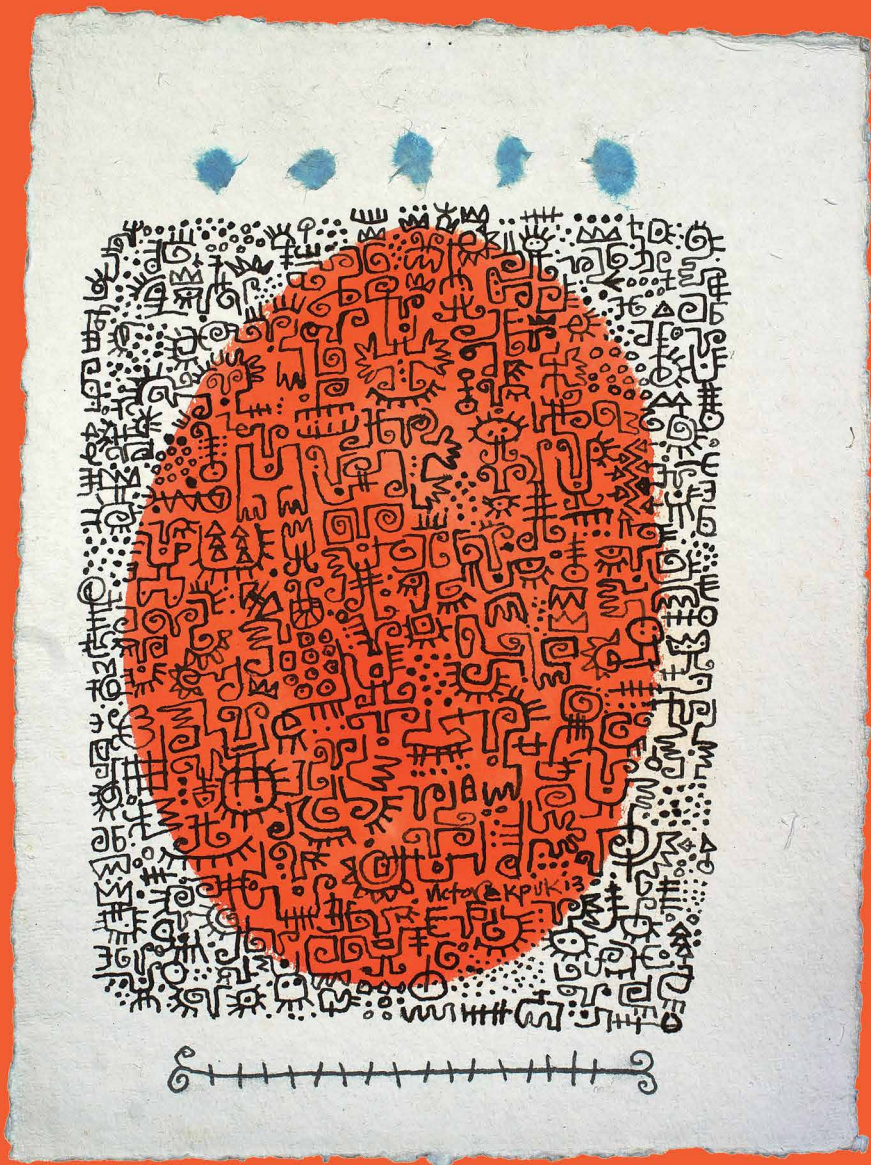


THE POSTCOLONIAL AFRICAN GENOCIDE NOVEL

QUESTS FOR MEANINGFULNESS



CHIGBO ARTHUR ANYADUBA

The Postcolonial African Genocide Novel

Quests for Meaningfulness

Chigbo Arthur Anyaduba

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Homage

I

*When you have finished
& done up my stitches,
Wake me near the altar,
& this poem will be finished...*

(Christopher Okigbo, "Siren Limits IV")

II

Ploughed from the mass graves of History
Exhibits on the pyre of empty testaments
Equestrians of trauma
Signifiers of perpetual suffering
Icons of silence, of the limits of speech:
To you mangled, rancid dead on display
I owe this stupefying enchantment.

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After it's been all said and done, the love and care of family and friends made all the difference. I am forever thankful to you all.

Introduction

This book explores some of the fictional responses to the genocidal mass atrocities of the Igbo in Nigeria (1966–70) and the Tutsi in Rwanda (1990–94). Through a comparative reading of the violent situations in both countries it underscores the ways that literary encounters with atrocities in Africa’s postcolonies have attempted to construct meanings of genocide and to reimagine the conditions giving rise to exterminatory forms of mass violence. This literature, taken together, tries to make “genocides” in Africa thinkable in certain ways. In the attempt, fundamental questions are raised about the nature of genocide, including: What explains why some groups attempt to eliminate others? Who count as victims, perpetrators, and bystanders in the theatres of these mass atrocities? What understandings of human goodness and evil can we derive from representations of genocidal horrors? What is the role of art and the artist before, during, and after genocides? What have genocides meant for the literary imagination in Africa? What is the relation of genocidal to colonial violence in Africa? These questions are not simple and frequently they provoke complex responses. Nevertheless, they lie at the heart of my project in this book.

This book concretizes and troubles one of the apparent truisms of genocide studies, especially in the context of imaginative literature: that the reality of genocide more often than not resists meaningfulness. Particularly given the centrality of this truism to artistic responses to the Holocaust and to genocides more generally, this book both identifies the manifold constructions of meanings and highlights the significance of some of the deeper humanistic concerns expressed by writers about exterminatory violence occurring on the African continent. It argues against the grain of thinking that genocide renders meaningless the artistic imagination attempting to represent it. A signal contribution of

this study is that it tracks the astonishing range of meanings drawn by writers at a series of (temporal, spatial, historical, cultural, and other) removes from the realities of genocide in Africa's postcolonies, meanings that are often highly specific and irreducible to maxims or foundational cases. The project of charting these overlaps and differences between the various meanings, which this book is essentially about, is one possible antidote to both the anxieties that genocide negatively affects the artistic imagination and the claims of empathy fatigue that have come to characterize recent genocide studies scholarship.

Extant discussions of genocides occurring in postcolonial Africa suggest that the conditions under which these mass atrocities are produced derive mainly from the twin legacies of European colonialism and modernity—specifically through the nation-state system foisted on African peoples and the ideas of sovereignty and political and moral subjectivity that this system enabled and depended on. The prevailing critical assumption, that is, is that there was no neat transition from the colonial period to a postcolonial one in Africa. Rather, the colonial system, with all its violent racist baggage, was carried along into the postcolonial period in ways that encouraged the instances of mass violence and brutal atrocity witnessed since independence.

What is missing from this conception of postcolonial African violence as derived from and underpinned by Africans' experiences of European colonialism is due acknowledgement of the extent to which our understanding of these violent occurrences has been shaped by the representational conventions and practices associated with the legacy of the Nazi genocide of Jews and other targeted victim groups in Europe. As this book shows, in the artistic projects to construct meanings against genocide's nihilism writers of African genocides deploy tropes that, while significantly orientated to African concerns, are equally shaped by the representational conventions and practices associated with the legacy of the Holocaust.¹ I understand the Holocaust to be an important point of reference for African writers and other artists attempting to make sense of genocides perpetrated in Africa.

