

**SIMONA JIȘA, SERGIU MIȘCOIU ET MODIBO DIARRA (DIR.),**  
***RACONTER LES POLITIQUES CONFLICTUELLES EN AFRIQUE.***  
**REGARDS CROISÉS, PARIS: ÉDITIONS DU CERF, COLL.**  
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The political turmoil of postcolonial Africa has ignited the imagination of many authors who tried to capture, through their writing, the essence of the various conflicts and crises that have ensued following the dissolution of the colonial empires. The volume *Raconter les Politiques Conflictuelles en Afrique*<sup>1</sup> untangles the narrative representation of conflict and bears testament to the complexity of its role in shaping the understanding of the past and present, demonstrating the intertwined relation between politics and literary creation in Africa.

The opening section of the volume introduces us to the political landscape of post-independence sub-Saharan Africa and explores the thorny social issues at the core of the never-ending cycle of violence. The Cameroonian conflict is the first to be analysed in the book. Wilfride Gilbert Nzokou Fotsing's contribution focuses on the ideological dissection of the conflict in Cameroon familiarises us with the broader issues that have plagued African states in their post-colonial history. This first sub-chapter explores the ideological justification of violence as a course of action and unpacks the bellicose logic of Amilcar Cabral's national liberation doctrine. The author notes the centrality of the military offensive in this rhetoric and reveals a revolutionary conception of the political struggle marked by the

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conflation of politics and violence that advances violence as the sole method through which autonomy and emancipation can be reached.

In the following contribution, Roxana Mateş elaborates on the narrative binary of the anglophone and francophone discourses on the secessionist crisis as reflected through literature. Her analysis highlights a dichotomous perspective of the crisis and reveals the political underpinning of the literary description of events. Mateş contends that, while the anglophone literature depicts the radicalisation of the conflict as a result of discrimination, marginalization and the feeling of being recolonized, the francophone literature focuses less on the root causes of the crisis and instead emphasises its unfortunate outcomes, labelling the supporters of the secessionist cause as enemies, terrorists and agitators whose only purpose is the destabilisation of the country.

Violence, a central theme of the volume, is presented as the result of an accumulation of factors, most notably the lack of rights beyond mere constitutional declaration, the clientelism and arbitrary distribution of state funds, the frustration with declining living standards, the lack of opportunity, of future perspective and generalised poverty. These issues are going to be a leitmotif for all the conflicts presented in this chapter.

The conflicts documented are take place in the context of the disillusionment with the promise of independence and freedom and the demythification of autonomy, caused by the corruption of its revolutionary principles and the untimely abandonment of its ideals. Against this backdrop and accentuated by the failure of the state to provide solutions for its younger population, Ciprian Gabriel Oros unveils the readaptation of radical Islam in Senegal and the incorporation of an anti-colonial discourse, manifested by the rejection of the occidental cultural model and its symbols as a form of resistance against an oppressive "other". Identity construction through alterity emerges as a central theme in this analysis, together with the rejection of Occidental culture and its consumerism as an attempt to craft an alternative cultural model that is, in effect, an ideological refuge that offers the disheartened youth a sense of dignity and control over their destiny.

Kombila Milunda's work on the representation of post-independence conflicts in the *Peuples Noirs, Peuples Africains* periodical uncovers an anti-colonial discourse according to which conflicts and violence are the outcomes of destructive colonial policies, and African politicians in power are nothing more than the puppets of the former colonial powers who enforce, through their faulty leadership, the preservation and extension of colonialism, albeit in a less direct form. He contends that this discourse and representation of postcolonial conflicts is a call to fight for emancipation.

The contributions of Simona Jiša and Diana Nechit remind us that cultural products, be it novels, magazines or comics and theatrical performances, can serve as devices that allow us to measure the political reality. Simona Jiša documents, in her assessment of the comic book series *Carnets d'Orient*, the plight of postcolonial Algeria and its struggles. The series is defined as a recollection exercise meant to document and recreate the past, in a critical perspective meant to encourage reconciliation and question the socio-political issues portrayed, most notably the rivalry between nationalities and religions, the tragedy of war, the racism of the colonial system and its compulsion to "civilize" at all costs, the violence and the condition of women.

Diana Nechit explores the theatrical world of Sony Labou Tansi, Koffi Kwahulé, Édouard Elvis Bvouma and Aristide Tarnagda in an effort to understand the engaging and militant character of the new forms of artistic expression. Here, art is not only a way of preserving memory and conferring sense to history, but also an invitation to reflect on the political *status quo* through the lens of the personal and intimate human experience of the characters. The new African theatre offers not only a relevant critique of the political crisis but provides us with a personalized account of events we can relate to. This, according to Diana Nechit, contributes to a relevant political reflection.

If the first part of the book encompasses a collection of radiographic reviews of works that offer insights into wide-reaching social and political issues, the second chapter is dedicated to the exploration of volumes offering a more personalized perspective. The works analysed in this

chapter illustrate the impact of the genocide in Rwanda on an individual level, through the lens of highly personified characters and techniques such as allegory and metaphor which sensitize the reader to the atrocities of war.

