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Writing in Ciluba
From Colonial Extirpation to the Challenge of Globalisation
Albert Kasanda

In the framework of the reflection on *Empire and Postcolonial Resonances*, it seemed appropriate to me, as a Luba and native of the former Belgian colony (the Democratic Republic of the Congo), to explore the relationship between colonisation and Ciluba literature. I am aware that the debate on the relationship between colonisation and literature in African languages is by no means new. I would like to take up this issue, since it remains a permanent quest concerning the relationship between the different cultures of humankind, and it constantly addresses the way we live together and build society.

I examine the statement according to which colonisation constitutes the ruthless gravedigger of languages of colonised people, at least as far as Belgian colonisation is concerned. Therefore, after sketching the genesis of Belgian colonisation, I explore Belgian colonial language policies to show how far Ciluba, as a literate and literary language, resulted from colonisation and was used to reinforce the colonial mission. Second, I analyse the post-colonial language policies to shed light on the role and achievements of Congolese leaders regarding the fate of national languages including Ciluba. Third, in view of the challenges generated by globalisation and the homogenisation of cultures, I examine how far the Luba community manage both the Luba language and culture. This section concludes with a short exploration, as a case study, of an essay in Ciluba by François Kabasele, ‘Ndì muluba’, which addresses Luba identity in the current era of people mobility and cultural mutations around the world.¹

The Colonial Background of Writing in Ciluba

The Genesis of the Belgian Empire

The Berlin Act (1884–85) materialised the dream of colonial expansion of Leopold, the Belgian king, by granting him the territory of the Congo Free
State (CFS), now the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). This acquisition depended on the will of the sovereign who, without any national support, engaged himself in an adventure whose profitability was a real challenge. Anthropologist Frank Wesseling observes that

After ascending to the throne, Leopold realized that his country [...] did not want to hear about colonial expansion. *Fortiter in re, suaviter in modo*, he remained faithful to his dream, but changed his method. He would now act as an individual. He would obviously be adorned with his monarchical prestige, and he would have his family’s fortune in reserve, but he should not be accountable to either the government or the parliament. Constitutional ruler in Belgium, independent entrepreneur beyond state borders, such was Leopold’s new strategy.²

King Leopold managed the CFS according to an oppressive method guided by an unrestrained desire for maximum profitability. Two postulates determined the way he ran the colony: the idea of the colonial surplus and the premise of mandatory cultures.³ The principle of the colonial surplus considered the metropolis as the beneficiary of colonial dividends. This postulate enabled the king to launch, thanks to the profit generated by the CFS, various architectural projects of public interest and to carry out sumptuous works throughout the kingdom.⁴ This initiative earned him the qualification of the king-builder.

However, this recognition hardly concealed the brutality of the system of exploitation that was set up in the CFS. Adam Hochschild’s famous diatribe against the CFS counts among the harshest critiques of the Leopoldian’s exploitation system.⁵ Years before the publication of Hochschild’s book, Aimé Césaire had already denounced, in his *Discours sur le colonialisme*, the iniquity and dehumanising aspects of colonialism.⁶

The principle of mandatory cultures is approached here in a broader meaning. It includes the dispossession of colonised people of their lands and resources, but also evokes the eradication of their cultures considered as primitive. This perception echoed the theory of the civilising mission that was used to legitimise colonialism. By the same token, Western civilisation was presented as superior to other civilisations, and thus considered as an exclusive reference for all meaningful discourse on God, humankind, and the world. Following Césaire, I can observe that this claim to universalism was accompanied by a deep contempt towards non-Western cultures and traditions. In other words, it represented a denial of alterity and difference.⁷

The annexation of the CFS to the Kingdom of Belgium (1908) embodies the paradox of change in continuity. Without losing sight of the original purpose
of colonisation initiated by the king, both the Belgian government and parliament restored the image of their country, as it had been tarnished by the brutal methods of exploitation used in the CFS. They set up a tripartite alliance to rule the colony—the government, the church, and the market—that is, financial institutions and concessionary companies.

This form of collaboration was already used during King Leopold’s management. The added value of its update consisted in highlighting the henceforth national character of Belgian colonialism. This arrangement made it possible to replace the sporadic and often abusive presence of CFS’s agents—formerly recruited by the king himself—by a strict administrative network and a rational control of the colonial territory.

Colonising the Luba Land

The management of the colony was entirely contingent on the colonisers’ objectives. By this logic, the welfare of the colonised took second place. Regarding the region of Kasayi, the coloniser preferred large towns and cities to small villages scattered over large areas. These settlements were clustered around Catholic or Protestant missionary stations. Colonial cities were designed as administrative areas and regulated according to a discriminatory policy separating modern spaces from indigenous zones. The former were reserved for White people, while the later were assigned to Black people. Following Frantz Fanon, this principle of regulation reveals the unequal balance of power governing society. Paradoxically, this division of the city has survived, except that now wealthy people have taken the place of White people, while the poor have been allocated to the euphemistically named ‘popular’ areas.

