

The world is a bar: Fiston Mwanza Mujila's writing beyond 'Africa'

Susanne Gehrmann

Susanne Gehrmann is professor of African literatures and cultures in the Department of Asian and African studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany. Her research interests include autobiographical and popular genres, discourse analysis, and intermediality.
Email: susanne.gehrmann@rz.hu-berlin.de

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4462-7836>

Submitted: 3 April 2022; Accepted: 30 May 2022; Published online: 18 September 2022

The world is a bar: Fiston Mwanza Mujila's writing beyond 'Africa'

Taking recent debates on 'How to write Africa' in general and the allegations of sexism in Fiston Mwanza Mujila's novel *Tram 83* in particular as a starting point, I analyze three texts by the Austria-based Congolese author in this article. Considering the scope of each text, namely *Tram 83* (2014), the play *Zu der Zeit der Königinmutter* (The Times of the Queen Mother, 2018), and the latest novel *La danse du vilain* (The Dance of the Villain, 2020), shifting images and meanings of gender dichotomies are explored alongside Mujila's aesthetic literary devices. The article is structured around the omnipresent setting of bars that develop from a disputable 'African' bar in *Tram 83* to a radically global bar in *Zu der Zeit der Königinmutter* and to referentially set bars of Central Africa's postcolonial history in *La danse du vilain*. I argue that recurrence of the bar as a focal lieu of mingling people in Mujila's writing underlines its function as satirical microcosm that goes beyond a realistic representation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Multilayered cultural references in *Tram 83* and *Zu der Zeit der Königinmutter* construct the setting into a worldly space whereas *La danse du vilain* privileges a historical approach. As further pointed out, the metatextual level that is woven into the texts comments on the difficulty of the adequate representation of 'Africa' and the pitfalls of the global literary market place. **Keywords:** Fiston Mujila, bar, sexism, controversy.

Introduction

In his much-debated 2013 review of NoViolet Bulawayo's globally acclaimed novel *We Need New Names* in *The Guardian*, US-based Nigerian novelist Helon Habila ranges the equally US-based Zimbabwean writer's text in the category of "western-media-coverage-of-Africa, poverty-porn". Habila explains the thematic scope of poverty porn: "We are talking child soldiers, genocide, child prostitution, female genital mutilation, political violence, police brutality, dictatorships, predatory preachers, dead bodies on the roadside" and accuses Bulawayo of a peculiar "anxiety to cover every 'African' topic; almost as if the writer had a checklist made from the morning's news on Africa". Habila's strong indictment echoes Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina's satirical essay *How to Write about Africa* (2005) that was, however, mainly addressed to Western

writers. This provokes questions such as: Do African writers, notably those in the Diaspora, themselves adopt the technique to assemble African clichés in order to be successful on the global literature scene and book market? In this context, does ‘writing Africa’ today still mean to showcase the continent’s miseries and worn-out clichés of never-ending crisis?’

A year after the Habila-Bulawayo dispute, Fiston Mwanza Mujila, a young Congolese author based in Austria, published his widely acclaimed first novel *Tram 83*, which, in spite of, or maybe just because of being an indisputable international success translated into numerous languages and crowned by several literary awards, led to heated discussions on social media in 2017.² Dismissed as a sexist sellout of the miseries of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) by some and lauded as a genuine critical deconstruction of global late-capitalist structures by others, the novel speaks loudly to the African writer’s dilemma of representing Africa without reifying ‘the dark continent’. Taking this controversy as a starting point, in this article I argue that in his follow-up publications—a theatre play in 2018 and his latest novel in 2020—Mujila consciously or unconsciously reacts to the former allegations of producing sexism and a denigrating image of Africa. After revisiting *Tram 83* and its reception, I will therefore analyze *Zu der Zeit der Königinmutter* (The Times of the Queen Mother) and *La danse du vilain* (The Dance of the Villain) with the question of ‘how to write or not to write about Africa’ in mind.³ While I explore how metaliterary passages in the texts counter possible critiques by discussing them, I will also point out how Mujila’s enhanced global allegorical approach in *Zu der Zeit der Königinmutter*, featuring the bar as a global village, contrasts with the historically referential setting of Central African bars in *La danse du vilain*.

As I will structure my article around the omnipresent setting of bars in Mujila’s writing, it is useful to mention that representations of drinking and meeting places such as inns, taverns, pubs, cafés, bars, or nightclubs have a long literary history since at least early modern European literature where they feature as the setting for digressive storytelling (McMorran) and/or conviviality (Newman). Closer to Mujila, in contemporary Francophone central African writing bars have become topical settings as well. In the early 2000s, Patrice Nganang’s *Temps de chien* (Dog Days) set in Cameroon and Alain Mabanckou’s *Verre cassé* (Broken Glass) set in Congo-Brazzaville popularized this literary space as one from which the *vox populi* of the postcolony emerges.⁴ Meanwhile, postmodernist German language literature frequently draws on pubs, bars, and clubs, too (see Geuen’s monograph). It is not unlikely that Mujila, as a Francophone writer who also reads English and German, drew inspiration from different historical and contemporary trends with regard to the bar in literature. A comparative or intertextual reading is, however, not the focus of my approach here, as I venture into analyzing the shifting, yet stable, function of the bar as microcosm and satirical *mise en abyme* of worldly societal situations in three of Mujila’s works.⁵ Therefore, I start by discussing the controversial online debate on *Tram 83* and outline my own appreciation of the novel by focusing on its seminal place, the bar, and its ambivalent representation of

Africa. Secondly, I briefly analyse the play *Zu der Zeit der Königinmutter* in which Mujila connects the bar setting to globality which also speaks to his position as a transnational author. Thirdly, I point out how Mujila's latest novel, *La danse du vilain*, reinscribes the bar into the historical setting of Zaïre and Angola. In my last sub-section, I discuss the novel's metatextual approach to the controversy on 'how to write Africa'.

The controversial 'African' bar in *Tram 83*

In a lengthy derogatory blog post in April 2017, US-based Nigerian blogger Ikheloa comments on Fiston Mwanza Mujila's novel:

Indeed, reading *Tram 83* filled me with incredible sadness, because I thought we had gone past the notion of African writing as a pejorative, the expectation that the only literature that can come out of Africa is one that reeks of misogyny, sexism, patriarchy, despair, poverty, wars and rapes, with women and children objectified as unthinking sex objects, hewers of wood, and mules. [...] The cynicism and jadedness that Mujila directs at Africa in the name of fiction is nuclear: Mujila's Africa is all stereotypes and caricature, filled with stick figures fucking mindlessly, defecating, wolfing down "dog cutlets" and "grilled rats" and drinking up a storm under the watchful eyes of a supercilious writer. It is all so annoying. I thought we were past this nonsense.

