasian," and thus superior, group of conquerors. Therefore, Bantu became "negro," inferior and Hutu.<sup>30</sup> Tutsi's were given better

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid.* 50-51

education, opportunities in government, and powers of managing land. This dichotomy in the representation marked development in region. It was taken as an ultimate reality, that there was an invading race from the north, and a starting point from which to institutionalize colonial oppression. In the public eye, it made conflicts seem tribal, as the same time as obscuring European responsibility.

This Hamitic hypothesis was eventually disproved. What was found instead were undulating movements of internal migrations throughout that led to civilizations that took two millennia to develop, but no external invasion, until the Europeans, of course.<sup>31</sup> The way Chrétien understands this dichotomy is through two different possibilities. Either, they are populations with different geographic origins, and from different linguistic families; or the divisions are of a socioeconomic nature, which developed between largely pastoral or largely agricultural groups, each of which found different ecological niches.<sup>32</sup>

These two groups, came to be regarded as mutually exclusive races. Unfortunately, the things that actually defined members of these groups were patrilineal birth, and function or occupation in place and society. The groups intermarried, and men could even move from being Hutu to Tutsi by acquiring cattle and land. In almost every clan in the region there was both Hutu and Tutsi and until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, clan was the fundamental basis for identity.<sup>33</sup>

As important as it is to know about the history of caste development, a piece of information that must be told is that Hutu's not only killed Tutsi's during the

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid.* 69

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.* 74

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.* 91

Genocide, but they also killed other Hutu's who would not participate, or who exhibited physical traits generally considered Tutsi. Chrétien, by going back as far as he does in time, is able to develop humanity within these groups, they are not just tribes, or ethnic groups, battling in some eternal struggle, but people, with histories, that cannot be accurately reduced as such.

Chrétien is sure to situate the terms temporally. "To be Tutsi or to be Hutu, in Rwanda and Burundi, did not have the same sense in 1994, at the time of the genocide, in 1894, when the whites arrived, in 1794, when the former kingdoms were almost at their apogee, and in 1594, when the kingdoms came into being."<sup>34</sup> These words do not just mean agriculturalist or pastoralist, and originally, dictated no hierarchy, but the ways those hierarchies developed were ecological, colonial, and political. This duality, both highly manipulated through history and generally misunderstood, is reminiscent of the evasive, and pervasive, complexity and depth of the long history of violence and oppression in the Congo.

After a few hundred pages of reflecting on the "fragments of history" and putting them together, he suggests a dualized possibility for the direction of events in the Great Lakes region.

The contemporary situation leaves open two possible trajectories. On the one hand, the human, economic, and political chaos might lead to state disintegration and to permanent 'warlords,' more or less controlled by external regional powers or by a massive international intervention (which is improbably). On the other hand, positive factors might take root. In the new governments in Kampala, Kigali, and Bujumbura, movements have tried to structure civil society (human-rights associations, mutual-aid associations, intellectual

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid.* 83

and/or religious groups), and small groups have resisted the racist trend – both of which give hope for new initiatives.<sup>35</sup>

His contemplative solution avoids many of the pitfalls that befell the Kony 2012 video. He does not advocate for any specific institution, and speaks to the powers of bottom up institutions to bring change. For Chrétien, it seems, justice will come in the form of meditated and slow social movements, where power can be had by people on the ground. However, more than action for change, he urges more of a mental change. Chrétien ultimately describes the need for accurate history, as inaccurate historical narratives have been used to foster oppressive institutions.

The challenge is enormous because at the heart of the melee the leaders on each side would rather see their antagonistic vision of history, based on age-old grievances, made authentic. But the historian's skill is not in bargaining. It is in reflecting on long-term processes and past ruptures and challenging fixed memories. Africa also needs this pedagogical shift.<sup>36</sup>

Having just spent several hundred pages describing in great detail the history of this region, this perspective makes sense. Chrétien draws out how various racist histories have been used throughout time to integrate colonial institutions and foster violence. With so many pieces of the puzzle it seems to make sense, but this is problematic from a human rights perspective because, although his book does a great job of showing how the events and understanding of this history came to be, it makes little room for judgment, or definitive claims of wrongdoing. Although his aims are reflective, his effect and direction is political. His explicit speculations

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid.* 356

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.* 357

about trajectory above prove this, although he gives himself room to be both right and wrong, he also patronizes African pedagogy.

I wonder if the last sentence of the book would be taken as racist by Teju Cole, or Mahmood Mamdani: “Africa also needs this pedagogical shift.” Perhaps, in some ways, Chrétien best exemplifies the “constellational thinking” Cole calls for in his essay. And, perhaps, Cole is speaking in a more aggregated sense, in terms of the academic opportunities, or rather the lack there of, for most in the region, let alone opportunities that can draw near the amount of light Chrétien does, Chrétien is correct. Here is a place where a white European man has written perhaps the most comprehensive history of the region to date, and situates himself outside of it by talking history in such a fluid way, and proposing a dualized direction. However, I do not think African scholars would disagree with him. Because the history has been so often misconstrued, Chrétien’s goal is one of the most important. If people can be correctly informed, then they can know better how to act, particularly in regard to an area with such histories of conflict, and ongoing persistent ones.