Fearing the slave raids launched by Tippu Tip, most Baluba moved to zones under colonial authority to be protected. A decree of the general administration of CFS, dating from 1895, granted them permission to settle in the vicinity of existing administrative localities and missionary stations. Aimé Van Zandijcke recalls the settlement of the first Luba migrants as follows:

In early 1896, a first and small group of migrants presented themselves to Kalamba. [Kalamba] took them to Father Cambier at the Mission of Luluabourg St Joseph (Mikalayi). [Father Cambier] received from the ruling authority of Luluabourg-Malindi the permission to house these migrants in the surroundings of the missionary station, where they founded a small village.

This excerpt sheds light on one of the dark sides of the Luba exodus during the colonial era. Hunted down by slave traders, the Luba abandoned their ancestral
lands to join a new existential economy in which the power relationship was not in their favour. This situation reinforced their uprooting and the reconfiguration of their identity. José Tshisungu observes that

The colonial authorities replaced the [precolonial] society, in which barter dominated, by an industrial structure based on a monetary economic system. They replaced orality and the educational system based on rites of initiation by a written language and modern school instruction. This educational system, which initially did not take women into consideration, promoted people who were able to read, count, and write in Ciluba.¹⁶

This short reminder of the genesis of Belgian colonialism and the occupation of the Luba region helped to define the context in which Ciluba acquired both the status of literate and literary language. Before examining the effects of writing in Ciluba both for the coloniser and the colonised, let us examine how Ciluba became a literate language.

**Colonial Language Policy Assessment**

**Ciluba Language: From Orality to Writing**

Orality was (and is today) the predominant way of communication in the Luba community. It is the channel through which collective memory and knowledge are recorded and transmitted from a generation to another. The Luba writing system was created recently compared to languages such as Géez (Ethiopia) or Swahili in eastern Africa.¹⁷ For Crispin Maalu-Bungi, Ciluba became a literate language at the end of the nineteenth century thanks to the work by Western explorers and Christian missionaries. It also became a literary language in the first quarter of the twentieth century thanks to the dynamism of Luba people and locutors, as well as to the commitment of both Catholic and Protestant missionaries regarding evangelisation and educational duties.¹⁸

The Ciluba spelling relies on the Latin alphabet. Its codification was carried out by German explorers including Paul Pogge and Hermann Wilhelm von Wissmann. These figures arrived in Kasayi in October 1881 from Angola.¹⁹ Laying the ground for the European conquest of Africa, they set up a system of linguistic notation of Ciluba. Their work benefitted from the expertise of their Angolan guides and interpreters whose mother tongue was Kimbundu. This language, which had already been codified by the Portuguese, belongs to the same linguistic group as Ciluba, in other words, the Bantu languages group
according to Malcolm Guthrie’s classification. The work of Pogge and Wissmann was supplemented by other explorers and philologists, including Ludwig Wolf and Carl Gotthilf Büttner. The codification of Ciluba was accompanied by the compilation of a Ciluba grammar, the earliest of which was published in 1897, under the title *La Grammaire de la langue des Bena Lulua*. Tshisungu observes that ‘[this] first draft […] was descriptive and normative […] and was used as a reference book in elementary education.’

The Society of Congolese (Zairian) linguists contributed to the improvement of Ciluba codification and spelling. As will be developed further, this society took advantage of President Mobutu’s nationalist agenda and promotion of Zairian authenticity to propose a new approach to Congolese languages.

According to Tshisungu, the process whereby Ciluba became a literate and literary language coincided with the entry of Luba society into modernity. This development may suggest the idea that Luba people uncritically reproduced Western schemes. For me, this process enriched Luba culture and communication. Luba people can use it to capture their reality, and to record their memory. Writing in Ciluba represents an important milestone in Luba historiography and culture because it is the starting point of a new self-perception and self-expression. In other words, Ciluba writing revolutionised Luba culture, and here, I fully endorse Tshisungu’s view:

The introduction of colonial structures in Congo implied the modernisation of Ciluba. This modernisation was possible thanks to the codification of this language. This process made meaningful the act of writing and it transformed the way Ciluba speakers remember and store perceptible reality. This codification is a kind of power.

The blossoming of Ciluba as a literary language depended on language policies implemented by the ruling authority. In this respect, three different periods can be noted, including the colonial rule, the post-colonial period, and the globalisation era. Before exploring their related policies and effects on Ciluba writing, let us underline the already evoked transformation of Luba society generated by the new status of Ciluba as follows:

[Now] writing in Ciluba is to domesticate the word, which, in essence, rises in prominence. Memory tames speech only partially, and for a limited period. Writing materialises the word, makes it perceptible through the mediation of symbols. Formally, writing [in Ciluba] is the equivalent to implementing a codification technique acquired thanks to an apprenticeship.
Luba Writers under Colonial Rule

Language is an essential asset, as it allows human beings to reveal themselves to each other and to build a community. As Frantz Fanon observed, ‘to speak is to exist absolutely for the other’. The predominance of the colonisers’ language reflected their desire to wipe out or, at best, to assimilate the colonised into the ruling culture and system. Some colonised considered that it was important to master the language of the coloniser for them to be recognised as human beings. Fanon denounces the violent premise of this way of thinking, since it both generates the discrimination and inferiority complex of colonised people. Commenting on the Martinican situation, he notes that:

Every colonised people […] finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonised is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle.