Ikheloa's judgement of Mujila's dilapidated 'Africa' image needs some nuancing. *Tram 83's* setting is mainly in a bar of the same name, located in a fictional, vaguely African city-state ruled by a dissident general who broke away from the so called 'hinterland'. The ironic use of colonial language runs through the novel. Its setting has been read by Ato Quayson and others (Fyfe 1; Jelly-Schapiro 12; Mabanckou 1) as a slightly veiled representation of Mujila's home-city Lubumbashi in the DRC's soil rich province of Katanga that could potentially exist without the rest of the DRC and whose historical secession during the Congo crisis of 1960–1963 is still vividly remembered. I agree with those critics who understand *Tram 83* as a political allegory and as a critical representation of postcolonial states whose carnivalesque and absurd features have been pointed out by Achille Mbembe in his seminal essay *On the Postcolony* by drawing largely on examples from Cameroon and both Congos (Brazzaville and Kinshasa). However, it is important to acknowledge that Mujila does not choose an explicitly referential representation of the DRC or Lubumbashi.⁶ While there are references to the DRC in the text, notably to historical personalities such as Lumumba or Stanley, as well as to the generalized "lawless minerals rush" (Kapanga 174), other allusions and quotes refer to different African states, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Asia, in a chaotic cacophony of diversified cultural references (Tidmarsh 62). The metonymic function of the bar, *Tram 83*, which is the novel's central place, and the city state can thus not be ascribed to Africa, much less the DRC, alone (Higginson 316). The bar is notably populated by, to quote but one of the novel's shorter checklists:

les filles-mères, les vendeurs d'organes, les enfants-soldats et leurs kalachnikovs, les apôtres, les serveuses et aides-serveuses de nuits, les musiciens venus de l'ex-Zaïre, les bandits et autres cambrioleurs. (Tram 23)

the single mothers, the human organ dealers, the child soldiers with their Kalshnikovs, the apostles, the night waitresses and the bus girls, the musicians from former Zaire, the bandits, and other burglars. (*Tram 17*)

This conglomerate of collective secondary trash characters meets up with drug and diamond dealers, sex-workers, poor intellectuals, and louche international businessmen in a psychedelic cityscape condensed in the nightlife of the bar where they are all united in the art of resourcefulness to survive, *la débrouillardise* in Congolese French, accompanied by a lot of drinking and paid sex on the backdrop of an unorganized, but authoritarian political regime “characterized by violence and rapacious for financial gain” (Kapanga 175). In short, the bar serves as the satirical *mise en abyme* of a postcolony par excellence. Moreover, its transcultural flair as a meeting place of locals with expats from all over the world, be they refugees, tourists, or merchants, turns the bar into a microcosm of a globalized late capitalist society where monetary and sexual greed rules alongside social decline.

The novel's thin plot revolves around two antagonists, who are sometimes also partners in crime, both destitute former students and friends: Lucien, a historian and aspiring writer, and Requiem who is involved in all kinds of illegal trade and blackmailing. In spite of his attitude as a revolutionary intellectual who explicitly wants to contribute to the collective memory of an uprooted country, Lucien is quickly driven into the endless “night of debauchery” (*Tram 7*) of the bar where he risks drowning in booze. Intermedial references to music, highly rhythmic sentences, leitmotif refrains, and the already mentioned breathless enumerations are recurrent rhetorical devices of the novel that feed into its “aesthetic of excess” (Jelly-Schapiro 13) whose tempo speaks to the concept of “locomotive literature or train literature or railroad literature” (*Tram 158*) invented by Lucien. Strikingly, on a metatextual level established by Lucien's pondering on literature, Mujila ironically comments on his own literary technique (Tidmarsh 56).

For good reasons, Ikheloa was particularly shocked about the text's sexist image of women:

Tram 83 is a frontal, violent attack on African women. This is not just merely a male book, it reeks of misogyny on each page. In Mujila's world, in his Congo, women are nothing but mere objects to be used and discarded like used condoms. On every page. [...] In *Tram 83*, Africa's men doze, wake up, order dog meat and grilled rats and fuck more women, pretend humans with fake buttocks and “melon breasts” and return to sleep to continue with the misogyny and self-loathing.

The fact is, every woman in *Tram 83*, with the exception of the transnational singer *La Diva*, is either a professional or an occasional sex-worker, cynically

classified into different categories such as the single mamas and the small chicks, meaning underage girls selling their bodies. Women are constantly harassing the male drinkers of the bar in search for clients. The sexual acts are more often than not directly performed in the toilets. Furthermore, female bodies are dissected through a male gaze focusing on the ‘tomato’, ‘melon’, ‘grapefruit’, and so on breasts of the ‘chicks’ who are thereby objectified as flora and fauna. Sexism is obviously part and parcel of a capitalist patriarchal society where, in the absence of other basic infrastructures, the mining business is in the hand of male local patrons and fraudsters dealing with male foreign investors. In this context, sex-work seems to be the only form of survival for women. Here, as with other African cliché topics of the novel, such as warlords and child soldiers, corruption and greed, poverty and decay, the satirical aspect of representation can however not be overlooked. The privileged form of Mujila’s literary examination of certain social realities, such as patriarchal power relations in particular, is the hyperbole.

South African feminist novelist Zukiswa Wanner, who was on the committee of the Etisalat Prize for African literature awarded to Mujila in 2015, spoke back to Ikheloa’s allegations of sexism by pointing to “his failure to realize how accurate the novel is in capturing the misogynist reality of its setting”.

My take: walk into any bar akin to *Tram 83* in Kampala, Nairobi, Johannesburg, Harare, Accra, Lusaka, Lilongwe, Dar to mention but a few African cities and see whether the women in *Tram* are not representative of sex workers in many of these cities. [...] Are bars on this continent patriarchal places where women are seen and treated like pieces of meat? When you can answer that honestly, do. Then re-read *Tram 83*. (qtd in Obi-Young)⁷

Consequently, it is indeed possible to read *Tram 83* as a social critique which deconstructs sexism by exposing it in a caricatural way. In my view, it is even debatable if we can speak of misogyny in this novel. While the patriarchal gaze that ultimately objectifies women is undeniably omnipresent, the male desire for women also speaks of admiration and dependency. Condescending comments are addressed to the male clients of *Tram 83*, too. Wanner was furthermore rightfully offended that “Ikhide’s analysis overlooks that the two females on the three-judge 2015 Etisalat Prize panel are feminists based in Africa whose unanimous choice of the novel could not have been based on Western stereotypes of Africa, who being feminist could not have decided on a book promoting misogyny” (qtd in Obi-Young). This statement implies a useful reminder that blaming African writers for sexism and poverty porn is predominantly a preoccupation of Diaspora intellectuals who risk losing sight of positions from the continent itself. His ignorance of African women critics’ positions on Mujila’s novel should be an opportunity for Ikheloa to rethink his own patriarchal attitudes.