His work, however, should not disarm the power of the Rwandan Genocide, the conflict in the Congo, or any other. If anything, although his history is so dynamic, and sometimes hard to keep track of, he does the job of placing massacres in their broader historical contexts. As some human rights workers believe that history can be used to explain the past beyond the ability to act, and make violence seem circumstantial, and excusable, it should not. It should, however, allow us to have a better understanding of why the violence has happened the way it has, so as we can see the institutional developments that fostered the violence, and try to



mend them. Perpetrators should still have to make their way through some justice system, but the history would allow us to locate perpetrators, and for example, make Belgium take account of its brutal role in the Congo's history, or the role of Belgium and the United States, in their role in installing Mobutu, or even Apple computers in sourcing materials from the conflict ridden east of the Congo.

Chrétien's book is one for seasoned academics. It uses advanced language and is very full of portions many might find extraneous, or uninteresting. If anything the book's size and title may be intimidating enough to put a lot of people off. Adam Hochschild, in his book *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, takes a very different approach. He focuses on King Leopold II of Belgium the man who left more of a mark on the Congo than any other individual. In order to express this sentiment more specifically Hochschild uses a much shorter time frame in history, discussing the earlier past a bit, as well as the future, but focuses mostly between 1880-1910, when the Congo was Leopold's personal property. Although Leopold is the central character, Hochschild develops the personalities in his periphery strongly. His book almost takes on a tone of fiction, while constantly referring to real history, which makes for a very successful way for those with little previous knowledge of Congolese history to begin to understand the persistent conflict in the region, and by what means resistance to such atrocities can come into being. Unfortunately, Hochschild is not able to illuminate many Congolese characters, and thus ends up portraying a sort of white man's burden angle, but he also is able to highlight the importance of international

exposure and how crucial particular actors can be in the large picture, rather than just institutions.

Hochschild begins with an introduction to a man who would come to expose Leopold for his atrocities. A few sentences into the book he says, “Try to imagine him, briskly stepping off a cross-Channel steamer, a forceful burly man, in his mid twenties, with a handlebar mustache. He is confident and well spoken...” the description goes on. This man, Edmund Dene Morel, an employee of the shipping line that held the monopoly for the Congo Free State, was the first to realize the implications of the cargo loads full of ivory and rubber coming in, and the shipments of young men in uniforms, arms, and ammunition going back.<sup>37</sup> He realized that perhaps, the King being lauded as a “philanthropist” for his efforts in combating the African slave trade and developing the African continent was in fact, doing something very different.

The Congo has been a place that has gained the sense of being the dark heart of a dark continent. Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* helped to cement this thought in the public mind. Very few people know anything about the Congo, its history, or the millions upon millions who have died there as a result of brutal oppression and war over the last one hundred and forty years, and few feel driven to search beyond the very surface. You might be surprised to hear, as Hochschild points out, what he learned from a footnote in something he was reading. “The footnote was to a quotation by Mark Twain, written, the note said, when he was part of the worldwide movement against slave labor in the Congo, a practice that had taken eight to ten

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<sup>37</sup> Adam Hochschild. *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. New York: First Mariner Books Edition, 1999. Print.2

million lives<sup>38</sup>.” It is a movement very few people know about, and if a learned author and journalist went so many years of his life without hearing about it, it is unlikely that most others have either. Knowing this to be the case, it seems, Hochschild wanted to make sure to tell the story in an accessible and attention grabbing way. Whereas most would be daunted by Chrétien’s *The Great Lakes of Africa: Two Thousand Years of History*, most could engage with Hochschild’s *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. Though less complete in its scale of history, it enters the profound world of the personal, which can illuminate the human qualities past events, and institutions.

Because his tale focuses around the internal slave trade Leopold ran in the Congo, Hochschild chooses to start his story with the beginning of colonialism in Africa and its engagement with the slave trade that already existed there. He describes the 1482 journey made by Diogo Cão, Portuguese naval captain that led the first Europeans to the Congo, and the first encounter with sub-Saharan civilization, the Kongo kingdom.<sup>39</sup>

It is here where we can illuminate an interesting divergence between Chrétien and Hochschild. Hochschild effectively ignores the eastern slave trade that was also taking slaves from what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo. Chrétien, however, does not. He describes the trade networks that were developing to the east of the country in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and we learn that traders from the east, “Turks,” of Khartoum, and “Arabs,” from Zanzibar, as well as their Swahili auxiliaries, were working with Rwandans who urged that slaves must be taken from

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid.* 3

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.* 7

west of Lake Kivu, what is the modern day Democratic Republic of Congo.<sup>40</sup>

Regardless, in trying to maintain such a tight and focused narrative, Hochschild skips this part of the story, almost as much as Chrétien neglects the western trade. As his focus is on the Great Lakes, the trade based on the west coast is on the geographical periphery for his study. Both authors capture different sides of similar tales, yet fail to really bring the two together. It was Jason Stearns however, in his book *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa*, who connects the two, albeit briefly.