The resulting nexus of Holocaust memory with representations of African violence presents some ambivalence. On the one hand, reference to the Holocaust (its history, tropes, and analytical categories)

1 I use "the Holocaust" throughout this book to refer to what has become the standard description for Nazi Germany's genocide of Jewish people and other targeted victim groups in Europe including the Sinti-Roma people, the Slavs, Blacks, homosexuals, and other groups that the Nazi regime considered to be physically and mentally unfit.

provides those working with and on African genocides with a ready-made descriptive toolbox whose utility has already been demonstrated and whose meanings are widely understood (if not always shared). This toolbox has helped to make African genocides visible globally. On the other hand, the Holocaust has also in various ways overdetermined the explanatory and moral-evaluative frames through which African genocides have been conceived of and responded to in art as well as in the “real” world, such as in discussions of post-conflict reconciliation and redress.²

Yet the sublimation of Holocaust memory into mediations of violent encounters in Africa has broader implications in ways not generally accounted for in scholarly works on African genocides that focus more narrowly on the process of brutalization of European colonialism, but not often on the process that is constituting post-genocide subjects and subjectivities in Africa. These implications suggest themselves more broadly in literary projects that privilege moral responses to genocides and unstable political visions of justice and political organization in a genocide’s wake.

My concern in this book, therefore, is with mapping not only the meanings that literatures of genocide in Africa suggest but also the various intersections linking Holocaust memories to representations of genocide in Africa, specifically in Biafra/Nigeria and Rwanda. I explore in this book the significance of tensions in novels between the experience of violence in Biafra/Nigeria and in Rwanda that arise from their authors’ desire to have the atrocities at their centres acknowledged as genocides both particularly and universally.

Genocide in Africa’s Postcolony: The Examples of Nigeria and Rwanda³

Notwithstanding disputes over the use of the word “genocide” to describe the mass atrocities committed in Nigeria and Rwanda, I

2 This point about the entanglements of Holocaust memories in African conflict zones has been the focus of some recent works, notably Michael Rothberg’s *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Stanford UP, 2009, and Lasse Heerten’s *The Biafran War and Postcolonial Humanitarianism: Spectacles of Suffering*, Cambridge UP, 2017. See Chapter 2 of this book for a fuller discussion of the subject.

3 Throughout the book I have used such generic terms as “Africa”, “postcolonial Africa”, “Africa’s postcolony”, “African literature”, and “postcolonial African genocide novel” not to homogenize the complex nature of socio-political and historical realities on the

have used genocide with more nuance than suggested in its current standard understanding as articulated by the United Nations' Genocide Convention. Article II of the UN Convention on the Punishment and Prevention of the Crime of Genocide (UNGC) defines genocide as meaning:

any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.⁴

The UNGC definition emphasizes deliberateness (intent) leading to systematic genocidal action. My inclination would be to treat the UNGC definition as a form of narrative (that is, supposing we regard law as story, as some scholars are inclined to do).⁵ As a narrative,

continent or to suggest that violent realities in Nigeria and Rwanda represent what obtains in all of Africa. There is always a danger, as Simon Gikandi notes in the *Encyclopedia of African Literature* (Routledge, 2002), "that the diversity of the [African] continent and its complicated history will be subsumed by the desire for a larger narrative of culture and society" (p. xii; for more on this point, see, for example, Pius Adesanmi, *You're Not a Country, Africa: A Personal History of the African Present*, Penguin, 2012). With Gikandi's submission in mind, I acknowledge that differences of historical experiences across the continent cannot be homogenized under the rubric of Africa or under any national name such as Nigeria or Rwanda. Accordingly, I recognize the multiple forms, complexities, and differences of historical events and experiences on the continent as well as the multiple dimensions that the understandings of these experiences have unfolded. My use of such generic terms is essentially conceptual in order to highlight a broad process that I consider lying at the background of crises in Africa of which the Nigerian and Rwandan instances provide only a foreground. Thus, I have not overly concerned myself in the book with the tedious, tendentious, and perhaps irresolvable question of what constitutes "African" in the specific and different national contexts of my focus. Instead, I have used such generic categories as a diversifying approach to highlight thematic threads in the discourse of African experiences.

4 United Nations, *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, Geneva, 1948, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%2078/volume-78-i-1021-english.pdf>. Accessed 16 March 2015.

5 See, for example, Payam Akhavan, *Reducing Genocide to Law: Definition, Meaning, and the Ultimate Crime*, Cambridge UP, 2014 and *In Search of a Better World: A Human Rights Odyssey*, House of Anasi Press, 2017.

therefore, the UNGC definition is indebted to an understanding of genocide that is based on the Nazi atrocities against Jewish people in Europe. In this understanding, genocide is imagined to follow a teleological course from intent to action, a course believed to be the way in which, for example, the Holocaust proceeded. This understanding of genocide has informed several scholarly and literary projects on postcolonial African genocides. The novels that I discuss in this book also show that their authors understood the atrocities in both Nigeria and Rwanda to be genocidal by this standard UNGC understanding of the term. The reliance on the UNGC as a form of Holocaust trope is perhaps the reason that writers narrativize African mass atrocities to “fit” the image of the Holocaust.

Yet some recent Holocaust and genocide scholarship, such as the work by Christopher Browning (for example, *Ordinary Men*), has challenged the teleological narrative of genocide and the emphasis on genocidal intent. While I rely on this recent scholarship here in order to broaden understanding of genocides occurring in Africa, my inclination has been to consider the “meanings” of a genocide not as an objective reality that one finds “out there” but instead as produced (or socially constructed) in discourse—discourse here taken to mean “a cluster (or *formation*) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society”.⁶ This book, therefore, is an attempt (1) to show *how* novels through their *representations* of targeted mass killings participate in the process of producing meanings of genocide and (2) to underscore the implications for *our* understanding of the meanings of genocide produced in literary representations.

That said, it is important also to underscore (at the risk of performative contradiction) that the mass atrocities in Nigeria and Rwanda do meet the official criteria for considering genocide as enshrined in the UNGC. The reason for my highlighting this point is in order to reject certain denialist claims that mass atrocities in both countries do not meet the international standard and official/legal understanding of genocide. Thus: the mass killings of the Igbo in Nigeria and the Tutsi in Rwanda do meet the threshold for genocide under the UN’s definition. For example, victims were identified by their killers as belonging to an ethnic group, and then massacred because of that group membership.

6 Stuart Hall, editor, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Sage, 1997, p. 6.

The killings were deliberate, well planned and systematically (with varying degrees of success) executed by perpetrators.