Tram 83 can be read in many different ways: as a literary jazz symphonia (Quayson), as “radically and fundamentally dystopic” (Higginson 303), and as a satirical critique of failed states and neoliberal capitalism (Deckard 252). In Eli Jelly-Schapiro’s Marxist oriented interpretation, it becomes a “twenty-first

century apotheosis” of what he calls “the novel of primitive accumulation” (5). One important point is that it is also a metatextual novel on writing and on the place of African writers in their society and in the global editorial world. The plotline confronts the aspiring writer with the Swiss businessman and editor Malingeau who promises to publish the revolutionary play Lucien is working on, but makes reiterated demands to change it.⁸ He wants the play to be turned into prose, the characters to be reduced from 20 to 10, then to only two, and finally back to 20. The indecent intrusiveness of such demands targets power relations on the global book market. The ‘kind regulation’ of their original creativity is sadly nothing new to African writers. In a late-capitalist world, literature is as much a commodity as are minerals. Malingeau’s involvement in both businesses underlines this sharply.

In addition, the novel raises the problem of a lack of reading audiences: when Lucien performs a reading in the Tram 83 bar, nobody wants to listen to him, and he is severely beaten up for disturbing the conviviality of the place with his ‘intellectual rubbish’. This marks a low point of the novel. In the represented society, figured through the microcosm of the bar, a writer is simply not taken seriously, least of all can his art help him make a living. Therefore, Lucien submits to the Swiss editor’s demands and tries to fit within “the dynamics of world literature systems that themselves rely on a variety of infrastructures for the production and circulation of literary works” (Fyfe 3). In *Tram 83*, a surplus of mining infrastructure contrasts with a flagrant lack of infrastructure for literary production. This is as much an accurate statement on the condition of the DRC as an allegorical comment on global power constellations that favor business instead of art.

Lucien can be read as a double of the author. Mujila himself has written and performed poetry and plays, the latter staged with local theatre companies in Lubumbashi, before coming to Europe. Many of his early texts have not been published, as is often the case in the DRC that has a lively artistic scene but a poor editing infrastructure and an audience that enjoys live performance more than reading. He became a novelist only after moving to Austria. While poetry, theatre plays, and short stories are dominating genres in the DRC, the novel flourishes mainly in Congolese Diaspora writing and accommodates the demands of a Western-dominated global audience. When giving readings of *Tram 83*, whenever possible Mujila performs together with a saxophonist and turns the reading into a real spectacle by dramatically shouting his text above the music. An adaptation of the novel as a play by French stage director Julie Kretzschmar was actually performed not only at European festivals but also in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi in 2017 and 2018. This brought the novel—that had in reality been read by just a handful of people in the DRC—back to a broader Congolese public.

The global bar in *Zu der Zeit der Königinmutter*

In *How to write about Africa*, Wainaina writes, “You’ll also need a nightclub called Tropicana, where mercenaries, evil nouveau riche Africans and prostitutes

and guerrillas and expats hang out” (12). As we have seen, *Tram 83*'s bar can be read as such a prototypical 'African' nightclub though its multiple cultural references also point beyond a continental and towards a global setting. In his theatre play *Zu der Zeit der Königinmutter* published in 2018 in German and staged in Graz, Vienna and Berlin in 2018/19, Mujila radicalizes his approach. He remains true to his predilection for those places where people meet, drink, discuss, love, hate, plot business, and philosophize as the whole play is set in a pub called New Jersey bar. The author himself (qtd by Innerhofer) calls his play “*eine hybride Kreatur aus afrikanischen und österreichischen Elementen*” (a hybrid creature of African and Austrian elements), a comment that holds true for the bar itself that doesn't belong to any particular continent. Names of people and places are American (Jimmy, New Jersey bar), African (Mariama, Solo), or German (Gertraud, Fucking), thereby confirming a cultural hybridity that goes well beyond Europe/Austria and Africa/DRC. Mujila has now been living in Europe for more than 15 years, reads a lot of German language literature, and is involved in theatre projects in Austria and Germany on a regular basis. According to the author, French, even if appropriated as a creative tool, remains a colonial language of power, while the use of German is a deliberate choice. In an interview he states that French is:

die Sprache der Gewalt, des Blutes, der Brutalität. [...] Deutsch ist für mich eine neutrale Sprache; anders als Französisch zu verwenden ist das jetzt meine Entscheidung.

the language of violence, of blood, of brutality. [...] German is a neutral language for me. Different from the use of French, this is my choice now. (qtd by Innerhofer)

German is Mujila's sixth language after Tshiluba, Swahili, Lingala, French, and English (Innerhofer). The author's predilection for word plays remains genuine and he succeeds in using repetition, enumerations, and rhythm in his play in German just as well as he does in his French novels.⁹

The title of the play seems to invoke a mythical African past of matriarchal power—however, this is quite misleading. There is nothing specifically Congolese about the setting and the play's characters, lest the audience wants to read this into it just because the author originates from the DRC. Otherwise, the setting is a global everywhere, but not at the center of power and wealth, rather on the lost spot of a downtrodden periphery where the drinkers are nostalgic about the better time of a now bygone gold rush era. Though the play is structured into an opening monologue, four acts, and an epilogue, there is no corresponding drama plot. This plotlessness, combined with its performative playfulness, qualify the piece as theatre of the absurd. A metatextual comment in the 'second act' ironically dismisses this filiation:

Was bedeutet das, Theater? Das Theater des Absurden? Die Menschen tanzen, bewegen, entfesseln sich und schreien Texte, sie verschlingen sich auf der Bühne, sie imitieren das Leben oder das wirkliche Leben; Monsieur wir, wir existieren im Ernst, wir proben nicht Die kahle Sängerin von Ionesco [...] (Königinmutter 190)

What does theatre mean? The theatre of the absurd? People dance, move, unleash themselves and shout texts, they swallow each other up on stage, they mimic life or the real life; Monsieur we, we exist for real, we do not rehearse *The Bald Soprano* by Ionesco [...]