Stearns' book reads like a long, magazine article. He goes back and forth between historical information, developing the characters for the story, and contemporary time, interviewing people who had been involved in the Congo's more recent history. He is somewhere in between, but also outside of Chrétien and Hochschild. His focus is much more on the years of 1994, and the Rwandan genocide, through the mid to late 2000's as violence evolved to surround artisanal mines.

Stearns, like Hochschild, discusses the Kongo Kingdom, however, only in his conclusion, and primarily to allude to their surprising development at the time, having a 20,000 man standing army, and diplomatic representatives in Portuguese, Spanish and papal courts. He does not illuminate, however, in the way Hochschild did, the character of Nzinga Mbemba Affonso, the Manikongo who sought help from the Portuguese Monarch, and how his empire was to fall. He only refers to the quick image of the highly developed Kongo Kingdom, and then how "the Congo has been

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid.* 198

the victim of four hundred years of political disintegration,” and a brutal export of slaves.<sup>41</sup> Stearns builds characters as well, but his choice of actors, time frame, and angle is different. He has a consistent, chronological narrative, and dips in and out of interviews in more recent years with folks involved. It allows him to draw a reality with a now. These contemporary moments are in some ways more effective than Hochschild’s narrative past; Stearns work seems very real, as opposed to Hochschild’s almost fictional style.

These sort of personal details, which create a more traditional narrative, help forge stronger more coherent memories for us as readers. Chrétien does not really do this at all and, in order to highlight geopolitical or geosocial phenomenon jumps quickly between actors and times. Although it has much more breadth of facts and detail, it is much easier to get lost in. On my first reading of Chrétien’s book I had not noticed the details of the emergence of the eastern slave trade amongst so much information. Through Hochschild’s, or Stearns’, focused narrative, we can see the interpersonal struggles and feelings within the actors, illuminate the story and help guide the narrative.

While central to Adam Hochschild’s story, King Leopold II doesn’t enter Chrétien’s narrative until about halfway through the book. He appears as the sole competitor to Britain’s colonial efforts in east Africa. He is treated as a relatively disengaged, though cunning actor.

Rather, behind the scenes, the king of Belgium, Leopold II, paved the way by establishing a domain for which his International Association of the Congo would be responsible. In 1885, he had his domain recognized as an independent state (the Congo Free State). He

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<sup>41</sup> Stearns. 330

negotiated, according to his representatives, using one of Stanley's particularly fanciful maps, variously referring to waterways and relief.<sup>42</sup>

Though this is not his first reference in the book, it is shortly afterwards and typifies Chrétien's attitude towards him. His role in the story thus is more geopolitical and takes almost none of the man's character, or serious human rights offenses into account. There is no mention of the system of forced labor he implemented, and little of the immoral ways he took to gain control.

Jason Stearns only mentions the King in three separate and brief occasions. By doing so he misses out on an important dimension of the history, but with the purpose of developing other aspects of the story he deems more critically important, the events and actors who have most recently and directly affected the current situation. The first sums up as much of Leopold's role as possible in a few sentences

In 1885, during the scramble to divide Africa among colonial powers, King Leopold II of Belgium claimed the country as his personal fiefdom. He set up the Congo Free State, a private enterprise, and during the rubber boom of the 1890s the country became a key source of latex for car and bicycle tires. Colonial officers created a draconian system of forced labor during which they killed or mutilated hundreds of thousands and pushed millions of others to starvation or death from disease.

This brutality prompted the first international human rights campaign, led by missionaries and activists, including Mark Twain and Arthur Conan Doyle. King Leopold capitulated and handed the country over to the Belgian government in 1908. Although they established a much more elaborate administration with extensive primary education, the Belgians still focused on extracting resources and did little to encourage Congolese development. The upper echelons of the military and civil service were entirely white, pass laws kept

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<sup>42</sup> Chrétien 215

Congolese from living in upper-class neighborhoods, and education was limited to the bare minimum.<sup>43</sup>

Stearns treats Leopold as cog. By focusing instead on his role in the greater scheme, Stearns favors institutional development over the development of characters in his representation. His treatment of Leopold is more similar to Chrétien in this regard. Stearns other references to Leopold are in passing as the owner of the Congo as his private empire, but no are more than twice the rest of the book. Considering that Stearns' focus is on the wars in the 1990's and 2000's he chooses to lightly gloss over past atrocities of the past. Although they were a long time ago, they are still relevant and have played hugely into developments since, they illuminate the routes of the conflict, and emphasize its persistence. Perhaps the details are not essential, but humanizing actors draws emotional attention and gives character to institutions, making people more likely to understand these narratives as real, as they were represented.

On April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1835, King Leopold II of Belgium was born, shortly after the Belgium itself had gained independence. His father had been appointed king of the new country; a German prince related to the British royal family and he took the throne as Leopold I. Hochschild is sure to describe, at least briefly, the state to which Leopold I came into power.