Various African writers also denounced this policy. In this respect, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o can be viewed as one of the leading figures because of his choice to write and to publish in his mother tongue. By this choice, Ngũgĩ expressed his desire to make visible his native language and culture in a context of struggle for recognition. He addressed the British colonial system and literary elite for which African writers are expected to write in English to be acknowledged and to access literary recognition. Like in the French colonial situation described by Fanon, the mastery of the coloniser’s language is set as a condition for the recognition of the colonised as human beings and writers. As will be explained later, Belgian language policies were different from the policies underpinning the French assimilation system, since they favoured vernacular languages over Western ones and made it difficult for the locals to learn European languages.

As a matter of fact, Belgian language policies in the CFS were ambiguous and confusing. Colonial authorities relied on a kind of empiricist attitude, as they rejected preconceived systems and rigid theories. They adopted a day-to-day attitude that changed according to ever-changing priorities. French was declared the official language of the CFS in 1887. As Barbara Yates observes:

It is thus recommended to officials to use, as much as possible, only French terms in their official dealings with State soldiers and workers in a manner to have in each post a nuclear of men knowing the rudiments of language and who will in turn propagate it among natives.
The implementation of this policy was complex because of various factors, including national ethnolinguistic conflicts, missionary rivalries, and the multiple origins of the CFS colonial agents recruited by King Leopold. Barbara Yates remarks that

Leopold’s policy of attempting to diffuse French throughout the Congolese population was a failure. His three principal goals – Belgianisation, adequate manpower, and a humanitarian, international image – offset each other. Many officials did not themselves speak French, and although political considerations precluded the teaching of any other modern European language, the subsidised Catholic schools did not actually propagate French, and the colonial Government did not support Protestant schools that did teach French.31

In addition, Belgian authorities themselves were reluctant to teach European languages to the locals. The conservative Parti catholique was one of the standard bearers of this policy that was based on paternalistic considerations aiming at protecting indigenous from Western subversive ideas, keeping them submissive, exploited, and far away from the White community. The following statement by Edouard Kervyn, a pro-Catholic director of justice and education in the Congo central headquarters in Brussels, can attest to this attitude:

First, in the opinion of very experienced colonials, all negroes knowing French refuse to do manual labour, especially in urban areas. Secondly, missionaries and colonial officials were especially irked when Africans wanted to imitate the dress, behaviour, and language of whites. Colonialists noted derisively that, in knowing a few words of French, an African imagined himself as civilisé who should be accorded special liberties; indeed, the idea of African assimilation continued to upset Belgian colonialists. Thirdly, to have all Congolese study French was ‘to risk the creation of a generation of déclassés and anarchists.32

After complex debates, which also touched on financial considerations and the profitability of the colony, the Belgian administration allowed the use of indigenous languages, including Kikongo, Swahili, Lingala, and Ciluba. This option contrasted with British policy, for example, which opposed the teaching of English to Kenyans.33 For the advocates of the separatist policy, this refusal to provide education in European languages was a strategy to maintain a demarcation between the colonisers and the colonised. For the defenders of the colonised people’s dignity and emancipation, this policy expressed the coloniser’s
racial contempt. I personally go beyond these two attitudes, as I consider that this reluctancy to teach foreign languages (French or Flemish) to Baluba constituted an opportunity for the development of Ciluba, which benefitted from the attention of the colonial authorities and local intelligentsia. Both the Catholic and Protestant missionaries were involved in its modernisation and dissemination through education and evangelisation. They engaged with the translation of the Bible into local languages, and spearheaded the publication of textbooks and magazines in Ciluba, for which locals received some basic training in the art of writing. Magazines such as Nkuruse, Lumu lua Bena Kasayi, and Diboji dia balongi bakale represented an important stage in the development of Ciluba literature and the book industry.

Earlier Luba writers were shaped by the colonial and missionary ideologies. They were not highly educated since the coloniser limited the education of Congolese youth to a basic and vocational level. The happy few willing to make a career in the Church were taught philosophy and theology under the strict supervision of Church clerics. While developing their own cultural heritage and individual abilities, most of these pioneers and writers often worked in close collaboration with missionaries and colonial staff who initiated them into the art of writing.

Pioneering Luba writers such as Emery Ngoyi and Mundadi Samuela started writing in the interwar period and made use of various literary genres including poetry, theatre, the novel, and the essay. Their aim was to shed light on two aspects: first, they celebrated the triumph and the consolidation of missionary Christianity (and by extension Western civilisation) in Luba land; second, they set out to announce the defeat of Luba traditions perceived as the legacy of paganism. This double consideration reflects the Manichaeism at the heart of their works. They denounce Luba precolonial culture while praising missionary Christianity and Western civilisation without any critical distance.