In the New Jersey bar, the dominant inertia and melancholic nostalgia for bygone better times are occasionally ruptured by outbursts of *joie de vivre* and extroverted storytelling. The extensive oral narratives of Jimmy the storyteller that are embedded in the play can count as the 'African' element mentioned by Mujila as it links back to orature. For instance, six pages of the play are devoted to the fairy-tale like story of Solo, a child made of clay who is punished for disobeying his parents by melting away in the rain (200–5). During its stage presentation in Berlin, the story was performed in an over-dramatized, hilarious manner that gave a funny twist to its erstwhile moralizing message.¹⁰

By designing a global situation of dissatisfied people hanging out in a shabby bar, Mujila carefully avoids any representation of 'African' realities in this play. The New Jersey bar is not Wainaina's club Tropicana, it's set neither in Africa nor America or Europe. Showcasing extravagant characters in more or less meaningless conversations, the play doesn't offer political or moral interventions. Through the dominating device of absurdity only an implicit critique of the state of the world is traceable. Loitering, drunkenness, and squalidness are praised as freedom:

Ah Monsieur, hier sind wir von niemandem abhängig, weder vom Himmel noch von der Erde, noch von Außerirdischen, wir saufen unsere schmutzigen Biere, wir scheißen, ohne jemanden zu stören, wir stinken nach Fisch, wir schneiden unseren Bart nicht, wir putzen unser Zahnfleisch nicht, wir spielen das ganze Jahr Karten, wir saufen sogar, bevor wir fluchen, und wir überleben wie im zweiten Jahrhundert, aber wir fühlen uns frei in all unserer Fäule. (Königinmutter 197)

Ah, Monsieur, we do not depend on anyone here, neither on heaven nor on earth, not even on aliens, we booze our dirty beers, we shit without disturbing anyone, we stink of fish, we don't trim our beard, we don't brush our gums, we play cards the whole year long, we booze even before we swear, and we survive like in the second century, but we feel just free in our decadence.¹¹

Binary gender representations and the display of sexism prevail in *Zu der Zeit der Königinmutter* in a similar way as they did in *Tram 83*. Backing up Ikheloa's earlier allegations, this text features, again, a one-sided gaze on women. The New Jersey bar is notably populated by ageing female sex workers who do not have clients anymore. They hang around in fur coats and lament their faded beauty and glory of satisfying myriad men from all over the world. Despite their lifelong disillusionment with love, they keep dreaming about prodigious males who would take them to a better place. When the monotony of the bar that has been visited by the same few drinkers for years is interrupted by the arrival of an arrogant German stranger, "der Neue" (the fresh arrival), a promiscuous atmosphere is revitalized, followed by sexual and economic rivalry among

both men and women.¹² Would this heteronormatively sexualized atmosphere justify judging *Zu der Zeit der Königinmutter* as a misogynistic play? In my view, through its exaggerated rawness the play denigrates callous performativities of masculinity as much as of femininity. Both genders rely on encapsulated concepts of being desirable as a woman (through physical seduction) or as a man (through economic success). These inflexible gender roles clearly contribute to the standstill of a precarious society that, under its weary surface of post-golden-times, still lusts for money, inebriation, and sex. Instead of merely confirming it, the play mocks gender dichotomy.

It must also be mentioned that, according to the stage directions, the play features a cross-dressed queer character: “*die kleine Gertraud ist ein Mann, der Frauenschuhe und einen langen schwarzen Rock trägt*” (*Königinmutter* 182) (little Gertraud is a man who wears women’s shoes and a long black skirt). In Charlotte Sprenger’s play production at Deutsches Theater in Berlin, Gertraud wore an elegant red gown, a referential wink to Austrian pop icon Conchita Wurst whose glamorous drag queen apparitions are well-known all over Europe. The omnipresence of Gertraud on stage evokes an element of amusement but also of rupture that questions the binary, patriarchal, and heteronormative matrix reigning at the New Jersey bar. Though this queer character remains largely mute—they are summoned to say or to do something by various speakers a dozen times, but do not react—its sheer presence on stage puts the surface female/male dichotomy of the play into question and debunks the irony of gendered performativity, thus confirming its satirical use in the play.¹³ Therefore, I argue that in *Zu der Zeit der Königinmutter* sexism and stereotypical gender roles are as much exhibited as they are unmasked and disrupted. At the end of the play, it is revealed that little Gertraud is the child of the late queen mother who founded the New Jersey bar as a place of refuge for gold seekers from all over the world and was tragically stabbed by a client many years ago. The queen mother is praised as a generous maternal figure. A similar mythical figure is further developed in Mujila’s latest novel, to which I will now turn.

Bars in Central African settings in *La danse du vilain*

In his second novel, published at the literary *rentrée* in fall 2020, Mujila chooses a realist topographical and historical setting for the first time. The novel is structured into 54 short chapters along two loosely interconnected narrative threads. The first is set among Zairean migrant workers in North-Eastern Angola and features a collective narrator. The second, based on shifting narrative point of views, takes place in Lubumbashi, mainly among a group of witty street children. A paratextual map of Central Africa is even offered to situate the reader (*La danse du vilain* 9). The map indicates two important zones of diamond mining: one in the Kasai provinces at the center of the DRC and one in North-East Angola, close to the border with the DRC. It also indicates Lubumbashi’s geographical position on the Zambian border in the south of the Shaba province that was renamed Katanga after the fall of Mobutu whose Zaïre provides the main historical backdrop to the novel. In a short

peritextual author's note at the end of the novel, Mujila explains the historical referentiality of his text:

C'est le nom de Zaïre qui correspond le mieux au vécu des personnages et à l'atmosphère de ce texte. Les années du régime de Mobutu furent remplies d'utopies, de rêves, de fantasmes et d'autres désirs incontrôlés pour l'ascension sociale, la quête de l'enrichissement facile et la profanation des lieux de pouvoir. Parmi ces phénomènes, l'immigration des Zaïrois en Angola pendant la guerre civile quitte à boycotter les frontières héritées de la colonisation comme si le pays ne possédait pas ses propres diamants, l'occupation des places publiques par les enfants du dehors. Ce roman je le dédie aux uns et aux autres. (Danse du vilain 263)

It is the name of Zaïre that best corresponds to the experience of the characters and the atmosphere of this text. The years of Mobutu's regime were filled with utopias, dreams, fantasies and other uncontrolled desires for social advancement, the quest for easy enrichment, and the desecration of places of power. Among these phenomena, the immigration of Zaireans to Angola during the civil war even if it means boycotting the borders inherited from colonization as if the country did not have its own diamonds, the occupation of public squares by children living outside. I dedicate this novel to all of them.

The novel thus references the Angolan civil war and in its last chapters the so-called war of liberation of 1996–1997 that transformed Zaïre into the DRC. It also depicts working conditions of miners and survival tactics of *shégué* (Lingala for street children) in Lubumbashi. Nevertheless, Mujila remains true to his erstwhile mission to highlight the hilarious absurdities of everyday life in a chaotically 'developing country', with the difference that he also gives accurate references to Mobutu's regime and the turmoil of the post-independence decades in Central Africa. By writing the memory of Zaïre, a failed postcolonial state par excellence, and of its migrant community in Angola, Mujila gives voice to characters from below who are artful masters of survival, not just victims of a violent postcolonial history. *Débrouillardise*, the everyday fight for survival by wit, characterizes the chapters revolving around the young boy Senza who becomes part of a group of street kids who occupy the place in front of Lubumbashi's central post office and also those that feature Molakisi among the fortune seekers in Angola's Cafunfo mines.