After spells of Spanish, Austrian, French and Dutch rule, it had only become independent in 1830, following a revolt against Holland. Any respectable country of course needed a king, and the infant national had gone looking for one, finally settling on a German prince, related to the British royal family, who had taken the Belgian throne as Leopold I.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Stearns. 6-7

<sup>44</sup> Hochschild. 33

Here we see a father, who seems like he was handed power. It seems doubtful this man really represented the ideals of the people considering his seemingly chosen position. Hochschild sets up the image of a disconnected man, a legacy carried on by his son, in so many ways.

Leopold II was a child of a loveless marriage of political convenience, and he was sent away to boarding schools and military academies from a young age. He took little interest in his studies, as Hochschild shows with lines in a letter from his mother. "I was very disturbed to see in the Colonel's report that you had again been so lazy and that your exercises had been so bad and careless. This was not what you had promised me, and I hope you will make some effort to do your homework better. Your father was as disturbed as I."<sup>45</sup> Here, we see things we can identify with, detached parents, lack of motivation: we can identify with Leopold's youth. The way he paints this soon to be monster as a young man is important. It highlights the banality of the face, the life behind incomprehensible suffering. We can see the suffering as internal in Leopold, and then how it expressed itself in his life, and the lives of others.

If he ever wanted to see his father, he had to apply for an audience, and if his father wanted to tell something to him, it would be through one of his secretaries. Here, he learned networking early, having to deal with many of his father's court officials who were eager to please the future monarch, indulging his interest in maps and information about far reaches of the world.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* 34

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.* 34



Leopold I arranged a marriage for his son when he was eighteen with the aims of cementing a more beneficial relationship with the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The sixteen year old bride that Leopold II was made to take was known for her love of horses and her raucous laughter. Leopold had a tendency to fall off of horses, and no visible sense of humor. A woman observed this marriage was “between a stable-boy and a nun, and by a nun I mean [Leopold II].”<sup>47</sup> They were a match made in royalty, and bound for unhappiness. On their honeymoon he wouldn’t let her ride in the gondola with musicians that had already been hired. A month after the wedding she wrote a friend saying “If God hears my prayers, I shall not go on living much longer.”<sup>48</sup> He had one son, who died young of pneumonia and his wife bore three daughters. After the son’s death he refused to have anything to do with his wife and even tried to change the Belgian law with required assets bequeathed to one’s children. His selfish aspirations for power had grown beyond that of his family. In this detached life, the young Leopold sought an outlet for his desire, and a means by which to prove himself as a king and a man.

Hochschild shows a deeper side of the story in that regard. Whereas the geopolitical and social details of institutional development are important, through this type of narrative we can understand and see details in our lives that make it easier for us to come to grips with someone else’s life. Through this type of personal understanding, the representation will affect the reader more, and thus have a stronger impact.

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.* 35

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.* 35

Despite Leopold's disturbed youth, and absolutely central role in the colonization and atrocities committed in the Congo while he was in direct ownership of it, there were other characters who took great, if not more, direct responsibility in the horror. Leopold II never actually set foot in the Congo. Part of Leopold's genius was the way he instrumentalized individuals to help further his plans. This aspect of the narrative is also greatly ignored in Chrétien and Stearns, who care more for broad-spectrum analyses and contemporary developments, however they give great insight. Deep looks into small pieces of the past can be very illuminating, in a fractal sense, every piece like the whole.

Perhaps, the person single handedly most responsible in the realization of Leopold's Congo, and for actually fabricating the web of lies which shrouded it, goes unmentioned in Jason Stearns' *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*. To Chrétien he is one amongst others, an explorer, whose habit of ideating his endeavors is only alluded to. To quote Chrétien, the character I refer to is "Henry Morton Stanley, who, financed by the *New York Herald*, left specifically 'to search for Livingstone' and ended up 'finding' him un Ujiji in 1871."<sup>49</sup> This was Stanley's first expedition through the continent of Africa, which gained him international fame, and one of his book deals. It also grasped first Leopold II's attention.

Hochschild starts with the man's childhood. "He was entered on the birth registry as 'John Rowlands, Bastard' – an epithet that was to mark him the boy for the rest of his life, a life obsessively devoted to living down a sense of shame."<sup>50</sup> We begin, as readers, through Hochschild to get a sense of some of the roots to the

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<sup>49</sup> Chrétien. 204

<sup>50</sup> Hochschild. 21

current and persistent conflict in the Congo. Men with something to prove, with shame to dispel, abusing power far from the public eye. As a young lad he was bounced between family members and foster homes and, at six years old, St. Asaph Union Workhouse. Hochschild describes rumors of sexual abuse, and how, for the rest of his life, Stanley would “show a fear of sexual intimacy in any form.” These types of details are immensely powerful, and shed light on perhaps one of the darkest aspects of European colonialism, the state of lives in Europe, how oppression there reflected in colonialism. This is, however, not the story I’m trying to tell, but I applaud anyone who could tie those ends together.