François Kabasele, the author of Ndi muluba, disagrees with this proselytism. For him, the Luba precolonial heritage was by no means synonymous with paganism, as it was predicated on humanist values and relied on a monotheist doctrine considering God as the Creator (Mvidi-Mukulu) of both visible and invisible realities. Tshisungu also denounces the crusade carried out by this first generation of Luba writers against their own culture. For him, these writers fought against their ancestral beliefs because they were faced with a foreign ideology and religion. Subsequently, they focused on creating a new Luba identity based on Christian and Western values. Tshisungu wrote:

[For these writers] to write is to affirm (their) Christian belief. The author, and later the writer, defines himself as a person carrying a Christian message intended to influence their conscience.
Martin Kalulambi Pongo expresses the same concern in *Être Luba au XXe siècle*. For him, missionary magazines published in Ciluba contributed to shaping a new Luba identity marked by Christian values. The Catholic magazine *Nkuruse* can be considered as one of the most active platforms in this respect. This first generation of Luba writers were submissive, and they served as a sounding board for colonial and missionary ideologies. An analysis of works by Emery Ngoyi and Mundadi Samuela would confirm this statement. In sum, from the perspective of Luba colonial historiography, it can be noted that this generation of writers attests to Fanon’s postulate about colonised people’s self-alienation and self-hatred.

Finally, it is worth noting that colonial language policies generated a paradoxical outcome. At first, it created favourable conditions for the development of vernacular languages, including Ciluba. Thus, these languages developed from their original status as oral languages into literate and literary languages. Second, this policy turned out to be a trap to control and stifle Luba culture, as suggested by Barbara Yates:

> [The Belgian language policy] was, thus, an ‘admirable’ agent of social control of the African population. Colonialists were quite aware that, by discouraging the learning of a European language, the extent and nature of ideas could be limited or expanded at their discretion.

As already mentioned, this policy reinforced the alienation of Luba people and their submission to the ruling order. As a result, most of the works written in Ciluba during the colonial period were marked by this paradox.

**The Ciluba Literature in the Postcolonial Era**

**Congolese Emancipation and Language Policies**

Following the euphoria of Congolese emancipation in 1960, and in the wake of the new nationalist momentum created by this event, French became the official language and the main language of instruction at all levels of formal education. The first Congolese president, Joseph Kasa-Vubu, officialised this choice through his presidential ordinance of 17 October 1962.

Various postulates have been evoked in support of this language choice, including national unity and development, the efficiency of European languages of wider communication, and their cost-effectiveness. The idea of national unity relies on the fear that the use of a vernacular language as an official language in
a Congolese context marked by multilingualism would lead to ethnic conflicts, and that this situation would subsequently compromise the fragile national unity in progress. To prevent such an upheaval, the government privileged a European language (French) viewed as neutral and free of any ethnic background. The argument of national development referred to the idea that progress – understood as catching up with Western modernisation – would only be possible if European languages of wide communication were used as media of instruction. In other words, African (Congolese) languages were viewed as an obstacle to progress. They are perceived as less developed than European languages and therefore unsuitable as media of instruction. By the same token, it was also thought that the adoption of an indigenous language would be very expensive, as it would have required the translation and writing of textbooks, reference tools, and the training of teaching personal.

These arguments have already been the subject of multiple studies, and it is not the purpose of this chapter to revisit them. However, it seems enlightening for my purpose to underline their counterproductive effects both for Luba-speaking people and their literature. The imposition of French as the country’s official language and the language of education at all levels distorted people’s self-representation, and it affected their relationship to vernacular languages. Indeed, this decision devalued people’s self-esteem and upset the way they negotiated their relationship to the world. Henceforth, to access a valuable education and a successful career, one would have to adopt a foreign language, French, in this case. As a result, many people lost trust and motivation towards their own mother tongue, since it was classified as a second-class language and seen as nonessential to access modernity. This situation generated an inferiority complex among vernacular-speaking people towards French speakers, and vice versa. A social and cultural divide was thus created between the educated elite and the uneducated lower classes. The former considering the later as the incarnation of conservatism and underdevelopment. As a reaction to such contempt, the vernacular-speaking community cultivated a kind of resistance that consisted in making fun of the elite’s eagerness to learn and speak French in everyday-life situations. Therefore, they employ the following humoristic assertion that is still in use today: *Mfwalansa ki mfwalanga to* literally translated as ‘French does not produce money’, which means ‘learning and speaking French is not enough to earn a living’.

Despite this situation, Luba writers have carried out remarkable works. Using different literary genres, such as poetry and the essay, they have explored new topics away from colonial and missionary ideologies. They have focused on social and political conflicts including, for example, the ethnic violence between the Luba and Lulua communities and the expulsion of the Luba community...
from the Katanga province. Mabika Kalanda’s essay ‘Tabalayi bama betu’ is symptomatic of this period. From the outset, Mabika Kalanda states why he writes in Ciluba. For him, writing in Ciluba represents a straightforward and easy way to tell the truth to his people, and to be understood unequivocally by them. In other words, he seeks direct communication with his readers, free of all kinds of intermediaries and obstacles. This motivation is far from coinciding with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o’s decision to go back and write in Gikuyu. For the former, the desire to touch and to be in touch with his Luba readers has come first, while the latter has denounced the British and ruling systems and their marginalisation of vernacular languages.

Instead of using the language of the elite, Mabika Kalanda made use of Ciluba to encourage the Luba to reflect and make adequate choices in a complex and conflictual political situation. Indeed, he wrote this book shortly after independence at the right moment when the Luba community was in turmoil facing a variety of challenges including, for example, the ethnic war opposing the Lulua to the Baluba, the internal antagonism between the Luba of the East and those of the West (Bena Mukuna ne bena Cibanda), the race for power between local and national political leaders.