In contrast to Mujila's preceding texts it is striking that *La danse du vilain* features considerably less sex scenes and female sex workers or otherwise objectified women characters. Still largely centered around several male protagonists, the novel features women characters with more agency. Consciously or unconsciously, Mujila seems to have taken the allegations of misogyny and sexism to heart and chose a subtly different take on gender in this text, as I will outline by presenting the drinking places of the novel. For a flagrant continuity with both *Tram 83* and *Zu der Zeit der Königinmutter* is the strategic presence of yet other bars cum nightclub or hostel. Although the nightclub *Le Mambo de la fête* (The Mambo of the party)—“*le Mambo de l'Amour, le Mambo de la débauche, le Mambo de l'insomnie [...]*” (*Danse du vilain*

117) (the Mambo of Love, the Mambo of debauchery, the Mambo of insomnia [...])—set in Lubumbashi is not the epicenter of the text as the bars in Mujila's earlier writings were, nevertheless it remains a crucial space of encounters, business, and *joie de vivre* as well as a *mise en abyme* of the depicted Zairean society. While the plot's focus is on male clients of the bar, throughout the text many a times Mujila ruptures with the male clients/female service providers' dichotomy that was so flagrant in his first novel. Phrases such as "*les aides-serveuses—de sexe masculin et de sexe féminin*" (53) (the busgirls—of masculine and feminine sex) or "*les clients (de sexe masculins et féminins)*" (160) (clients [of masculine and feminine sex]) are obtrusively used as a means to ironically underline the subserviency of both genders and, even more importantly, the agency of women as clients of drinking debaucheries beyond their stereotypical role of barmaids and sex workers.

In the Angolan setting, an agelessly old woman by the name of Tshiamuena, respectfully titled *la Madone*, features right at the beginning of the novel and remains its enigmatic leitmotif character. She runs a restaurant-hostel for Zairean mine workers in the Angolan diamond zone where she takes care of the uprooted young men. For those readers of the novel who know Mujila's previous play, the figure of *la Madone* rings a bell as she seems to be a more elaborate version of the allegorical queen mother and founder of the New Jersey bar in *Zu der Zeit der Königinmutter*. Tshiamuena is a witness of the violent history in Angola and the DRC, from colonial times through "*la belle époque de la guerre froide*" (112) (the heyday of the Cold War) till the present. After living in many countries, Tshiamuena settled down on this rich spot of the earth where diamond miners hope to celebrate a transient wealth. Endowed with magical powers, this volatile character poses as a contradictory personality: maternal, wise, caring; but also demanding, obtruding, and disturbing. Described as, for instance, "*une grande dame, un être exceptionnel, une mère pour beaucoup entre nous, une reine, une femme puissante [...]*" (12) (a gentlewoman, an extraordinary being, a mother to many of us, a queen, a powerful woman [...]), she is also suspected to perform evil witchcraft by some, and quasi religiously adored as a spiritual mother Africa—hence the Christian honorary title of the Madonna—by others. Endowed with the gift of divination, capable to move through time and space at her will, Tshiamuena switches between several identities, proclaims to be a Japanese singer and even God (114).¹⁴ Lubumbashi's street children, who are also clients of *Le Mambo de la fête*, are equally endowed with magic—their stories of flying around at night under the influence of drugging themselves with glue are close to the testimonial stories of so called '*enfants-sorciers*' (child witches) collected by anthropologist Filip de Boeck in *Kinshasa: Tales of the Invisible City*.¹⁵

Le Mambo de la fête and the unnamed bar-hostel in Angola complement each other. Though set in different localities, they are closely connected through their staff and clients' dreams of fame and wealth in a dysfunctional political and economic environment. The function of the bar as the microcosm of a flawed postcolonial society thus resembles that in *Tram 83*, but is rooted in explicit geographical and historical referentiality in *La danse du vilain*. This

doesn't mean that the novel lacks fantastic passages such as, for instance, the marriage of one character with a mermaid and the surreal construction of the exuberant personality of *la Madone*.¹⁶ Tshiamuena also incarnates the land—“*Elle n'était pas la mémoire de l'Angola. Elle était l'Angola*” (*Danse du vilain* 13) (She wasn't the memory of Angola. She was Angola)—and reminds us of the old topos of the Mother Africa allegory in African male writing since the times of Négritude (Stratton 74–91). However, through the ambivalent complexity of Mujila's character, this continuity is ironically ruptured and complicated in a way that puts the stereotypical use of gender into question.

Mujila's metatextual approach to the 'How to write about Africa' question

An important secondary character in *La danse du vilain* is Franz Baumgartner, an Austrian writer who comes to Angola and Zaïre to write a novel. Though penniless, as a European he is first welcomed and taken care of by Zaireans who all hope to feature in his book. In chapters eight and 21, *la Madone* pressures Franz, who suspects her to be just a “*proxénète en fin de carrière*” (*Danse du vilain* 67) (a pimp at the end of her career), to write down her meandering memoirs. When he moves on to Lubumbashi, diverse clients of the Mambo de la fête also persistently demand that he must write them into his novel and actually tell him bluntly how he must portray them. As time goes by, Franz's loitering presence at the Mambo de la fête becomes more and more disturbing and the Zairean *vox populi* starts to look at this representative of the Global North with suspicion, as the following multilogue among clients of the bar shows:

- *Si vous voulez mon avis, c'est très ardu pour lui d'être un écrivain blanc et de devoir écrire sur l'Afrique, ou plus précisément d'entretenir dans son roman non pas un personnage noir, mais des personnages noirs. C'est, je pense, écrire dans une mare de clichés. [...]*
Chacun intervint à sa manière.
- *Il semble sympathique ce garçon, mais il joue avec le feu. A-t-on le droit d'entretenir des personnages qui n'ont pas la même expérience mémorielle que soi? L'esclavage, la colonisation [...]*
- *C'est un écrivain, il écrit de la fiction [...]*
- *Nous sommes au Zaïre!*
- *Tant qu'il me paie des bières, il peut écrire sur n'importe quoi.*
- *Il est au Zaïre juste pour couper des bières, ne lui prête pas ces idioties [...]*
- *Mimi la couveuse, les bières il pouvait les couper dans son pays!*
- *Vous ménagez la chèvre et le chou pour rien. Franz est un écrivain [...]*
- *Cette histoire de femme bicentenaire sort tout droit de son imagination!*
- *Si déjà pour les écrivains africains c'est difficile d'écrire des textes peu reluisants sur l'Afrique sans être accusé de perpétuer l'image d'un continent moribond, à plus forte raison un Blanc qui d'ailleurs écrit sur les gendarmes [...]*
- *Non, c'est la bicentenaire!*
- *Tu dis une chose et son contraire. Il est européen, il peut écrire sur ce qu'il veut [...]*
(Danse du vilain 209–10)