He accelerated in school, despite what else was going on, showing here a propensity to turn fear into a work ethic. He was fascinated with geography. When he finally arrived to New Orleans in 1859, John Rowlands took on a new name, Henry Morton Stanley, and wrote himself a biography, painting his dark history as heroic, leading a rebellion at the workhouse and escaping. Hochschild is sure to say “Other students recalled no mutiny, much less one by Stanley; they often remembered... Stanley as a teacher’s pet, often given favors and encouragement and put in charge of the class when [the teacher] was away.”<sup>51</sup> It seems that Stanley’s capacity as a leader in the face of adversity would set him up perfectly to be one of Leopold’s pawns.

Like this Hochschild draws out the tale in intimate detail: how Leopold saw the success of Stanley’s first trip across Africa and used his power as King to convince Stanley to do it again; how Stanley paraded through Africa with a massive

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid.* 24

group of porters and others to carry his equipment. There were many deaths; aside from the brutal conditions, Stanley was a harsh task master and disciplinarian, no transgression, would go without a whipping from a chicotte (widely used and made of hippopotamus hide, it would break skin with almost every stroke), even two drinkers got 100 lashes each and 6 months in chains.<sup>52</sup> One problem here is that Hochschild portrays Stanley, in a sense, foreshadowing systems of forced labor to come, and he does, of course. But Hochschild, for example, does not describe the history of the chicotte, or relevant or parallel references to disciplinarian techniques amongst African's with any power; whether or not his type of behavior was anything but atypical in Africa. If the opinions of Europeans about Africans has anything to say to this end, then Hochschild finds it in the mouth of Leopold himself, deferring to the top: "In dealing with a race composed of cannibals it is necessary to use methods which will best shake their idleness and make them realize the sanctity of work."<sup>53</sup> It is hard to see where exactly Stanley lies in the institutional development, but Hochschild does make sure to give parallels in sentiment.

This is a place where we could benefit from a bit more of Chrétien's attitude, a get-down-to-the-bottom-of-it, long time frame historical type of approach. However, if Chrétien does do that, it is hard to find. There is no index for objects, or institutions, only people and places. If the chicotte is referenced it is strewn amongst almost 500 pages, with no means by which to search it out others than through meticulous sifting. Chrétien would benefit by broadening his scope a bit here, although it is already swollen, even if simply with a third index to allow readers to

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<sup>52</sup> Hochschild. 50

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.* 118

more easily trace history through objects, and events, as they shape history as much as people, and places. It is obviously impossible to include absolutely everything, but it is important for future works to learn from the techniques of earlier ones to increase their multidimensionality, and frame within which the information can be accessed.

The chicotte was one of the most widespread objects used in the Congo, yet more important than its history was the ways and reason it was used, the window it gives into the greater system. The object doesn't make into Stearns' index either, but is referred to a number of times in Hochschild's. He quotes a Congo state official to first introduce:

A file of poor devils, chained by the neck, carried my trunks and boxes towards the dock...There were about a hundred of them, trembling and fearful before the overseer, who strolled by whirling a whip. For each stocky and broad-backed fellow, how many were skeletons dried up like mummies, their skin worn out...seamed with deep scars, covered with suppurating wounds...No matter, they were all up to the job.<sup>54</sup>

Strangely, he doesn't include the name of the whip, the chicotte, in or just around this quote, but he gets back to it later. This whip is quite literally a means for oppression, for subjugating individuals, for striking fear and pain into them. In this section, the whip is an unquestioned driving force of that reality in the Congo. It is not simply a way to create a different narrative, but a way to illustrate a sort of

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<sup>54</sup> *ibid.* 119

aggregate image. What one thinks of when they hear the word Congo, without these sorts of descriptions those connotations of oppression and violence, will not bear articles of reality and will not enter our minds in the same way.

It is also important to address a present. Of these three author's Stearns spends the most time addressing it. He does so through his method of using historical and contemporary time. He describes interviews with individuals in a reflective way, asking them about how events took place. There is something essential in the way we get the reflections of people involved, or who were present, during various points of the history because, they are not simply the reflections of historians, but reflections which bear real meaning on these events within the context of lives, and help show how things got to the way they are now. In a way, it almost absolves individuals, by showing so much of their humanity, and portraying individuals involved outside of the context of the conflict directly, we see humanity behind the even the perpetrators of violence.

Stearns describes and interviews a man named Papy Kamanzi. Now a family man, he was a mid-level army commander from a Tutsi community who had fought in four different armed groups. He described working in a Rwandan death squad in Goma, killing up to a hundred "dissidents" a day, sometimes women and children, using a rope to crush their windpipes, asphyxiating them. There is something to be taken from Kamanzi's response to Stearns' question, "Why did you do it?"