In Nigeria, a group of military officers carried out a coup in January 1966 that led to the murders of members of Nigeria's government. Of the five officers who organized the coup, four were of Igbo ethnicity. The coup plotters claimed that their goal was to rid Nigeria of corrupt politicians. Most of their victims were top government officials of the ruling coalition parties, including the country's prime minister and the premiers of the then Northern and Western Regions of Nigeria. However, the coup failed after the military command intervened to suppress it. The coup nonetheless ushered in a military regime led by the country's top military officer, Major-General Aguiyi Ironsi, who happened to be an Igbo. The leaders of the Northern Region, who felt aggrieved by the coup's outcome, branded it an example of Igbo treachery that was hatched from an Igbo conspiracy to impose Igbo hegemony over Nigeria. In May of the same year mobs and militant bands began killing Igbo residents in several cities in the Northern Region. By July a second coup took place, this time led by military officers from the Northern Region. The July coup plotters murdered the Igbo head of state and subsequently undertook a systematic purging of Igbo officers from the military. Killings of Igbo civilians living in the North intensified during this period and spread to the Western Region as well. Between July and December 1966 massacres of Igbo peoples living in the Northern and Western Regions of Nigeria were widespread, leading to thousands of deaths and the displacement of millions of survivors who escaped from these regions to the Eastern Igbo homeland.

The mass murders of the Igbo and other so-called Easterners in Nigeria precipitated the secession of the Eastern Region of Nigeria from the federation in May 1967. Lieutenant-Colonel Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, who was the military head of the then Eastern Region, announced the secession and called the resulting new nation Biafra. Nigeria invaded Biafra a few weeks after its declaration of independence in order to force it back into the federation. The war that followed was marked by heinous atrocities, including massacres of whole Igbo towns by Nigerian troops, the mass rape of girls and women, and the prosecution by the Nigerian military of a war of blockade and mass starvation targeting Igbo civilian populations and leading to the deaths of over two million people. The war ended in January 1970 with Biafra capitulating.⁷

7 For details of the historical accounts of the crisis and war in 1960s Nigeria see Dan

Contention between scholars has generally not been over the facts concerning atrocities against the Igbo. Instead, controversies have related to such issues as how to characterize the massacres of Igbo peoples across Nigeria before and during the war. For those who argue against labelling the killings as a genocide, the argument has generally been that no clear evidence of genocidal intentions could be established on the part of the Nigerian military government.⁸ To account for the systematic nature of the killings, such accounts generally view the massacres of the Igbo as revenge for the first military coup, which was believed to have been propelled by an Igbo conspiracy to rule Nigeria.

However, the premise of the revenge hypothesis—that the first coup was an Igbo coup—is not only factually inaccurate but also difficult to accept theoretically, as many of the junior soldiers who participated in that coup were non-Igbo: for example, the soldiers who killed the Northern Premier were mostly non-Igbo people from Northern Nigeria, including some members of the Premier's palace guards. A further problem with the revenge claim is that it fails to explain the rationale that places collective guilt and blame on a whole people because of the supposed crimes of its members. Some scholars, such as G. N. Uzoigwe (for example, in *Visions of Nationhood*), have argued that no evidence of such an Igbo conspiracy exists in reality. Nor, I should add, are such claims of a grand conspiracy ever a justifiable reason for a genocide. Not only is there ample evidence of genocidal intentions in the statements, publications, and actions of Nigerian leaders before and during that period, but the organized pattern of killings and the fact that victims' ethnic (or racialized)

Jacobs, *The Brutality of Nations*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1987; John de St. Jorre, *The Brother's War: Biafra and Nigeria*, Faber & Faber, 2009; G. N. Uzoigwe, *Visions of Nationhood: Prelude to the Nigerian Civil War, 1960–1967*, Africa World Press, 2011; Timothy J. Stapleton, *A History of Genocide in Africa*, Praeger, 2017; Michael Gould, *The Biafran War: The Struggle for Modern Nigeria*, I. B. Tauris, 2012; Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, Cambridge UP, 2008.

⁸ See Stapleton; *A History of Genocide*; Gould, *The Biafran War*; S. Elizabeth Bird and Fraser M. Ottanelli, *The Asaba Massacre: Trauma, Memory, and the Nigerian Civil War*, Cambridge UP, 2017; Douglas A. Anthony, "Irreconcilable Narratives: Biafra, Nigeria and Arguments about Genocide, 1966–1970," *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide: The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967–1970*, edited by A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten, Routledge, 2018, pp. 47–71.

identity constituted the central reason for their murders are proof enough that an attempted extermination of a people took place.⁹

Disagreements similar to those found in the discourse of Igbo genocide in Nigeria are also present in the case of the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda, although the atrocities in Rwanda have now become almost incontestably accepted as a genocide. Following the end of the Rwandan civil war in 1994, several historians of modern Rwanda traced the crisis of the 1990s back to the activities of European colonizers in the country,¹⁰ with scholars such as Mahmood Mamdani attributing the genocide to the politicization of the social identities of the Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa in Rwanda during colonial times. During the period of decolonization a majority Hutu population rebelled against members of the ruling Tutsi class, resulting in violent massacres of the Tutsi in Rwanda between 1959 and 1963. These massacres led many Tutsi people to flee Rwanda into neighbouring countries. The persecution of the Tutsi continued through successive Hutu governments. In the 1980s a group of Tutsi refugees in Uganda organized themselves into a rebel unit demanding a return to Rwanda. The Rwandan government under President Juvénal Habyarimana refused to accept the refugees, a situation that set in motion a long civil war. Following the murder of President Habyarimana in 1994, Hutu militants and soldiers launched a campaign of extermination that massacred Tutsi people and their Hutu supporters across the country, even while the civil war raged on between government forces and the rebels. By July the Hutu government had lost the war to the Tutsi-led rebel group, known as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), and millions of Rwandan Hutu people fled into neighbouring countries. The massacres claimed somewhere around a million victims.

Unlike the Nigerian case, most scholars agree that the targeted massacres of the Tutsi and their Hutu supporters in Rwanda amounted to a genocide. The Rwandan atrocities led to the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda to try perpetrators of

9 See Uzoigwe, *Visions of Nationhood*; Chima Korieh, editor, *The Nigeria-Biafra War: Genocide and the Politics of Memory*, Cambria Press, 2012; Chinua Achebe, *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, Heinemann, 2012. See also Parts I and II of Toyin Falola and Ogechukwu Ezekwem, eds, *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War*, James Currey, 2016.

10 Stapleton, *A History of Genocide*; Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, Columbia UP, 1997.; Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, Princeton UP, 2001; Martin Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of the Continent since Independence*, CBS, 2005.

genocide, an institution that gave further legitimacy to the genocide attribution. Major controversies about the genocide generally involve the assignment of responsibility for the assassination of President Habyarimana, which is believed by many to have triggered the 1994 genocide. Some historians have argued that the assassination was a consequence of a plot by members of the Hutu government who were against the power-sharing agreement President Habyarimana reached with the RPF. Some others contend that it was carried out by the RPF as part of their ploy to resume the civil war and defeat militarily what they already knew was a disorganized regime.¹¹ Yet, as was the case in Nigeria, the massacres in Rwanda were ethnically based and occurred during a moment of chaos and confusion. Moreover, they were well organized and systematically executed, and many victims were murdered because they identified as Tutsi or were identified by others as such.