- If you want my opinion, it is very difficult for him to be a white writer and to have to write about Africa, or more precisely to maintain in his novel not just one black character, but black characters. It's, I believe, writing in a pool of clichés. [...] Everyone intervened in their own way.
- He seems nice this boy, but he plays with fire. Is it right to maintain characters who do not have the same experiences and memory as yourself? Slavery, colonization [...]
- He's a writer, he writes fiction [...]
- We are in Zaire!
- As long as he pays me beers, he can write about anything.
- He is in Zaïre just to drink beer. Do not buy into these idiocies [...]
- Mimi the hatcher, he could drink beer in his country!
- You are trying to accommodate the goat and the cabbage for nothing. Franz is a writer [...]
- This bicentenary woman story comes straight out of his imagination!
- If already for African writers it is difficult to write unflattering texts on Africa without being accused of perpetuating the image of a moribund continent, let alone a white who also writes about police officers [...]
- No, it's the bicentenary.
- You say one thing and its contrary. He's European, he can write on whatever he wants [...]

This multilogue on the Austrian's unfinished novel clearly points to the debates around the representation of Africa in literature as Lucien's literary project did in *Tram 83*. Admittedly, Mujila himself has by now declared himself to be not only a Francophone African or Congolese author, but an Austrian author, too (Innerhofer). So if Lucien in *Tram 83* can be read as a double of the author, should Franz Baumgartner be understood in the same vein? Meanwhile, this seems to be a bit more complicated. For, on the one hand, as a white European Franz enjoys privileges that neither the fictive Lucien nor his creator Fiston Mwanza Mujila have: "*Il est européen, il peut écrire sur ce qu'il veut*" (He is European, he can write about what he wants). On the other hand, the following line points to an implicit, moralistic form of censorship in today's climate of cancel culture which also affects the freedom of art in the Global North:

- *Si déjà pour les écrivains africains c'est difficile d'écrire des textes peu reluisants sur l'Afrique sans être accusé de perpétuer l'image d'un continent moribond, à plus forte raison un Blanc.*
- If it is already difficult for African writers to write unflattering texts on Africa without being accused of perpetuating the image of a moribund continent, let alone a white.

In this context, I read the passage of gossiping about Franz as a series of revelatory metatextual statements on the question of both African and Western writers' possibilities and limits when it comes to the representation of 'Africa' in literature today. Furthermore, it stands as a playful, ironic comment on the

allegations made on behalf of Mujila himself. The character of the Austrian writer in *La danse du vilain* and the dispute surrounding him by means of bar talk speak to Wainaina's 'How to write Africa' essay, Habila's concept of poverty porn, and to the sexism controversy surrounding *Tram 83*. The first two speakers in the multilogue accuse the white writer of creating black characters out of clichés and appropriating the memory of the violence of slavery and colonization that belongs to Africans. The third speaker, however, reminds everyone that literature is fiction and not a simple mirroring of history or experience, suggesting that freedom of art includes writing on whatever topic and in whatever style one chooses. The interjection "We are in Zaïre!" that follows promptly is at first glance a puzzling reply that seems out of context. A first understanding of this exclamation may suggest that, due to censorship and the persecution of intellectuals, the liberty of fiction is not a given asset in Zaïre/DRC and that in a politically repressive environment writers will always be judged negatively, if not censored. No matter what, political critique of a fictional regime will always be read as an offense of the actual regime. It is in this vein that Mujila's *Tram 83* has generally been read as a thinly veiled representation of the DRC, or at least of Lubumbashi as a Congolese microcosm, as a satire that criticizes the social and political reality of today's post-war Congolese society. At some point in the novel Lucien gets arrested and tortured, not for his implication in the illegal trafficking of raw material from the mines—these are activities taken for granted in the depicted society—but for allegedly speaking out about the eccentricities of the regime. A secondary understanding of the exclamation "We are in Zaïre!" as a reply to the claim that literature is fiction echoes an often-quoted passage of *Tram 83*:

Il est des villes qui n'ont pas besoin de littérature: elles sont littérature. Elles défilent poitrine bombée, la tête sur les épaules. Elles sont fières et s'assument en dépit des sacs-poubelles qu'elles promènent. La Ville-Pays, un exemple parmi tant d'autres [...] Elle vibrerait de littérature. (Tram 96)

There are cities that do not need literature: they are literature. They parade with bulging chest, head on shoulders. They are proud and assume themselves in spite of the garbage bags they walk on. The City-State, one example among many others [...] It vibrated with literature. (*Tram 100*)

There are times and spaces, the narrator implies, in which "creativity and dynamism of everyday life" (Fyfe 1) are so astonishing that it is futile to distinguish between reality and fiction; they are already always literature in the sense of being fabulous, endowed with the power of vibrating language, music, and magical moments. Mobutu's Zaïre with its fantastic parades, display of *commandement* (see Mbembe 77–134), hedonistic exuberance, and blatant social imbalance condensed in its mining agglomerations and crowded cities is one of them. Hence, whatever fiction Lucien, Franz, or Mujila himself for that matter, might write, the literariness of the space they (re)visit for inspiration needs no proof. In this context, should the line "This bicentenary woman story comes straight out of his imagination!" in the above quoted multilogue on

Franz Baumgartner be understood as an allegation that contradicts the right to fiction in a novel on Africa? Or, on the contrary, is it an appraisal of the imaginative mind of the writer? If the dialogue was to be performed, the vocal intonation could turn the statement either way. More importantly, here the metatextual passage deconstructs the novel's storyline itself, when its central iconic character Tshiamuena is revealed to be the literary fantasy of a secondary character. In a novel on Congo-Zaire and the adjacent Angola (and likewise in fiction *tout court*), boundaries between factual history and fictional storytelling cannot be maintained. Even less can the diegesis of Mujila's novels be taken for granted as if they were meant to construct a coherent narrative. *La danse du vilain* draws on a historical setting without renouncing hyperbole and satire as stylistic devices.

