

# Lamko, Koulsy

(1959- ),

Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.013.49230>

**Published in print:** 08 December 2011

**Published online:** 30 September 2012

A version of this article originally appeared in *The Dictionary of African Biography*.

musician, actor, playwright, novelist, and writer of short stories and essays active in Burkina Faso, Rwanda, France, and Mexico, was born in Chad on 25 October 1959. His work has won him numerous prizes. Theater companies in Africa, Europe, and Canada have presented his plays. His published works include *La Phalène des Collines* (2000), *La Tête sous laisselle* (1997), and *Aurore* (1997). Lamko grew up in Dadouar, Chad, but was forced into exile because of civil war. He left Chad in 1979 and went to live in Burkina Faso, located in West Africa.

Lamko's long-lasting influence on the world of theater and literature began while he was living in Burkina Faso. He got involved in the activities of the Institut des Peuples Noirs (Institute of Black Peoples) in Ougadougou, Burkina Faso. He spent ten years heavily promoting community theater in urban and rural neighborhoods. Additionally, Lamko founded the International Festival of Theatre for Development in Ougadougou. He also became close to Thomas Sankara, a famous political nationalist who eventually became president of Burkina Faso from 1983 to 1987. In 1997 Lamko produced a CD of mixed poetry and music entitled *Bir Ki Mbo* in collaboration with Stéphane Scott and Rémi Stengel as a tribute to President Sankara.

Lamko briefly lived in Limoges, France, where several of his plays were performed, such as *Tout bas ... si bas* (1995). He often attended the Limousin Festival International des Francophonies. Lamko eventually moved to Rwanda where he received his doctorate in arts, language, and French literature at the National University in Butare. He founded and directed the arts center at the National University. The center's goals at the time were to promote the use of arts to advocate peace, social justice, and reconciliation. In addition, Lamko taught writing and theater at the National University.

During his residence in Rwanda, Lamko's written works were heavily influenced by the 1994 Rwandan genocide. His first novel sprang from a project called *Rwanda: Écrire par devoir de mémoire* ("Rwanda: Writing so as not to forget"). In 1998, a group of ten African writers from eight different countries visited the Rwandan capital, Kigali, as part of this commemorative project. While there, the authors were asked to write about the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Nine published texts emerged as a result of the project. Lamko's contribution, a novel titled *La Phalène des Collines* ("The Butterfly of the Hills"), was published in 2000. The novel's historical background is the Rwandan genocide of 1994 in which thousands of Tutsis and Hutus were killed by the Hutu-dominated government between 6 April and 19 July 1994. The novel is significant in that it contributes to the continued remembrance of the genocide by recapturing the horrific events. A queen who is raped by a priest during the genocide narrates the book. After her death, the queen's spirit turns into a butterfly (*la phalène*) whose main goal is to reestablish her exiled family in Rwanda.

---

Lamko's participation in the national remembrance of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda also extends to the world of theater. As scholar Chantal Kalisa (2006) has observed, Lamko believes that the power of theater can help Rwandans emotionally and socially come to terms with the events of the genocide. Kalisa further notes that Lamko stresses that, at the collective level, dramatic expression can allow communities to heal by transforming collective traumatic experience into art. Two plays that Lamko has written and directed in Rwanda are *Corps et voix: paroles rhizome* ("Body and Voice: Rhizome Words") and *Le dernier jour d'un condamné à mort* ("Last Day of a Condemned Man"). In 2009, Lamko stayed as a guest of Amsterdam Vluchtstad, in the former apartment of Anne Frank and her family at the Amsterdam Merwedeplein. Thereafter, Lamko decided to live and teach in Mexico City, Mexico.

[ See also Sankara, Thomas.]

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

---

Barnett, Michael N. *Eyewitness to a Genocide: The United Nations and Rwanda*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003.

Chalaye, Sylvie. "For a Roaming Africanity: Interview with Koulsy Lamko." *Africultures*, 19 July 2001. Available at <http://www.africultures.com/php/index.php?nav=article&no=5503> <<http://www.africultures.com/php/index.php?nav=article&no=5503>>.

Hawley Chris. "In Mexico City, a Refuge for World's Writers: Haven from Persecution Gives Chance at Better Life." *Azcentral*, com, 24 February 2008. Available at <http://www.pvscene.com/682/citlaltpetl-mexicos-writers-safe-house/> <<http://www.pvscene.com/682/citlaltpetl-mexicos-writers-safe-house/>>.

Hitchcott, Nicki. "Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire." *A Global African Commemoration—Forum for Modern Language Studies Advance* 45 (February 20, 2009): 151–161.

Kalisa, Chantal. "Theatre and the Rwandan Genocide." *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 18, No. 4 (October 2006): 515–521.

King, Adele. "Koulsy Lamko: La Phalène des Collines." *World Literature Today* 77, No. 2 (July–Sept. 2003): 89.

### **See also**

Sankara, Thomas <<https://oxfordaasc.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-49885>>