The African Authenticity and the Standardisation of Ciluba

The change of regime in 1965 under the aegis of President J. D. Mobutu ushered in a new era characterised by the quest for African authenticity. The philosophical premise of this quest dealt with the rehabilitation of African culture and identity, seen as the principle of African dignity and national development. This ideology included various topics such as the struggle against the alienation resulting from colonialism, the expression of a way of being and living according to the aspiration of African (Zairian) people, and the enhancement of ancestral customs and values.

President Mobutu tried and brought this project into reality through various political and administrative measures including, for example, the replacement of names of Western origin by those of Congolese origin. These measures applied to Congolese nationals (who became Zairians), to the country (from Congo to Zaire), to cities and various institutions in the country. By the same token, it can also be mentioned that even the dress code was readjusted by replacing the suit and tie with the abacost (for males) and the prohibition of women from wearing dresses, trousers, and miniskirts. The monuments built in memory of the colonisers were also removed from public spaces all over the country (on this issue, see Bambi Ceuppens’s chapter in this volume). In addition, this ideology contributed to the legitimisation of authoritarian political
power, and to the truncation of the complex history of exchanges between cultures. Its fundamental postulate relied on a culturalist view of the world and the relationships between humankind as antagonistic, opposing indigenous people to foreigners, the authentic to the alien, and ‘us’ to ‘them’.

The anxiety elicited by this rehabilitation of African culture constituted a favourable background for the reconsideration of Congolese language policies, particularly regarding vernacular languages. In this respect, the first seminar of Congolese (Zairian) linguists, held in Lubumbashi in 1974, represented an important milestone in raising awareness of the country’s linguistic questions, including the teaching of and in vernacular languages, and the standardisation of these languages. André Mbula Paluku observes that

[the theme of this seminar was the promotion of the Zairean languages [...] it aimed at both asserts the citizen's cultural identity as concerning the linguistic level, and at bringing major languages of the country to the status of modern languages capable of conveying both scientific and technological knowledge. At the end of this seminar, the government decided to reintroduce the four national languages as vehicles and subjects in primary education.]

The reintroduction of national languages in the education programme was an attempt to offset the damages created by the previous language policy consecrating French as the predominant language of the administration and education in a country where more than 70 per cent of people can hardly speak French and have only received basic education. This decision represented a new start for national languages and their (re)enhancement. An output of this seminar is also that it encouraged the standardisation of spelling of literate national languages, particularly Ciluba. Specialists in Luba linguistics proposed various improvements regarding the pioneering work achieved by Paul Pogge and Hermann Wilhelm von Wissmann. As Crispin Maalu-Bungi remarks, these changes concern the transcription of the semivowels ‘y’, ‘w’, and the replacement of the trigraph (‘tsh’) with the sign ‘c’. He identifies ‘the adoption of the semi-vowels y and w instead of i and u […]’; the systematic notation of tones and vowel quantity […]’ and ‘the transcription of the deaf palatal affricate by the sign c to replace the trigraph “tsh”’.50

However, the implementation of the conclusions from this historic seminar suffered from vagaries impeding the political and economic development of the country. The Zairian supporters of Ciluba faced significant obstacles, particularly concerning the development of a successful book industry. Among other things, there was a scarcity of centres for the publication and dissemination...
of literature in national languages and hence a general erosion of the body of available readers and writers. What is more, vernacular languages are still held in suspicion and regarded as inferior by French users.

Despite this difficult transition, Luba literature has resisted. In addition to its ever-dynamic poetry, other literary genres – the essay, the novel, and the comic book – have been developed. This generation of Luba writers explored new issues including, for example, the critique of Mobutu’s dictatorship,51 the love for Luba culture,52 power, Luba aesthetics and ethics, and Luba historiography. Thanks to this dynamism, Luba literature is propelled to the heart of debates on the ability of African languages to match modernity and to transcend local considerations. In this respect, it is worth underlining the remarkable work of Pius Ngandu Nkashama on Ciluba plasticity, morphology, and semantics.53 Via an analysis of two Luba verbs, Ku-twa and Kw-ela, he shows how far, through a meticulous articulation of both the morphology and syntax, these verbs include multiple meanings and can be applied to various contexts.

Ciluba Literature in a Globalised World

Beyond the (Post)Colonial Stereotypes

Postcolonial thinking can be viewed as a critical discourse concerning norms established by the colonial system and aiming at consolidating a hierarchical relationship between the metropolis and the colony. This discourse denounces the philosophy structuring the relationship between the centre and the periphery.54 It applies to a variety of fields including political, social, religious, artistic, and literary areas. In the area of literature, this criticism has consisted in denouncing the occultation and marginalisation of literatures in non-Western languages, especially those published in African languages, a central point in this chapter. The postulate behind this attitude is that protagonists of Western hegemony consider literature in African languages to be literature with a local vocation, a kind of second-class literature. The African languages themselves are perceived as incapable of grasping and formulating the challenges of modernity. In addition, many of these protagonists think that African writers have no choice but to write in Western languages in their pursuit to publish rational works and access universal readerships.