Writing Genocide in Postcolonial Nigeria and Rwanda

Nigeria and Rwanda stand out in the discourse on African genocide literature not least for the volume of literary work concerning atrocity events produced in these two countries, but also because they provide fertile ground for considering how narratives become important avenues through which traumatic experiences may come to be witnessed and transformed into instruments of justice. Nigeria and Rwanda are also significant because both countries' violent histories contain important moments in Africa's recent past when the word "genocide" was mobilized for a range of political, socio-cultural, and legal purposes. The violent crisis between 1966 and 1970 in Nigeria provided arguably one of the first major moments of contestation in postcolonial Africa when accusations of genocide were made and questions raised about the nature and scope of the ethno-political violence taking place. However, it was only in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda that a broadly accepted norm governing the cultural representation

11 See, for example, Stapleton, *History of Genocide*, pp. 53–57. Another major controversy relates to a 2006 revisionist publication by French investigative journalist Pierre Péan which claimed that the RPF equally committed a genocide of their own against the Hutu and that most of the deaths attributed to Hutu extremist groups were the work of the RPF (see Pierre Péan, *Noires fureurs, blancs menteurs: Rwanda, 1990–1994*, Miunenuits, 2005; see also the 2014 BBC documentary *Rwanda: The Untold Story* (John Conroy, dir.)).

of African genocides emerged, comprising a nascent canon. What I highlight in this book is that African genocide literatures now organize representations of experiences of extreme violence in ways importantly, though not entirely, indebted to the Rwandan experience. This experience now serves as a paradigm of genocide and genocide writing in postcolonial Africa. One contention of my work is that the reason for this canonization of the Rwandan genocide is, at least in significant ways, a function of how representations of the Rwandan experience have adapted certain meanings, particularly the representational and commemorative tropes of the Holocaust.

However, by discussing as genocide literature fictional works responding to mass atrocities perpetrated against Igbo peoples in Nigeria, I redraw the map of postcolonial African genocide scholarship not only by “rediscovering” the Nigerian state’s attempted “genocide” of the Igbo before and during the Biafra–Nigeria War but also by tracking the changing cultural meanings of genocide in Africa since the mid-twentieth century. The novels about Nigeria and Rwanda that I have selected to discuss in this book highlight literary contributions to producing representations of forms of violence as a genocide. This imaginative corpus has contributed significantly to some basic conceptualizations of genocide as it has unfolded on the continent following decolonization.

Furthermore, I examine the role played by these “genocide” narratives in societal reconstruction following mass violence. Questions I attempt to answer here include the following: What informed the critical receptions of these novels? What are the implications of the discursive practices and traditions shaping interpretations of these novels? What memories and frames of understanding do these novels and their critical reception privilege and/or aim to secure? This last question is extremely important, as my study suggests that both Nigeria and Rwanda are contexts within which literature and its criticism mark certain violent experiences as worth imagining and writing about and others as needing to be repressed. In the case of Nigeria, for example, the massacres of Igbo people and/or those identified as “Easterners” in 1966 and 1967 have drawn fewer imaginative and critical responses than the eventual war, which lasted from 1967 to 1970. The war discourse appears to have overshadowed the discourse on genocidal atrocities in literature and criticism (even though some writers and scholars of the Biafra–Nigeria War contend that the war itself was genocidal, especially given the level of violence unleashed on Igbo civilian populations by the forces of the Federal Military Government).

Likewise, in the case of Rwanda, literary and critical responses to the Rwandan crisis have essentially focused on the genocide of those identified as Tutsi, but not often on the brutal civil war that began in that country around 1990 and which was being fought alongside the genocide that took place in 1994. The basis of post-1994 Rwandan trauma as explained in imaginative and critical writings about the country has been linked to the deaths of targeted civilian populations and not to the suffering of the battlefield. Hence I underscore here some of the factors accounting for the discursive repression of aspects of violent encounters during and after the violent events I am interested in. These factors result from political circumstances and cultural or commemorative practices (or a lack thereof) that have shaped how writers have responded to atrocities in the two countries. In the Nigerian context, the Federal Military Government accused by the Biafran leadership of committing a genocide against the Igbo won the Biafra–Nigeria War and proceeded to engineer an understanding of that past based on a nationalist narrative in which the war was fought in defence of Nigerian unity. This narrative, used in justifying atrocities, is perhaps what led some writers opposed to the government’s position to evoke paradigms of meaning (such as reference to the Holocaust) in their work in order to make comprehensible the idea that the Nigerian atrocities constituted a genocide. These representational paradigms sometimes intersect with the Biafran rhetoric of genocide deployed during the war in the secessionist state’s self-determination efforts to have the violence against it recognized as a genocide by comparing it to the Holocaust—the idea being that, because after the Holocaust came Israel, hence Biafra was supposed to emerge from an attempted genocide against the Igbo in Nigeria.

In the case of Rwanda, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) won the war and cast itself as a heroic force that decisively ended a genocide. Since the war narrative also implicated it in violence and atrocities, the RPF-led government privileged instead the memories of the 1994 genocide during the country’s post-war reconstruction. Writings drawing comparisons between the Rwandan genocide and the Holocaust further served (at least implicitly) to represent the RPF’s role as a moral one directed towards ending a genocide, and so rejected substantive mention of the idea that the RPF was itself a violent force engaged in political conflict with, and committing atrocities against, the defeated Hutu government, militias, and civilians.

The point here is not so much about the problematic and contentious uses of genocide in some of these accounts as a factual (or otherwise)

category in ways that reify the racist logic of the violence. Instead, it is to understand the use of genocide (even in the work of cultural representation) as significantly shaped by social and political processes of construction, and to consider what is gained (and what obscured) in the literary and discursive projects that represent violence in the two countries as a genocide. My contention is twofold. First, in both contexts literature and its criticism served to construct powerful meanings of violence as genocide in ways that importantly underline exterminatory processes of group destruction in Africa following colonization. Second, such literary constructions of genocide (even when the idea of genocide has been deployed as a strategic rhetoric) rely significantly on analogies to the Holocaust as a “paradigmatic” genocide—that is, analogies to the narrative conventions and representational forms associated with the Nazi genocide of Jewish people in Europe. One important point to note here, as some other scholars have also observed, is that such analogies constructing violence as a genocide resembling the Holocaust serve largely to pull African violence out of a complex web of events, ostensibly simplifying complicated history into a story of evil that is removed from the larger flow of history.¹² In both the Nigerian and Rwandan contexts, references to the Holocaust (even if only tangential sometimes) have served to further a moral agenda by castigating “evil”, a moral function that downplays the political pre- and post-conditions of violence and blurs political visions of justice and reform emerging in both countries in the aftermath of mass violence and atrocities.