What does this mean for the representation of Central Africa? Following Wainaina's draconic satirical essay that highlights the many pitfalls of how to write (about) Africa and the poverty porn debate, there seems to be scarcely an escape for literature from getting it wrong, as the collective voice in the above analyzed dialogue from Mujila's latest novel also insinuates. Oduor Oduku, a Kenyan blogger who also responded to Ikheleoa's enraged post on *Tram 83* in April 2017, rightfully warns:

Poverty porn is our new prison, a lexicon borrowed from development critics. But this phrase even becomes more problematic when it is applied to a creative work, say a novel, because it automatically presumes that the work was written that way primarily to increase sales, for African novels, in a Western market, and there is a deliberate kowtowing to certain demands from the Western publishing system (editors, publishers, readers). It has become a simple way of shooting a novel down, of refusing to engage with its unpleasant contents.

Indeed, the controversies around Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and Mujila's *Tram 83*, as two flagrant examples of a wider debate, indicate that African intellectuals (more often than not of the Diaspora) are now increasingly moralizing and accusing each other for creating the wrong image of a doomed and sexist Africa. The danger of this discursive tendency is not only that it contributes to the neglect of literature as an art form beyond reportage, but also that it favors a blindness for critical agendas that are not always to be found on the surface of aesthetically complex texts.

But if we turn the perspective around for the last moment of this essay, take Mujila's thought a step further in thinking that a Congolese Diaspora writer based in Austria can also identify as an Austrian author, and slightly change the multilogue's last sentence into "He's in Europe, he can write on whatever he wants", an alternative conclusion to be drawn is that those transnational authors living abroad do have more liberties to write on whatever topic and in whatever style they please compared to those living on the continent where the book market is difficult and political censorship still prevails in certain countries. In the case of *Tram 83*, its adaption into a theatre play has served as a transmitter to reach Congolese audiences who are on the margins of the Western-dominated global cultural industry. If Mujila's Austrian and German

theatre projects could also reach the DRC, this would be a good next step into further opening up those circuits. With its specific focus on Zaïre and a rhetoric of ironic nostalgia which is not uncommon in today's DRC, *La danse du vilain* speaks more directly to Congolese readers, while at the same time it remains the art of a global author who addresses publics beyond borders.

Conclusion

Mujila has been accused of sexism and poverty porn while using hyperbole and satire in his writing in a bid to depict an allegorical postcolony in *Tram 83*. As I have pointed out, the condensed space of the bar as a hedonistic meeting place remains a leitmotif in the author's follow-up publications *Zu der Zeit der Königinmutter* and *La danse du vilain*. In his play, Mujila pushes the *mise en abyme* function of the bar as a representation of the state of the world even further than in *Tram 83* by constructing the New Jersey bar in *Zu der Zeit der Königinmutter* as a global everywhere. Stereotypical, patriarchy-based gender dichotomies are hyperbolically reproduced in both texts as a means of satire. The intrusion of a queer character in the play paves a (timid) way to the disruption of binarity. In his second novel, Mujila pinpoints a referential topographical and historical setting of Zaïre and Angola and considerably reduces bluntly sexist scenes. Nevertheless, bars remain strategic spaces in the same spirit of *joie de vivre* and survival tactics as in the precedent texts. In all three texts, the bar functions as a satirically condensed microcosm of dysfunctional societies. In *Tram 83*, the reference space is a prototypical postcolony whose features point beyond 'Africa' while at the same time referencing the DRC and other worldly spaces. The New Jersey bar in *Zu der Zeit der Königinmutter* is a global microcosm that reflects the state of our late capitalist world at large. Finally, Le Mambo de la fête and *la Madone's* hostel-bar in *La danse du vilain* are more concretely inscribed into the history of Zaïre and Angola whose imbalanced early postcolonial nation building projects they mirror.

Acknowledgements

I thank Anja Oed for inviting me to the panel "Writing a novel, or writing Africa?" at the virtual VAD (Association of African Studies in Germany) conference "Africa challenges" in 2021. This article has been developed from the paper given on that occasion.

Notes

1. Habila has himself written on so to say typical 'African', and more precisely Nigerian, topics in his novels: dictatorship and imprisonment in *Waiting for an Angel*, child soldiers in *Measuring Time*, and the Niger Delta violence in *Oil on Water*. We can add his non-fiction piece *The Chibok Girls* to the picture to see how many political and social scourges he deals with in his oeuvre. The interesting question of what is specifically different in his representation of these different Nigerian scenes of crisis compared to Bulawayo's representation of the declined Zimbabwe at the end of Robert Mugabe's reign can however not be dealt with in this article.
2. It is worth noting that in Francophone Africa, its Diaspora, and among Francophone studies scholars, the debate on 'How to write Africa beyond poverty porn?', to put it in a nutshell like this, has never taken place in the same moralizing way as in the

- English-speaking world. In fact, it was only after the publication of the English translation of *Tram 83* and when the novel had already won international literary prizes that the controversy started.
3. Translations from English and German in this article are mine, except for *Tram 83* whose English translation by Roland Glasser is quoted.
 4. However, as Pim Higginson points out in “Drinking Scenes: Alcohol in the Francophone African Novel”, the importance of the bar as a setting can be traced back to the earliest classics of the emerging Francophone novel in the 1950s with Mongo Beti, aka Eza Boto’s *Ville cruelle* (Cruel city).
 5. I deliberately abstain from applying Foucault’s concept of heterotopia with regard to my corpus. Although it might be tempting to conflate Mujila’s bar with the idea of a heterotopic space that represents society while at the same time suspending certain norms and functioning according to its own rules, this is not exactly the use of the bar in Mujila’s texts. On the one hand, different from the definition of heterotopia, in Mujila’s writing the bar is an open and not a closed space, penetrable to all members of society. On the other hand, it seems not to differ from the outer space, but rather to prolongate and satirically illustrate the already existing unruly space surrounding it.
 6. Mujila has himself declared that at least three cities have inspired his writing: Lubumbashi, Mbujimayi, and Kinshasa, but that he did not want to fix any of them in his novel (Brezault 137).
 7. While some of the original posts are not available anymore, the whole April 2017 controversy has been summarized and documented by Otosirizee Obi-Young on Brittle Paper.
 8. This is a speaking name. Though not as pejorative as its English phonetic equivalent ‘malign’, in French *malin* means smart in the sense of sharp or malicious.
 9. Mujila (*Königinmutter* 174) acknowledges Astrid Nischkauer and Philipp Hauß as language mentors.
 10. I am referring to the staging at Deutsches Theater Berlin during the 2019/2020 season. Mujila is now regularly engaged in theatre production projects in Austria and Germany. The plays are not always published.
 11. The Berlin stage design featured a toilet at the center of the stage. Ample use of shitting and vomiting as nonverbal performance elements was made.
 12. The Berlin staging featured an actor with a heavy Berliner accent that entertained the audience graciously.
 13. A queer, cross-dressing character appears shortly in *La danse du vilain*: “*Soudain un homme habillé en gonzesse—ou une femme vêtue en garçonnet, qu’importe—hurla de tous ses poumons: – La danse du vilain!*” (105) (Suddenly, a man in girl’s clothes—or a woman dressed as boy, it doesn’t matter—shouted full-throatedly: – The Dance of the Villain!) Whilst the character is not developed further, it’s function as an animator for the dance that constitutes not less than the novel’s title is significative. This dance, carried out with frenzy by all clients of the novel’s central bar, is neither male nor female, but both at the same time pointing to a queer dimension.
 14. By naming one of the central settings of his novel *Le Mambo de la fête*, Mujila references the popular song “Omatsuri Mambo” by Japanese diva Hibari Misora. Furthermore, considering intertextuality in the Francophone literary field, this peculiar choice of an alternative identity is a wink to Dany Laferrière’s novel *Je suis un écrivain japonais* (2008) (I am a Japanese writer) in which the Haitian author who migrated to Québec ponders the possibilities of multiple artistic identities.