This contemptuous dogmatism about African languages and literature in African languages has been widely questioned by both anglophone and francophone African thinkers. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o is one of the recent and virulent critics of this dogmatism. It is worth recalling that decades before Ngũgĩ wa
Thiongô’s rebellious cry, Cheikh Anta Diop had already expressed the need to revalorise African languages in his project of intellectual emancipation. Writing in African languages – especially in Ciluba as is the focus of this chapter – amounts to participation in the struggle for emancipation and development of Luba people.

I personally think that Ngũgĩ wa Thiongô is right to call for the decolonisation of literature through language. My statement relies on the following postulates. At first, I refer to the importance of language as a communicational process, since it can be viewed as a way people call each other into existence and build a community, as suggested by Fanon, ‘to speak is to really exist for the other’. One’s language is the most beautiful, most secure, and easiest way to approach truth and beauty. Given this premise, it is my belief that writing in one’s own language constitutes the very assertion of one’s existence and interactions with others. Communication through one’s language represents the epiphany of the other, or the revelation of ‘oneself as another’, to make use of Paul Ricœur’s hermeneutical expression. Such a revelation disrupts colonial patterns and calls for the renewal of our own vision of the world and that of the others.

Next, I take into consideration the idea that the literature in African languages is by no means a literature from the margins and forever enclosed in such a framework. This literature transcends geographical, political, cultural, and linguistic barriers, and tries to match current humankind challenges. Through their respective publications in their native languages, writers like Ngũgĩ wa Thiongô and Boubacar Boris Diop demonstrate how rich and creative their mother tongues are to express modern experiences. Regarding Ciluba, writers such as Pius Ngandu Nkashama, Mabika Kalanda, and François Kabasele have also demonstrated through their respective works how far Ciluba can create and extend concepts to match all kinds of reality and contexts.

I am of the view that Ciluba literature belies the idea according to which Afrophone literature operates in a cultural ghetto and fails to promote any universal messages. This literature is not tied to Luba land, the Kasai region. Given the ‘circulation of worlds’ and the subsequent emergence of new configurations, it travels all over the world and addresses multiple challenges and themes. Ciluba literature is disseminated in the world by the Luba diaspora, which, while facing challenges related to migration, unemployment, and social and cultural integration, refuse to enclose themselves into Afrocentrist or ethnic debates. This community negotiates on the basis of its participation in the world. It addresses new topics while calling for the renewal of Luba culture regarding current mutations. Via Afrophone literature, it is possible to underline the role played by the diaspora in the dissemination of Ciluba literature:
‘This diaspora contributes greatly to relocating languages. […] This is why an important part of the literary production in Ciluba is currently published in Canada, Belgium, and France.’

It is worth revisiting here some relevant works published during this period in the diaspora and in the DRC: Pius Ngandu Nkashama’s *Bidi ntwilu bidi mpelelu*, François Kabasele’s *Ndi Muluba*, Bertin Makolo Musuasua’s *Munanga wanyi*, Tshisungu wa Tshisungu’s *Cimvundu* and *Kuanyi kuamba*, Therese Tshia-dua Kandala’s *Bumfumu bua kabukulu* and Kapajika Kamudimba’s *Kanyingela*.

Before exploring my proposed case study, *Ndi muluba* by François Kabasele, I would like to point out the relevance of Pius Ngandu Nkashama’s novel *Bidi ntwilu bidi mpelelu* as a critique of the contempt towards Afrophone literature. Crispin Maalu-Bungi notes that this novel is a translation into Ciluba, by the author himself, of a novel (*Le pacte de sang*) previously published in French. I firmly believe that the passage from French to Ciluba does not affect the originality and the literary value of the Ciluba version. On the contrary, by translating his own work into his mother tongue, Pius Ngandu Nkashama wrote a new novel that is far from a mere copy of the French original, as it involves various nuances and rhythms unknown in French. I can say that approaching reality and formulating it in Ciluba is not the same thing as doing it in French. Indeed, there is no room here for a simple equivalence of words. This process requires the author’s ability to handle, like a seasoned artist, the morphology and syntax of Luba terms, to give them additional semantic capacity and extent. He explains this by introducing his other book on *Sémantique et morphologie du verbe en Ciluba*, as follows:

The project for this study of the morphology and syntax of Ciluba was inspired by the work of writing a novel, *Bidi ntwilu, bidi mpelelu*. During this literary experience, it appeared that with each paraphrase, the language was discovered from within, displaying its lexical resources and its semantic expressivities. […] But by the contextualised situations and locutions, the demands of discursivity as much as those of narrativity turned out to be more important than they seemed at first glance.

Concerning the use of the verb *Kw-ela*, for example, he notes:

By using the only verb *Kw-ela* and its derivatives, all the meanings of violence, struggle, combativeness of the protagonists, as well as actions carried out around the battle between two people are rendered. And this, without the speaker having to resort to approximate, analogies, synonymous, and metaphors.
As already suggested, relying on the demonstration by Pius Ngandu Nkashama of how the articulation of morphology and syntax of verbs in Ciluba can create new meanings and extend concepts, I can note the inconsistency of the colonial stereotype considering that African languages including Ciluba ‘are weak, poor, incapable of expressing abstract notions, unsuitable for logical reasoning or simply philosophical thinking, incompatible with mathematical concepts and symbols’. Xavier Garnier expresses a similar argument about the way in which postcolonial and francophone theorists disregard Afrophone literature. For him, these two categories of scholars consider Afrophone literature with contempt, as local, popular, and didactic literature. As already suggested, this perception needs to be rectified, because publications in vernacular languages – particularly in Ciluba – are far from being locked into such a theoretical rut. In addition to its ability to grasp and express an infinite number of situations, Luba literature is spread throughout the world thanks to the ‘circulation of worlds’ and the dynamism of the Luba intelligentsia and diaspora who largely contribute to the production and dissemination of Ciluba writings by setting up appropriate publishing houses, promoting Luba cultural activities, and expanding Luba networks and meeting spaces.