I had to. If I hadn't, it would have been suspicious... You know, you can't really explain these things. For us soldiers, killing comes easy. It has become part of our lives. I have lost five members of my family during the war. You have to understand that. You have to understand the history of my family – how we were

persecuted, then favored by Mobutu, how we were denied citizenship and laughed at school. How they spat in my face. Then you can judge me.<sup>55</sup>

How do you serve justice in a world like this, where every person has a reason, some internal logic to excuse themselves? We rely on human rights institutions to form a moral argument above all else, that justice can be had and served, even retroactively, that punishment can bring more justice.

I try to imagine what it must be like for this man. Does he dream of the people he killed? Does Papy suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, along with one-fourth of other Rwandans?<sup>56</sup> Does that post traumatic stress not act like its own form of internal justice, punishing for the things done wrong, or for things entirely outside of our control? Should Papy be thrown in jail, taken from his family? Is it right to punish a lack of individual will, like for Papy to stand up to his comrades, in the face of such a history, in the face of social power? He very well might have been killed for speaking out. We reach, in some ways, a banality of justice.

I do not know the answers to these questions. I do not know the right course of action, but it seems, neither does Stearns. He says that “peacemaking cannot be done on the cheap,” and that half-assed attempts tend to do more harm than good. That being said, he says his book is “an exhortation to raise the bar and try harder to understand this layered complexity.”<sup>57</sup> It seems for everyone there is the question of how to move forward, and it seems representations that leave their ends more open ended are the most successful, ultimately. Stearns concludes:

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<sup>55</sup> Stearns. 10

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 46

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.* 336

There are no easy solution for the Congo, no silver bullet to produce accountable government and peace. The ultimate fate of the country rests with the Congolese people themselves. Westerners also have a role to play, in part because of our historical debt to the country, in part because it is the right thing to do. This does not mean imposing a foreign vision on the country or simply sending food and money. It means understanding it and its politics and rhythms on their own terms, and then doing our part in providing an environment conducive to growth and stability.<sup>58</sup>

The most interesting part of Stearns conclusion is in his description of the role of the west, as his book is oriented for a western audience. This concept of historical debt, or moral imperative, draws on a different tone than Chrétien or Hochschild. Where Hochschild lauds the growth of international human rights organizations out of the rights movement for the Congo 100 years ago, Stearns draws his humanity towards a younger, more pragmatic end. Stearns understands quite well the realities of the Congo, and knows that he cannot understand fully their problems, he knows that there is no simple fix, and thus suggests a course of action that is not specific, but is true to need for community based projects, and wariness of western humanitarianism.

The deeper the issues of the Congo are explored, the more truth comes to light. Stearns' almost detached attitude towards the end is appropriate. The problems are not his own, and he treats them as such. This is a good lesson. It is always good to learn more, and keep trying to understand. Developments of individual understanding can filter into the social, in discussion and debate, and are thus important, and should be motivation to continue an active learning process. On the other hand, with that knowledge must remain a level of humility, because

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<sup>58</sup> Stearns. 336-337



knowing, or thinking you know, does not empower you to fix anything, it does however ask you to change how you feel, and effectively to act.

In knowing that the knowledge we input will be reflected in our lives, we must know how representations effect us, and how they effect others, so that we can represent our knowledge most honestly, without falling victim to a hubris that echoes structures of oppression. The history must be heeded very consciously, so as to let plans of action develop in a critical and public space.

### 3. Continuing Representation and How to Move Forward

Perhaps this is a sign of progress, that profound ideas about justice, development, rights, and representation, are being talked about, and a greater breadth of narratives are being proliferated. If anything, there has been a recognition that comprehensive history is essential in representation, as is the fair treatment of all of those struggling for rights, for if we look back on the history we will find that no one has been innocent forever, that the systems of oppression go far beyond individual militant leaders, and that we may need to look beyond military intervention to solve issues and encourage progressive development.

The Enough Project is an organization whose goal is “to end genocide and crimes against humanities,” primarily in Sudan and the Congo. The organization’s co-director John Prendergast travelled with celebrity actor and producer Ryan Gosling to the Congo and together, they released a video in March 2011.<sup>59</sup> Despite Gosling’s increasing fame, it took over a year before the video came into the public space for me, shortly after first seeing the Kony 2012 video. I cried when I watched it. I shared it the video on Facebook and was surprised when the video didn’t get any notifications. I posted it again the next day, and maybe got a response or two. The video did not go viral, and has since been removed from the Enough Project’s website, though it can still be found on Ryan Gosling’s Vimeo account.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ryan Gosling, and John Prendergast. *raisehopeforcongo.org*. *Vimeo.com*. raisehopeforcongo.com, Mar. 2011. Web. 10 Mar. 2012. <<http://vimeo.com/20962050>>.

<sup>60</sup> Ryan Gosling. “Ryan Gosling.” *Vimeo.com*. Ryan Gosling, Mar. 2011. Web. 10 Mar. 2012. <<http://vimeo.com/user6020044>>.