Buata B. Malela examines the narrative violence in the francophone account of the genocide in Rwanda. In this work, the francophone fiction is the expression of an anthropological view of the conflict and the familiarity of violence, reflected by the dehumanization and normalization of violence against victims, in its physical and symbolical form. F. Z. Odome Angone talks about a “survivor’s syndrome” in the “post-traumatic” storytelling of Scholastique Mukasonga and the therapeutic role of writing. In this perspective, the writing of Mukasonga is seen as a tribute to those who have died, a way of making peace with reality, of forgiving oneself for having survived where others have perished, relieving oneself from the perceived guilt of being alive and the survivor syndrome. Jalad Berthelot Obali’s analysis of the novel *Petit pays* by Gaël Faye unveils the possibility of reinventing the post-traumatic identity and space through symbolic reconstruction. Obali asserts that the knowledge deriving from such literary endeavours can serve as a source of critical reflection and provide the symbolic resources needed for the reconstruction and *reinvention* of the African identity, complementing the cultural, social, and human aspects that need to be mobilised in this regard.

Violence is the dominant aspect of the atmosphere, and the second group of contributions highlight the ubiquity of violence in the real and the fictional world, in discourse and action, in the political and personal sphere. Our attention is directed towards the familiarity of violence and its trivialization in the genocidal discourse contrasted by the literary reconstitution of personal tragedies. The contribution of these writings is analysed as an anthropological work through which personal experience can be better understood and immortalized.

The last cluster of contributions focuses on the representation of reality in works of fiction, the interconnected aspects of war and the condition of the postcolonial state, with injustice and corruption as main areas of interest. Andreea Bianca Urs offers an insight into Jean Bofane’s *Congo Inc* and emphasises the domino effect of the conflicts in post-

independence African states, the consequences of war on everyday life, the lack of freedom, the ethnic polarization, the injustice and the suffering brought by the overflow of the Rwandan conflict into Congo. She argues that Bofane's writing is a form of symbolic justice that restore the dignity of the Congolese people by raising awareness on the atrocities of war and encouraging them to study the history of the conflict.

The interdependent character of conflicts and crises is further illustrated in Patrice Nganang's novel *Temps de chien*, analysed by Murielle Sandra Tiako Djomatchoua. The general tone of the volume is described as pessimistic and critical, the central theme identified being a double critique: the critique of the post-independent state, plagued by the lack of fundamental rights, the inefficiency and the corruption, the lack of real independence, the manipulation and the oppression of the citizens, the repression of critical voices, the lack of political legitimacy and the contested political legitimacy, and the critique of the people, who are represented as passive and fatalistic, who seem to have accepted the oppression. Contrasting to this perspective, the following contribution reveals a different vocation ascribed to literature: that of a rehabilitation and self-discovery tool for marginalized groups. Ioana Marcu delves into the literary universe of the descendants of Harkis living in France. Longing for a sense of identity and belonging, these children of immigrants, found at the periphery of the French society, craft an *identity refuge* through writing and by doing so they create their own story and establish their visibility in the literary and the political realm.

Any discussion related to marginalization will naturally lead us to reflect on the condition of women. In this regard, Daniela Chipirliu's radiography of Assia Djebar's writing is particularly insightful. In this context, women emerge as observers of war and gain an important voice through their oral testimonies which contribute to the collective repository of knowledge related to the past. An alternative recollection of the facts is thus drawn. Intimate and personal, this version of events is presented through the filter of the female experiences and recorded through literature. For Daniela Chipirliu, this feminine reconceptualizing of history give women a voice previously silenced.

*Destination Biafra* by Buchi Emecheta is another novel that reframes reality through a female perspective and Jean Pierre Atouga's assessment reveals the reality behind the fiction by following the quest for social justice and the evolution of the heroine. If we agree that fiction is "a lie that helps us see the truth",<sup>2</sup> then Emecheta's novel helps us see the misery of war, the flaws and vices of men and the hardships of women more clearly, as we can conclude based on Atouga's interpretation.

By analysing *La Saison des pièges* by Seydou Badian, Modibo Diarra identifies three major themes of the African francophone novel: the fight against colonialism through the condemnation of its abuses, the rehabilitation and history of the continent and the critique of its post-independence leaders. Here, too, the frustration of the people towards the injustice and the corruption of the new regimes is emphasised, through the representation of an imaginary state that resembles Mali. These aspects of the political crisis are followed by a critique of democracy, weak and vulnerable to all kinds of impunity, which only adds to the magnitude of the calamity.

Bridging the gap between reality and fiction, the African novel is described by Analyse Kimpolo as a "mirror of social reality" in the last contribution of this volume. The author focuses on the metaphorical realism of Sony Labou Tansi's *La Vie et demie*, arguing that the symbolic representation of reality through *allegorization* can help us tackle issues in a way that normal language cannot fully encompass, inviting us to question the reality. This concluding work provides us with concepts we can use to sieve through fiction and see the critique of reality that surfaces through the realism of the stories and their unmistakable references to existing events and actors. Under this conception, fiction can be a political refuge, a form of protest and resistance, denouncing the excess and incompetence of postcolonial political leaders.

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<sup>2</sup> See Gary Rolfe, "A Lie that Helps Us See the Truth': Research, truth and fiction in the helping professions" in *Reflective Practice*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2002, pp. 89-102.

Storytelling is, according to cognitive scientist Mark Turner, a “the fundamental instrument of thought”<sup>3</sup>, essential in shaping our understanding of reality, our perspective and attitudes, including those related to social and political issues. This volume offers a variety of interpretations on the narrative depiction of conflict, illustrating the multifaceted role of storytelling. From the ideological justification of violence to the critique of politics and politicians, the self-discovery, the healing, the identity-building and resistance in the face of adversity and whether it is chronicling the past, reimagining the present or advocating for collective action in hopes of a better future, the narrative portrayal of the conflictual politics in Africa is an invitation to reflection.

## Bibliography

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<sup>3</sup> Mark Turner, *The Literary Mind*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 4-5.