Methodological Approach to the African Genocide Novel

My preference for novels over other forms of literature written in response to the mass atrocities in Nigeria and Rwanda is a consequence of the way fictional narratives have come to constitute a very significant intellectual and artistic response to violence taking place in postcolonial Africa. Focusing on novels allows us to survey the diverse range and variety of these artistic and intellectual responses to African genocides. There are four major novels lying at the explanatory heart of this book, two concerning the violent events in Nigeria and two the violence in Rwanda. The “Nigerian” novels are Wole Soyinka’s *Season of Anomy* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Boubacar Boris Diop’s *Murambi, the Book of Bones* and Gil Courtemanche’s *A Sunday*

12 See, for example, Heerten’s *The Biafran War*.

at the Pool in Kigali are the main texts I draw on pertaining to the mass killings in Rwanda. I have selected these novels because they not only continue to attract a great deal of critical attention but also exemplify important representational modes that characterize major artistic responses to exterminatory forms of mass violence in these two countries. In other words, I read these novels as representative exemplifications of trends I identify in other works dealing with mass atrocities in both countries and beyond that I discuss alongside the primary ones. Hence the discussion, while focusing closely on the works of these four writers, covers a broad spectrum of works by several other artists, including, for example, novelists, playwrights, poets, memoirists, and cineastes of various ideological dispositions. Taken together, works by these writers and artists have contributed to the emergence of an international iconography of African suffering that yokes ideas of genocide and its miseries in Africa to genocidal events elsewhere.

My focus on Nigeria and Rwanda is by no means part of an attempt to make a case for there being national genocide literatures in Africa, which has been the concern of some scholars writing on the discourse of war fiction.¹³ This is because, as several other scholars have shown, instabilities and atrocities occurring in postcolonial Africa cannot be reduced to simple explanations that privilege the artificially imposed boundaries of African nation-states. Rather, instability and atrocity operate through and within agencies and geographies that exceed the boundaries of nation-states. My justification for choosing these contexts for a study of genocide in literature produced in postcolonial Africa is essentially because the mass atrocities scarring both countries crucially mark the occasion of critical turns in the ways in which ideas and representations of genocide in Africa have been conceived following the Holocaust.

Importantly, my focus on novels is not arbitrary. Unlike other literary forms, such as poetry and drama, the novel has a unique history and form as a literary genre that has been put into the service of human rights advocacy and activism. Lynn Hunt, writing in her book *Inventing Human Rights*, uncovers the more than cursory connection between the rise of the novel and human rights discourse in Europe. Building on Benedict Anderson's argument concerning how national identities result from imagined ideas of community sponsored largely by the organs of print-capitalism, Hunt argues that the novel has been

13 See, for example, Eleni Coundouriotis, *The People's Right to the Novel*, Fordham UP, 2014.

significant for mobilizing empathy for human rights violations because, given its social history and affiliations with print technology, it was able to facilitate the birth of a more secular moral awareness in readers. For Hunt, the novel was able to create and channel the language of empathy characteristic of human rights advocacy through its secularization of moral sentiments and consciousness.¹⁴

In the African context, the rise of the novel in the twentieth century accompanied the rise of anticolonial struggles and independence claims across the continent. It is not merely a coincidence that as movements for individual freedoms and group rights against colonization arose in Africa, novels by Africans grew in popularity in Africa and globally. For example, as the success and tremendous importance of James Currey's Heinemann's African Writers' Series show, the "African" novel created new modes and languages through which experiences of colonial and postcolonial violation occurring throughout the continent could be expressed.¹⁵ Like Hunt, I identify the popularity of the novel (and literature in general) with writers of African "genocides" as resulting from the genre's provision of an adaptive, secular cultural and humanitarian apparatus for exposing abuses, witnessing atrocity, seeking justice in the face of oppression, and attempting to expand moral consciousness about the precarious experiences of those historically racialized (at least in the West) as sub-humans. In its specific representations of mass violence in Africa's postcolonies as genocide, the novel assumes a

14 Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History*, W. W. Norton, 2007. On the uses of the novel as an instrument of human rights practice see also Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg and Alexandra Schultheis Moore, eds, *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature*, Routledge, 2013; Joseph Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law*, Fordham UP, 2007. Yet I am more inclined to agree with Samuel Moyn's reading of frictions between humanitarianism and human rights. Moyn has argued persuasively against the parallel links that Hunt advances between the rise of humanitarian sentiments and human rights advocacies. While the rise of humanitarianism influenced and expanded the rights tradition, human rights as a moral framework was not a direct determinant of humanitarianism. See, for example, Moyn's *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*, Harvard UP, 2010.

15 See James Currey, *Africa Writes Back: The African Writers Series and the Launch of African Literature*, James Currey, 2008. Importantly, in its over four decades of active existence, over 80 per cent of Heinemann's African Writers' Series publications were novels. On the popularity of the novel in Africa see also Simon Gikandi, "African Literature and the Colonial Factor," *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*, vol. 1, edited by Abiola F. Irele and Simon Gikandi, Cambridge UP, 1994, pp. 379–97; Bernth Lindfors, *Long Drums and Canons: Teaching and Researching African Literatures*, Africa World Press, 1995.

significantly useful place within which the dominant symbol of violations in Africa and their attendant suffering can be appropriated and secularized.

My general approach to reading these novels is informed by multiple sources. First, I do not take for granted the value of close readings that scrutinize the aesthetic choices and thematic concerns of the novels I am concerned with. This approach also takes seriously the role of the novel as a genre and its stylistic matrices in representing violence in Africa as genocide. In addition, this formalistic approach is productive when it comes to elucidating and inferring meanings suggested by the texts. Yet this approach also by itself poses its own challenges. One of its essential difficulties arises from the fact that African novels are not often read with an eye on the socio-historical and political contexts informing them. With this assessment in mind, I have read my chosen novels closely, all the while remaining cognisant of the social, political, and historical specificities of the issues they address, as well as the contexts of their own production and reception. I have engaged with the critical reception of these novels as and when required, and discussed the implications of their representations of violence within their original contexts of production. My overall goal through this multivalent and intersectional approach—one that draws additionally on theories of genocide, trauma, and narrative, as well as on ideas from the disciplines of postcolonial and literary studies—is to instil a robust critical appreciation of what I have identified and theorized as the postcolonial African genocide novel.

To reiterate a point I made earlier, in discussing genocide as a central thematic focus in the novels selected for this study, the approach has been to treat the *meanings* of a genocide as socially and thematically produced through representation. That is, I do not approach the meanings of a genocide in these works as already determined by the standard definition of the term or as a fixed and otherwise stable concept but as a construct deriving from a social process in which cultural representations work to produce the meanings of a genocide.

By this approach, I do not intend to dispute the fact of mass killings. The fact is always there for us to verify empirically. What is at stake is how we are naming or representing facts and acts of killing and how this naming constructs frames of meanings of atrocity events. Since not every instance of mass killing is described as a genocide, the cultural theory approaches that I enlist implicitly in this study look at the ways that the meanings of a genocide are generated through narratives. What kinds of stories are told when genocide is invoked,

implied, or intended? How do these stories represent mass atrocities as genocides? Or, rather, how do literary representations (and their criticisms) come to *regularize* the meanings of mass killings as a genocide? In this delineation, my work is indebted to engagements with genocide in Lasse Heerten's *The Biafran War and Postcolonial Humanitarianism*, Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory*, and Jeffrey C. Alexander's "The Social Construction of Moral Universals" (in *Remembering the Holocaust*).