In its approach, style, and message, the video is very different than the Kony 2012 video. This video is only four minutes long, and is all in black and white. It starts in silence, with a handheld shot of a young person's profile looking out the window of a bus. The shot bumps up and down with the road. It is hard to tell whether the person is male or female, but their youth is foregrounded against a bustling city. The aperture is low, so the face is in strong focus and the background is blurry. City light reflects in the one visible eye. We see a place through a person, and setting is of less importance than the humanity. The shot is familiar, riding on public transportation, watching the world pass by. It connotes responsibility, agency, and an agenda, while the young rider remains passive. It dichotomizes the personal and world outside, and makes sets youth and potential amongst stress.

After 30 seconds, music starts, but it is only heavily auto-tuned vocals, beautiful and dissonant, the lyrics are hard to pick out through the stylized effects. After so much silence the sound is striking, and there is silence between lyrics. It shows the power and beauty in patience, in time needed to think, it draws out an esoteric beauty, or perhaps rather, intensity of silence, of lives we cannot understand. If your attention has been grasped by the images, then the sound will leave you waiting.

The shot begins to turn purple and dissolves into a shot of a jellyfish, where the color tone has lets the jellyfish glow almost infrared, swimming in a dark background. It draws humanity towards the animal, moving away from anthropocentric construction, ever so briefly, towards an even broader framework. On the one hand, it seems like the jellyfish has nothing to do with anything else in

the video, and comes off as overly stylized, and directed to draw attention from people who could not find something powerful enough in the rest of the video.

The shot dissolves to a young boy running with a soccer ball in his hands, friends following, all wearing button up shirts, and each carrying something, presumably back from school, or the grocery store. They are running behind a cameraman who holds the camera low, looking up at the children as he runs in front of them. Here we see growth, learning, and play: this spirited youth, these young boys, running through a small yet busy street. There are not many buildings but much foot traffic, and the little boy is most distracted on the run by one man wearing a suit and hat, carrying a big walking stick. Despite this world around them, of adults with agendas, and power, there is still a space for fun. As here the youths are dichotomized with adults we begin to see a patronizing light. It is as though the agency lies in the future, and not in the now with those who inhabit local power, in adults. While the potential is important, the video lacks any representation of agency in people capable of affecting change. This shot puts the adults as obstacles in the road.

It dissolves again, a shot from an automobile riding down the street, at night in the rain, motorcycles pass, and people run to avoid the rain, a couple walks slowly together. It draws darkness onto this life we have seen before. Nothing in the shot is unfamiliar, just nighttime and rain, but something ominous.

The shot blurs again, cutting more quickly to a shot of young children playing to the cameraman, staring into the lens. This shot again is at night, and a few children stop to interact as others walk by. Here we see individuality and identity in

eyes, and interest in something beyond through the camera. The purple jellyfish returns briefly, perhaps to remind us of the animal context again, something beyond race, or nationality, a creature of the ocean, yet something full of life, and light.

Then it cuts to the most powerful shot. You can see what appears to be a young girl telling a story and shaking her head through tears, but you cannot make out her words, as there is only silence, and the music. She stops talking, wipes her tears and looks presumably to the interviewer, and around a bit, as more tears well in her eyes. She has told a story, of memories past, something that looks profoundly disturbing. Her hair is cut close to her head, and the only thing that suggests her femininity is what appear to be straps of a brassiere under her shirt. The silence and looking towards the interviewer after she stops speaking forces us to sit with that image of her, and heed her look towards someone else, a desire for help, for something and somehow to move forward in the space after her story. The slight details force us to think of what could she be crying about? As she is female, and having heard bits and pieces of already raised awareness, one likely draws the conclusion of rape, and who knows what else.

It cuts to white words on the black background:

Congo is currently hosting the deadliest war since World War II and the highest rates of sexual violence in the world.  
Thousands of women are being raped.  
Over 5 million people have died so far.  
All this over the control of Congo's minerals.  
Minerals that are in our cell phones, laptops, and mp3 players.

It cuts again, "raisehopeforcongo.org." I thought this video was much better done than Kony 2012, but when I saw that page at the end I was distressed. It minimized a huge historical context into nil, saying that the whole conflict is about

minerals. Although the mining sector in the Congo is extremely problematic, and controlling mines now causes much of the violence, to reduce the conflict so is to simplify the reasons, the history, and the means for solutions.

The video's explicit point is to raise awareness, and hope. Unfortunately, most people I tried to send the video to turned it off when they saw the jellyfish, or before they could endure even 30 seconds of silence. The primary use of children could easily be construed as patronizing, and within the scope of the video the children are the primary means of emotional connection, begging patrimony. They, however, are real people, who live in the Congo, who have been effected, if only peripherally, by the conflict there, and a long history of oppressive institutions.

The video is emotionally very powerful, and paints humanity, and potential, into a situation that seems so dire from the outside, which seems lost. However, the video still leaves the power with and American audience, as if it is up to those with privilege to do the saving. Teju Cole would probably have similar criticisms to the Kony 2012 video, and so would Dinaw Mengetsu, that any representation by westerners falls in with colonization, and that this is taking power from Congolese, shown here only as children, and without voice. Looking towards the people behind the camera. The use of happy children, as well, shines a light very rarely seen, of normal life happening in the Congo. Both laughter and tears are portrayed, night time and day time, at points the camera is still, at times it rides in vehicles, at times it is handheld and running. We see an adult couple walking in the rain, children playing to a camera, a responsible young person, and in the end immense pain.