François Kabasele, Between Conservatism and Renovation

François Kabasele is a theologian and liturgy specialist. In addition to his involvement in higher education in the DRC and abroad, he has carried out work on the inculturation of Christianity in Kasayi. He perceives inculturation from a dual perspective: on the one hand, this notion is ideological and, following the reflection conducted by negritude figures, refers to the emancipation and de-alienation of African people, and the rehabilitation of their cultures and traditions. On the other, Kabasele believes that his concept includes a normative dimension aiming at educating, rehabilitating, and forging a new Luba society in accordance with Luba traditions and Christian values. Linking the word to the deed, Kabasele himself tried to bring this project into reality through his teaching and his pastoral activities in the diocese of Mbuji-Mayi, where he has also been responsible for the liturgy office. Kabasele also cooperates with the Congolese diaspora in Brussels – particularly with the Sangalayi association – to set up a Luba cultural archive. The book to be introduced here, *Ndi muluba*, can attest to this commitment. This book is an essay whose style is concise and clear. Through his writing, Kabasele complies with the guidelines by Congolese (Zairian) linguists’ society aiming at standardising Ciluba spelling. Therefore, he counts within few Luba writers engaged for the renewal and standardisation of their language.
The book focuses on Luba identity. Kabasele claims that identity is constantly changing while preserving what is essential. Without specifying what this essential element is made of, Kabasele engages with the enumeration of multiple features that, for him, constitute Luba identity. In other words, Kabasele relies on a broader concept of identity to express the convergence of different factors including music, art, religion, territory, language, to mention but a few. Since the scope of this chapter does not allow an extensive analysis of these factors, I will limit myself to mentioning some of their main aspects. The book is divided into three sections: Luba identity, the encounter of Luba people with Christianity, and the challenges facing Luba identity regarding the future.

Starting from a poorly substantiated premise that the Baluba are a migrant people, Kabasele contends that elements such as the Luba worldview, beliefs, and aesthetics, including sculpture and traditional music, social and religious rites, and political organisation, are constitutive of the Luba identity. He also mentions the unflattering aspects of the Baluba – their selfishness, greed for power, pride, complacency, and ostentation. In his sketch of Luba identity, Kabasele is prone to amplify some traits so much that he gives the impression of being disconnected from their real existence. As Tshisungu observes, this propensity has the collateral effect of disembodifying and weakening his purpose:

The Muluba (singular of the term Baluba) that the author describes seems disembodied, withdrawn from the constraints of the environment. Socially speaking, such a Muluba does not exist.70

The second section of the book analyses the Christianisation of Luba. This issue is important because it was through evangelisation that Ciluba achieved the status of a written and literary language. Modern education, infrastructure, and Luba daily life were shaped through the colonial and missionary economy.71 While recognising these achievements, Kabasele denounces the anti-paganist crusade considering precolonial Luba culture as a legacy of paganism. For him, Luba people had always believed in God. Their Christianisation can be viewed as an opportunity for both Christianity itself and Luba heritage to flourish. From this postulate, he focuses on various Luba religious beliefs, practices, and rituals72 that he connects to the Christian doctrine as expressed in the Bible and Church documents, essentially from the Second Vatican Council to today.

The last section focuses on the challenges of being Luba today. Kabasele informs his readers about the dissemination of the Luba diaspora around the world in the United States, Canada, Belgium, France, and the United Kingdom,73 to mention but a few. Without losing sight of risks associated with this dissemination, including the erosion of Luba cultural identity, he calls for a moral
and intellectual effort to maintain Luba values and traditions. He insists on the importance of solidarity and the responsibility of Luba diasporic communities about the future. They should kindle the fire of Luba identity. This last point is the leading idea of Kabasele's research as expressed in this book. Therefore, it can be considered as an important contribution, from the Luba-speaking world, to recurrent debates on acculturation, inculturation, interculturality, and hybridity.