The book is broadly divided into two parts. Part I, "Writing Genocide in Africa's Postcolonies", contains two chapters that, when taken together, provide context for understanding the stakes involved in discussing genocide in Africa. Chapter 1, "Genocide in Africa's Postcolony", provides some background required to address the question of what genocide means in Africa, as well as insight into the controversies and implications of designating certain kinds of violence in Africa as genocide. Focusing in parts on Nigeria and Rwanda, I explore in this chapter how the trajectory of scholarly discussions of genocide in postcolonial Africa pivots on the history of European colonization on the continent.

Chapter 2, "The Holocaust and Literary Representation of African Genocides", grapples with the question of what is meant by the postcolonial African genocide novel and its cultural debts to the narrative/representational regimes of the Holocaust. I argue that, since the mid-twentieth century, following World War II, the postcolonial African genocide novel emerged through an artistic process of implicitly comparing African genocides to the Nazi genocide of Jewish people in Europe. I contend that novelists' comparisons of African suffering to that of Jewish people during the Holocaust is typically a consequence of writers' desire to legitimize the reality of African suffering as genocide. In securing this connection, the postcolonial African genocide novel generally adopts features and elements typical of certain narrative regimes of Holocaust literature. I show that both in the Nigerian and Rwandan contexts writers of different ideological persuasions repeatedly turn to the Holocaust for a usable trope with which to construct meaning of African genocides. The prevalence of this trope in literary representations of African genocides suggests that the African genocide novel has been intervening in the discourse on African genocides by following certain specific patterns and logic, which among other things appear to be driven by a moral and humanitarian impulse that privileges rather moral-symbolic responses to exterminatory forms of violence in Africa.

Part II, “Artistic Quests for Meaningfulness in the Hells of Postcolonial African Genocides”, contains four chapters, each providing in-depth analysis of the selected novels lying at the interpretive heart of this book. In Chapter 3, “Genocide as a Tragedy”, I discuss Wole Soyinka’s novel, *Season of Anomy*, as representative of works expressing a tragic vision of genocide aimed at constructing a purpose for mass atrocities in postcolonial Africa. My contention is that Soyinka’s novel represents the massacre of Igbo people and so-called Easterners across Nigeria and the resulting Biafra–Nigeria War between 1966 and 1970 as a genocide. Soyinka’s artistic response to the tragedy of genocide became one of reinserting the message of will, recovery, and regeneration. Soyinka stages the drama of the artistic response to a genocide as a Black Orphean quest into a postcolonial African Hell to find a regenerative formula against catastrophe. In doing this the writer speaks against hopelessness and what he calls “the tragic lure” characteristic of post-World War II Western artistic and philosophical responses to catastrophe. Yet, as I show in the analysis, Soyinka’s tragic genocidal imagination is underpinned by significant representational challenges for thinking about the genocide of Igbo peoples in Nigeria. These challenges in *Season of Anomy* arise from Soyinka’s choice of a tragic metanarrative that valorizes sacrifice and masculine heroism. The tragic form of Soyinka’s novel turns victims of extermination into sacrificial objects required for their killers’ redemption, and problematically encourages a heroic vision of genocide.

In Chapter 4, “Writing the ‘African’ Holocaust”, I show that, in his novel *Murambi, the Book of Bones*, Boubacar Boris Diop inscribes meanings to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda by resisting the urge to imagine the genocide as meaningless. I contend that the attempt at constructing a meaning for the genocide underpins the novel’s project of fashioning a new decolonization agenda coinciding with cultural sentiments across different African contexts in the 1990s and early 2000s. In this project Diop “emplots” the biblical story of Cornelius’s meeting with the Apostle Simon Peter in order to advance an idea of the Rwandan genocide as a gospel of a “new” African decolonization. The mythos of the Gentiles’ conversion to Christianity that underpins *Murambi* reveals Diop’s investment in the redemptive message of Christianity. Diop’s approach departs slightly but in important ways from the contrarian and restorative praxis characterizing some earlier Afrocentric responses to colonial and postcolonial atrocities in Africa, such as found in Soyinka’s work. Yet, as I argue, Diop’s emplotment of the biblical story of the Gentile’s conversion to Christianity encourages

an affinity between the Holocaust and Rwanda's genocide. *Murambi*, by securing this implicit connection, constructs the Rwandan genocide in counterpoint to the Holocaust to deliver a moral message, one that would not be instrumentalized for nationalistic causes but instead one serving as a basis for introspection and African decolonization.

Chapter 5, "Gendering the Postcolonial African Genocide Novel", discusses Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* as representing the violence against Igbo peoples in Nigeria between 1966 and 1970 as a genocide. The chapter also reads *Half of a Yellow Sun* as exemplifying a neo-feminist imagining of events of that past and as a neo-feminist revisionism of the masculinist African genocide novel exemplified by Soyinka's, Diop's, and other works by men. Adichie's novel departs significantly from masculinist tropes of the African genocide novel exemplified in the other three primary novels of this book. Unlike in these other works, in Adichie's novel women's agencies figure prominently in the theatres of atrocity as men and women equally strive to make sense of their place in a chaotic world. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* Adichie deploys feminist fictional tropes in her attempt to manage the task of imagining a genocide. Although, like the other writers, Adichie inscribes meanings to a genocide and links the violence in Nigeria to the Holocaust, I contend, however, that her use of these tropological forms in her novel serves to "feminize" the genocide novel by deconstructing its patriarchal foundations and constructing an imaginative vista for thinking about the specificity of women's suffering.

In Chapter 6, "The Rwandan Genocide and the Pornographic Imagination", I discuss Gil Courtemanche's novel, *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, as an "African" genocide novel. My inclusion of Courtemanche's novel in the discussion—the work of a non-African (Western) author—presents an occasion for broadening the field of African genocide literature and for underlining the wider contexts underpinning the production of representations of violence in Africa. I consider Courtemanche's novel to be a pornographic representation of the Rwandan genocide on account of its spectacularization of sex and violence in its narrative. Courtemanche's novel, I argue, is characteristic of certain Western artistic attempts to represent the Rwandan genocide that bolster racist stereotypes of Africa even while advocating for humanitarian and empathetic response to African suffering.

PART I

Writing Genocide
in Africa's Postcolonies

1

Genocide in Africa's Postcolony

There are at least two major implications that stand out when considering genocides in Africa's postcolony as the direct legacies of European colonial activities.¹ The first is a tenacity of thinking that insists on a structural model of genocides in Africa. The structural model focuses on the macrodynamics behind social or collective actions and outcomes. For instance, in responding to the question of what causes genocide in Africa's postcolony the structuralist understanding will generally look towards colonialism and Western modernity as essential instigators of mass atrocity in contemporary Africa. The second, which is a consequence of the first, is a tacit scholarly endorsement of an idea of the genocide concept whose origination and semantic register are founded on a largely Western imperialist notion of racial violence that has become canonized in the Holocaust. According to this view, genocide is understood as a phenomenon—which may be exceptional in some cases—driven by ideas of race. These two strands of thoughts have coalesced to form what we may designate as the postcolonial genocide, which is used loosely here to describe exterminatory forms of violence occurring within the moment we call the postcolony.