15. De Boeck, who has also published anthropological work on diamond mining, is acknowledged in the author's note on page 263, in particular for nourishing the character of the Madonna.
16. The Mami Wata myth is deeply rooted in modern Congolese mythology and popular culture (see Jewsiewicki's book on paintings), but Mujila's short narrative on this figure is not at all folkloric. On top of her proverbial jealousy, his satirized siren is a heavy drinker who drives her human husband crazy by her excessive demands for alcohol.

Works cited

- Brezault, Éloïse. "Le 'théâtre-conte' chez Fiston Nasser Mwanza Mujila: une histoire du présent. Entretien avec l'auteur." *Francofonia* no. 76, 2019, pp. 137–44.
- De Boeck, Filip & Marie-Françoise Plissart. *Kinshasa: Tales of the Invisible City*. Ludion, 2005.
- Deckard, Sharae. "Trains, Stones, and Energetics: African Resource Culture and the Neoliberal World Ecology." *World Literature, Neoliberalism, and the Culture of Discontent*, edited by Sharae Deckard & Stephen Shapiro. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 239–62.
- Fyfe, Alexander. "Infrastructure and the Valences of the Literary in Fiston Mwanza Mujila's *Tram 83*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2021.1875975>.
- Geuen, Vanessa. *Kneipen, Bars und Clubs. Postmoderne Heimat- und Identitätskonstruktionen in der Literatur*. Ripperger & Kremers, 2016.
- Habila, Helon. "We Need New Names by NoViolet Bulawayo—review." *The Guardian*. 20 Jun. 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jun/20/need-new-names-bulawayo-review>.
- Higginson, Pim. "Drinking scenes: Alcohol in the Francophone African novel." *Routledge Handbook of African Literature*. edited by Carli Coetzee & Moradewun Adejunmobi. Routledge, 2019, pp. 305–19.
- Ikheloa, Ikhede. "Mujila Fiston Mwanza's *Tram 83*: Requiem for the African writer, and again, the balance of today's stories." *Pa Ikhede*. 16 Apr. 2017. <https://xokigbo.com/2017/04/16/mujila-fiston-mwanzas-tram-83-requiem-for-the-african-writer-and-again-the-balance-of-todays-stories/>.
- Innerhofer, Judith E. "'Zu der Zeit der Königinmutter': Die Bar als Bühne des Daseins." *Die Zeit*. 25 Feb. 2019. https://www.zeit.de/2019/09/zeit-koeniginmutter-theaterstueck-fiston-mwanza-mujila-akademietheater?utm_referrer=https%253A%252F%252F.
- Jelly-Schapiro, Eli. "Extractive Modernity at Large: The Contemporary Novel of Primitive Accumulation." *Interventions*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2021.2003221>.
- Jewsiewicki, Bogumil. *Mami Wata. La peinture urbaine au Congo*. Gallimard, 2003.
- Kapanga, Kasongo Mulenda. "UDPS Opposition Populism in the DRC and Its Reflection in Two Congolese Novels." *English Studies in Africa* vol. 63, no. 1, pp. 167–78. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00138398.2020.1780763>.
- Laferrière, Dany. *Je suis un écrivain japonais*. Grasset, 2008.
- Mabanckou, Alain. "Foreword." *Tram 83*, translated by Roland Glasser. Jacaranda, 2015, pp. I–II.
- Mbembe, Achille. *De la postcolonie. Essai sur l'imagination politique dans l'Afrique contemporaine*. La Découverte, 2020.
- McMorran, Will. *The Inn and the Traveller: Digressive Topographies in the Early Modern European Novel*. Legenda, 2002.
- Mujila, Fiston Mwanza. *La danse du vilain*. Métailié, 2020.

- _____. *Tram 83*. Métalié, 2014.
- _____. *Tram 83*, translated by Roland Glasser. Jacaranda, 2015.
- _____. "Zu der Zeit der Königinmutter." *Theater Theater. Aktuelle Stücke*, edited by Uwe B. Carstensen, et al. Fischer, 2018, pp. 173–219.
- Newman, Ian. *The Romantic Tavern: Literature and Conviviality in the Age of Revolution*. Cambridge U P, 2019.
- Obi-Young, Otosirieze. "Is Fiston Mujila's 'Tram 83' Misogynist Poverty Porn? Zukiswa Wanner and Richard Oduku Lead Strong Reaction to Ikhido Ikheloa's Damning Criticism." *Brittle Paper*. 24 Apr. 2017. <https://brittlepaper.com/2017/04/fiston-mujilas-tram-83-misogynist-poverty-porn-zukiswa-wanner-richard-oduku-lead-strong-reaction-pa-ikhido-ikheloa-damning-criticism/>.
- Oduku, Oduor. "Poverty Porn—A New Prison for African Writing." *Richard Oduor*. 24 Apr. 2017. <https://richardoduor.wordpress.com/2017/04/24/poverty-porn-a-new-prison-for-african-writers/>.
- Quayson, Ato. "The Improvisational Jazz Rhythms of Fiston Mwanza Mujila's Tram 83." *Brittle Paper*. 30 Mar. 2016. <https://brittlepaper.com/2016/03/review-improvisational-jazz-rhythms-fiston-mwanza-mujilas-tram-83-ato-quayson/>.
- Stratton, Florence. *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*. Routledge, 1994.
- Tidmarsh, Katie. "Tram 83: Trains, traumatismes et transnationalisme dans les écrits de Fiston Mwanza Mujila." *Francofonia* no. 76, 2019, pp. 51–66.
- Wainaina, Binyavanga. *How to write about Africa*. Kwani Trust, 2008.