The fact that Kabasele broaches some of these debates in Ciluba is important, because, following Mabika Kalanda's project, he addresses first and foremost the Luba, the people who are involved in and concerned by these issues. As I have already commented on the importance of one's mother tongue in the framework of communication, I believe that Kabasele's message in Ciluba reaches and affects his readers. In this respect, he has genuinely contributed to the revival of Luba literature in recent years. He has created an inventory of elements from Luba culture and has found them resonant with post-Vatican II Christianity, which he considers free from colonial and missionary shortcomings. Although Kabasele barely questions the structures of power inside the Catholic Church, nor challenges the social and political structures of contemporary society, he is fully absorbed by the issue of Luba identity. However, his perception of the Luba cultural legacy is based on a monocultural and past-oriented basis. The Luba identity is depicted as pure and static, and in this discussion, he mainly focuses on precolonial Luba communities. As I have already suggested, Kabasele's book acts as a compass in the current context of globalisation, but it suffers from a disconnect between the reality of Luba people and their ascribed identity, which seems to be much more normative than existential and pragmatic.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has relied on the postulate that writing in Ciluba is linked to the colonial and postcolonial history of the Luba community. In the wake of early explorations and the work of linguistic codification carried out by figures such as Paul Pogge and Hermann Wilhelm von Wissmann, Belgian colonialism contributed to making Ciluba both a literate and literary language. The language policies of the Belgian coloniser and those of the Congolese leaders after independence have shaped the standardisation of Ciluba and influenced its diffusion.

The existence of Luba literature can be viewed as a critique of colonial and elitist contempt towards vernacular languages. For the pioneers of this literature – e.g. Emery Ngoyi, Lazare Mpoyi, Mundadi Samuela – writing in Ciluba was a means to reject precolonial paganism and sing the praise of Christian
modernity. This chapter has also demonstrated how far this literature has escaped literary ghettoisation, examined modern themes, and explored them with appropriate concepts. In this respect, the contributions of authors like Pius Ngandu Nkashama, Mabika Kalanda, and François Kabasele have been crucial because, while exploring the multifaceted aspects of Luba identity, they have also revealed the linguistic riches of Ciluba. Luba literature, like most Afrophone literatures, suffers from a lack of standardisation and publishing infrastructures; however, the dynamism of the Luba diaspora is a reason for hope.

Ciluba as both a literate and literary language aims at approaching the world and dialoguing with it from a Luba point of view. This perspective can be considered as that of the powerless and the ‘wretched of the earth’ because, from the colonial era until now, Luba people have belonged to the category of impoverished people, even though, paradoxically, their homeland is rich in natural, human, cultural, linguistic, and spiritual resources. From their daily struggle for survival, they perceive the flaws of our globalised world, and they call for the establishment of another possible world. To this end, I believe that Luba writers can be seen as dawn watchers.
Notes

4. See works such as the African Museum of Tervuren (now AfricaMuseum), L'arc du cinquantenaire, the Brussels Courthouse, to mention but a few. On this process, see Matthew G. Stanard, The Leopard, the Lion and the Cock: Colonial Memories and Monuments in Belgium (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2019).
10. In the earlier stage of colonisation, Leopold was obliged to recruit administrators, army officers, traders, missionaries, and other workers from various Western nations, since Belgian people manifested very little interest in his African venture. They came from all over the world: the United States, the United Kingdom, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Russia, Switzerland, Italy, and Portugal.
20. See Introduction to bantu languages (bantu-languages.com) [accessed 22 December 2021].
23. Ibid., p. 15.
24. Ibid., p. 16.
25. Ibid., p. 19.
27. Ibid., p. 19.
31. Ibid., p. 260.
32. Ibid., p. 272. Edouard Kervyn quoted by Yates.
34. The proliferation of these magazines in local languages can also be explained by the support offered by Belgium to missionary institutions searching for a better knowledge of the colonised. See: Martin Kalulambi Pongo, Être luba au XXe siècle. Identité chrétienne et ethnicité au Congo Kinshasa (Paris: Karthala, 1997), pp. 231–32.
35. In this chapter, I only focus on Luba native writers. This does not imply the concealment or underestimation of works in Ciluba carried out by many foreigners including missionaries and colonial agents. In his book (pp. 43–45), Tshisungu (2006) provides a list of these individuals.


41. Kalulambi Pongo, *Être luba au XXe siècle*.

42. For a substantial introduction to these writers and their works, see: Maalu-Bungi’s *L’inconnue de l’histoire* and Tshisungu wa Tshisungu *La littérature congolaise écrite en ciluba*.


47. For an overview of works published during this period, see: Tshisungu (2006), pp. 35–65.


50. Crispin Maalu-Bungi, ‘Quand la pratique lexicographique se modernise en RD Congo, p. 323. However, the Ciluba standardisation process is far from over, as both the old and new spelling are still in use.


54. This is a vast field. Some of its most prominent figures include Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Robert J.C. Young, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gayatri Spivak but also Helen Tiffin, Gareth Griffiths, and Bill Ashcroft. In this scholarship, the influence of French thought — and of thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan — has been significant.


60. Ngandu Nkashama, *Bidi ntulu, bidi mpelelu*.

61. For further comments about these works, see: Crispin Maalu-Bungi, *L’inconnue de l’histoire*, particularly chapter 6 on Luba Literature.


64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., p. 13.

66. X. Garnier, ‘Les littératures en langues africaines…’.

67. See Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit*. 
68. Such as Panubula (Louvain-la-Neuve), Éditions Glopro (Ontario), Ciam-Kasayi, and Mabiki (Brussels/Kinshasa).


70. Tshisungu wa Tshisungu, La littérature congolaise écrite en ciluba, p. 130.

71. Kalulambi Pongo Martin, Être Luba au XXe siècle.

72. Such as the ancestor worship, birth ceremonies and the welcoming of children into the community, reconciliation, and wedding.

73. See Kabasele, Ndi muluba, pp. 297–312.