1 I use "postcolony" in the sense in which Achille Mbembe uses it to designate the "age" and "entanglements" resulting from and following multiple dimensions and histories of slavery, conquests and colonization in Africa. In other words, the postcolony does not merely suggest a time after colonization but rather the complex realities of entanglements, temporalities, and subjectivities occasioned by the colonial experiences in Africa (see Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, University of California Press, 2001, p. 102). While my focus has been on the history of European colonialisms and their aftermaths on the continent, I am by no means implying that the experiences of colonialism in Africa are singular. Nor am I suggesting that there is only one African postcolony deriving only from the experience of European colonization.

To speak about genocide and the postcolonial is equally to speak in terms of complexities and multiple decentrings. The first issue to consider is that the postcolonial, as some critics suggest,² signals a complex consideration of a time *after* European colonialism—a “postcolonial”. The “post-” in this sense of postcolonial suggests both temporalities and spatialities resulting from the history of Europe’s colonial activities in Africa. In this sense of the word, therefore, “postcolonial genocide” implies a concept of exterminatory violence occurring among formerly colonized peoples in the official aftermath of European colonization.

To conceptualize the postcolonial in terms of a time following or an “after” colonialism demands a reappraisal of the order of power in the postcolony, as well as of how this order could be authorizing exterminatory forms of violence. In addition, it demands that we ask how and why this order is able to produce genocides or preconditions of genocide. This temporality within which we have to make sense of genocide has to be understood in terms other than those associated with the concept of time in abstraction from material reality, because the temporality in question is in fact quite material, given its production of new territories, state systems, and quasi-sovereignties. In other words, this temporality, which by implication derives directly from the colonial generally, suggests a basic proposition: namely, that the colonial condition in some proximate or remote ways sowed the seeds of genocides in the postcolony.³ This proposition, popular among many Africanist scholars, raises a number of questions, which might be summed up thusly: Are genocides in so-called postcolonial Africa essentially a continuation of patterns of colonial violence? Are they the direct result and legacy of colonialism? The issues resulting from the answers to these questions, which I discuss in subsequent sections of this chapter, border on considerations of the nature and causes of genocide in postcolonial Africa.

The second issue to consider when speaking about the “postcolonial” in its relation to genocide in Africa manifests in the decentring

2 See, for example, Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 17, 1991, pp. 336–57; Peter Hitchcock, “Postcolonial Africa? Problems of Theory,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, vol. 25, nos 3–4, 1997, pp. 233–44; Linda Hutcheon, “Introduction: Colonialism and the Postcolonial Condition: Complexities Abounding,” *PMLA*, vol. 110, no. 1, 1995, pp. 7–16; Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*.

3 See, for example, Alfred Nhema and Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, editors, *The Roots of African Conflicts: Causes and Costs*, James Currey, 2008; Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*; Uzoigwe, *Visions of Nationhood*.

aspect of postcolonial practice. As a deconstructive concept that questions colonial hierarchies of power, the postcolonial may be co-opted in examining the historical, socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts that gave rise to the ideas and discursive practices of genocide.⁴ In other words, the framework may help us to understand the genocide concept as emerging from colonial discourses of power, to rethink certain colonial assumptions about the term, and to challenge valuations and hierarchies of suffering implicit in certain uses of the genocide concept. These valuations and hierarchies may be found, for instance, in the canonization of genocide—itsself a legacy of the canonization of the Holocaust as the ur-genocide—as a unique, exceptional act of violence that requires a rather exalted and serious attitude of apprehension, in comparison with other instances of mass atrocity. In the light of this understanding of the postcolonial, the evolving meanings and uses to which the genocide concept is invoked for explaining mass atrocities in Africa and elsewhere become a focal consideration of scholarly practice. In this consideration, therefore, viewing the genocide concept as a political instrument with its own specific history, context of origination, and use from colonial practice becomes significant. The driving question underlying this second sense of the postcolonial will be that of the evolving historical, cultural and political circumstances prompting the appropriations of the genocide concept for describing and responding to mass atrocities. In other words, to speak about postcolonial or postcolonizing genocide marks the occasion for thinking about the ways that the genocide concept is implicated in as well as overlapping with the discourses of coloniality.

Both issues arising from a postcolonial perspective on genocide—one demanding the placing of genocides in broader historical contexts that must begin with colonialism and the other seeking to decentre certain colonial assumptions of the genocide concept—constitute a significant background from which this examination of cultural representations of African genocides must begin. This take-off point is significant for at least three reasons. First, it helps to highlight some of the questions regarding the conceptualization and uses of the genocide concept for imagining and discussing mass atrocities in Africa. Second, it resists genocidal canonizations by insisting on treating the phenomenon and the event given its name as a particular form of politics with a particular

4 Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "Epistemic Conditions of Genocide," *Genocide and Human Rights: A Philosophical Guide*, edited by John Roth, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 118.

history and set of implications. Finally, it emphasizes its own limitations by encouraging us to question the assumptions that genocide in Africa's postcolony is a modern phenomenon, one put in motion by colonialism.

What is Meant by Genocide?

While my discussion of the concept of genocide relies heavily on the immensity of work done by scholars from different disciplines, I base my reflections on the concept's implications for our understanding of mass atrocities in Africa. This African focus provides a robust context within which to revisit some of the genocide concept's assumptions, while also suggesting alternative ways to rethink some of its resulting claims. Considering also its Western origin and relative popularity among Western scholars, the genocide concept has not particularly gained popular traction among many African scholars, who would rather embrace relatively less contentious concepts of violence, such as "civil war", when describing mass atrocities occurring on the continent. This anxiety over the use of the genocide concept to describe violence in Africa is perhaps best appreciated when African experiences constitute a significant barometer for examining the implications of the concept's uses.

In the early 1940s the Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin, responding to Nazi Germany's atrocities in Europe and to such historical precedents as Ottoman Turkey's attempted extermination of Armenians in the second decade of the twentieth century, coined the word "genocide" to describe as a crime the deliberate exterminatory acts and practices directed against human groups. By combining the Greek "genos" (people) and the Latin "cide" (kill) to mean, literally, the mass murder of a human collectivity, Lemkin provided what many scholars consider to be one of the most important definitions of genocide.⁵ In his 1944 book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, Lemkin defines genocide as "the

5 For a comprehensive discussion of Lemkin's concept of genocide, see, for example, A. Dirk Moses, "Genocide," *Australian Humanities Review*, vol. 55, November 2013, pp. 23–44, http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/AHR55_2_Moses.pdf, accessed 15 February 2016; Martin Shaw, *What Is Genocide?* 2nd ed., Polity, 2015; Samantha Power, *"A Problem from Hell": America and the Age of Genocide*, Basic Books, 2013. See also Douglas Irvin-Erickson, *Raphaël Lemkin and the Concept of Genocide*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017.

destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group”,⁶ explaining further that “genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation”.⁷ He uses genocide “to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves”.⁸ In other words, what makes genocide different from other varieties of mass murder is not its notable production of tremendous numbers of corpses. It is, rather, its attempt to destroy a people. That is, victims of genocide are exterminated for what they are imagined to be or what they are identified by. In this sense, therefore, what makes genocide an extremely morally and politically reprehensible act is that it is a murderous attempt on human forms of belonging—whether such form of belonging is imagined or real. Genocide targets the corporeal manifestations of human groupness and seeks to destroy the essential foundations of group identity.