There is a deep point in this video, something more emotionally profound and conscious than the Kony 2012 video. Most people watching the video will have been the same ages as the people in the video, albeit in different places, and can, on some level, identify with what they see. There are no white faces in the video, yet even I could understand the humanity, and the suffering, I can feel that. I do not know their struggles exactly, I do not know what their lives are like, or who they are, but the video lets me simply observe, and react. Despite all of the past, and the history, which is of great importance, the humanity must be portrayed and recognized as well.

As this video gives no context of history it runs counter in many ways to the arguments of all the scholars I have explored. But how do you represent and deal with conflicts to a population, who for the most part, has heard nothing about the conflict, cares very little to do anything about it, and will be less than likely to even watch, let alone read, anything about it.

I think there is something important to be taken from that Kony 2012 video. It got over 100 million views in a month, tons of attention, and stirred up important debate in the public sphere. There is something to be learned from its form of representation, as it was so widely proliferated, however, the emotional depth of Congolese humanity shown in the Gosling video is something to keep in mind. Both of them miss the historical background, and ultimately fail to really raise awareness about the reality, the only raise awareness about their own narratives, their own cause.

As more and more work is done to raise awareness, and urge action, it is increasingly important to account for all of the factors that make representations successful or not. It is important to know how the scope of history will affect the outcome for the viewer. The more and more that the power to represent can be taken on by the Congolese themselves the better, they should be able to tell their own stories, and call for what they want and need. Some of them are telling their own stories, on less exposed stages, and perhaps a good start for the west is to try to reveal those venues, and proliferate that work.

I do not know the answers. I cannot tell you how to seek justice, how to support rights, how to act in the face of all of this. There is so much history, so much feeling, so much emotion, inevitable projections of our inner selves, and the institutions behind us, into the outside world, vulnerability, and struggles for dignity, that it can all become very confusing. There is violence, there is rape, there is murder, there is genocide, there is slavery, there is pillage, there is exploitation, and there is oppression. Everything that happens now, and forever, will be in the shadow of colonization. But colonization happened in the light the Africa before Europeans, in highly developed monarchies. What many Europeans did was terrible, but so was slavery in the Kongo Kingdom before Europeans; the massacres committed by some Hutu's, and some Tutsi's, were brutal and destroyed communities and lives; what Museveni did, putting populations in internment camps, is similar to Jews in Germany, and Japanese in California during the World War II; what Joseph Kony does with the LRA is atrocious, but not unique. We must be able to see commonalities in history to draw on even bigger issues, but never



forget the humanity, the people whose lives are really affected in the contemporary moments.

If the timeline or the context becomes too broad, we can lose the power of narrative, if it is too short, we can lose the scope of its ends. Justice becomes intangible through representation alone, and reflects its ethereal reality. Is justice ever really served? Does putting a criminal behind bars fix the problem? I have to believe in the power of international institutions, and justice, because they have the potential for the greatest perspective. As their ethos is fundamentally humanist, it seems like the best way to proceed.

Perhaps I am wrong. I do not know the best way to proceed, but I do know that the power of representation is directly tied to dignity. People want to portray themselves, and others, in different ways for different reasons, and as much as possible it should be left up to them to do it, if they can. If they cannot, or for some reason, someone feels impelled to represent someone else, somewhere else, or an event beyond their immediate experience, particularly a conflict, they should do so with a broad scope of history and profound levels of humanity, in a public space where critique can be heard. This will help develop understanding in a way that can effect institutions, and spread the locus of power to more individuals.

People want rights, dignity, justice, and freedom, among so many other things. The stakes are high, and every urge or attempt to affect change is warranted, and must be analyzed critically. In this day and age we are fortunate to be able to expose mistakes on an unprecedented scale, and it is important to keep the goals in mind. The goals should be up to the very people who seek them, but

there must be a place for imposition, like with Joseph Kony, somebody must impose the law onto him, or, perhaps even better, let him come out and say what he has to say. Perhaps under the right circumstances, even Joseph Kony could articulate systems of injustice that led him to where he is, and the type of actions he takes, the types of narratives he proliferates. Maybe it would be best just to kill him, however, silencing those who have been oppressed is exactly what is at stake here, and perhaps the opportunity of voice must be extrapolated more broadly. If voice is power, then everyone should have the right to portray themselves, and others, however, they should do so within the consciousness of a public space, and should, do so to help the rest of us try to understand this profoundly confusing world that we all share.

Life is hard for everybody I think, and the more that we can all do to try to help out is good, because even mistakes foster progress. However, at a certain point, for those of us who do not need help, maybe it is time to realize the need to take a step back and let people deal with their own problems. Perhaps this humility must accompany a recognition, that people with privilege continue to benefit from oppressive institutions, and perhaps should spend more time trying to dismantle them, and deal with their own problems at home.

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