Lemkin’s definition provides the basis not only for the official and legal definition adopted by the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (subsequently UNGC)⁹ but also for how scholars from different disciplines have grappled with the genocide concept. Many scholars believe that Lemkin conceives of genocide in basically two senses: as a deliberate and systematic attempt at group destruction and as a social process of group destruction.¹⁰ As a deliberate attempt at group destruction, genocide is understood to be the intended practice of destruction put in motion and executed by, for example, a governing authority. Within genocide studies, this view is associated with the critical perspective known as “intentionalism”. As a social process, genocide must be understood as

6 Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress*, 2nd ed., The Law Book Exchange, 2008, p. 79.

7 Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, p. 79.

8 *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, p. 79.

9 Article II of the UNGC defines genocide as meaning: “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

10 See, for example, Shaw, *What Is Genocide?* pp. 13–35; Moses, “Genocide”; Christopher Powell, *Barbaric Civilization: A Critical Sociology of Genocide*, McGill-Queen’s UP, 2011, pp. 70–84.

neither a spontaneous nor a random act, but as a sustained and ideologically driven activity and set of social and material processes informing policies, behaviour, and all relations between perpetrators and victim populations. This view is also associated with the perspective known as “functionalism”.

Scholarly conceptualizations of genocide have generally tried to revise and reinterpret aspects of Lemkin’s original concept of genocide or its variant in the UNGC. Some fault what is believed to be Lemkin’s and the UNGC’s essentialist and primordialist conception of human groups as possessing internal cohesiveness and blood connection.¹¹ The problem with Lemkin’s concept of the human group, for these critics, is that it excludes from consideration mass atrocities perpetrated against groups that do not possess the essential features marking members of the national, the ethnic, the racial, or the religious community—a notion of group identity that suggests the presence at work in genocide of what Paul Boghossian dismisses as “*indelible* identifications”: that is, “identifications that one is born with and that one can do nothing about”.¹²

Critics such as Boghossian argue against limiting the notion of a genocide victim’s group to these “indelible identifications” because in some ways the implicit rationale of such group definitions is premised on the moral assumption that genocide is heinous only for targeting people “because of what they indelibly are, as opposed to what they may have blamelessly become” by choice, ideological affiliation, and status.¹³ Boghossian asks, “why should indelibility matter morally in this way? Is it really more morally reprehensible to kill people for what they biologically are than it is to kill them for what they may have blamelessly become?”¹⁴

One implication of the ontologically fixed conception of group identity is that exterminatory patterns of violence directed at certain groups of people who are not considered *indelibly* defined are ignored or treated as non-genocidal mass atrocities. So, to remedy this gap in the notion of group implied in the Lemkinian concept of genocide, categories such as politicide, democide, classicide, ethnocide, urbicide, auto-genocide, and gendecide have emerged as alternative nomenclatures in order to

11 See Shaw, *What Is Genocide?*

12 Paul Boghossian, “The Concept of Genocide,” *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 12, nos 1–2, 2010, p. 74; emphasis in original.

13 Boghossian, “The Concept of Genocide,” p. 74.

14 “The Concept of Genocide,” p. 74.

account for different ways of reconceptualizing human groups in the context of organized mass violence. This proliferation of “the many cides of genocide” has led to what Martin Shaw calls a “conceptual jungle”.¹⁵ Yet these attempts are not fundamentally redefining the genocide concept but merely renaming it by challenging the ideas of groups that the concept as a legal framework allows.

15 See Shaw, *What Is Genocide?* pp. 84–100. On propositions for reconceptualizing group and mass violence in the genocide concept, see, for example, on politicide (the killing of political groups), Barbara Harff and Ted R. Gurr, “Toward Empirical theory of Genocides and Politicides: Identification and Measurement of Cases Since 1945,” *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 3, 1988, pp. 359–71; on democide (deliberate government killing of unarmed civilians), R. J. Rummel, *Death by Government*, Transaction, 1994; on gendercide (as against femicide and gynocide, gendercide broadly suggests the deliberate murder of particular gender groups), Mary Anne Warren, *Gendercide: The Implications of Sex Selection*, Rowman and Allanel, 1985; on genocide as mass murder of social and political groups, Uriel Tal, “On the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide,” *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. 13, 1979, pp. 7–52; see also Hurst Hannum and David Hawk, *The Case against the Standing Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea*, Cambodia Documentation Commission, 1986; on mass murder of members of a social class, Lyman H. Legters, “The Soviet Gulag: Is It Genocidal?” *Toward the Understanding and Prevention of Genocide: Proceedings of the International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide*, edited by Israel Charny, Westview, 1984, pp. 60–66; on the notion of victim groups as perpetrators’ constructs, Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies*, Yale UP, 1990; on genocide as a political strategy and an act by armed power groups, Shaw, *What Is Genocide?*; on cultural genocide (that is, the destruction of cultures and cultural groups), David Nersessian, “Rethinking Cultural Genocide under International Law,” *Human Rights Dialogue*, 22 April 2005, https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/archive/dialogue/2_12/section_1/5139, accessed 16 February 2016; on colonial genocide (that is, genocide perpetrated on colonized peoples), A. Dirk Moses and Dan Stone, eds, *Colonialism and Genocide*, Routledge, 2007, and Andrew Woolford et al., *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America*, Duke UP, 2014; David Maybury-Lewis, “Genocide against Indigenous Peoples,” *Annihilating Difference: The Anthropology of Genocide*, edited by Alexander Laban Hinton, University of California Press, 2002, pp. 43–53; on genocide as utopias of race and nationalism, Eric D. Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation*, Princeton UP, 2003; on genocidal massacre and stages in the genocidal process, Leo Kuper, *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century*, Yale UP, 1981; Israel Charny, “Toward a Generic Definition of Genocide,” *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions*, edited by George J. Andreopoulos, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994, pp. 64–94; and Gregory Stanton, “The Eight Stages of Genocide,” *Genocide Watch*, 1998, <http://www.genocidewatch.org/aboutgenocide/8stagesofgenocide.html>, accessed 15 February 2016; on genocide as a kind of war, Shaw, *What Is Genocide? War and Genocide: Organised Killing in Modern Society*, Polity, 2003; Scott Straus, “‘Destroy Them to Save Us’: Theories of Genocide and the Logics of Political Violence,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2012, pp. 544–60.

Other subjects of contention resulting from the genocide concept, and even more particularly highlighted in the UNGC's definition of genocide, include the nature of the violence that is properly considered genocidal. Is genocide basically a matter of the physical destruction of a group or does it involve something more than physical destruction? The UNGC's definition emphasizes physical or biological destruction, thereby seeming to diminish aspects of violence targeted, say, at the culture of groups, and so the means of a group ensuring its identity and distinctness.¹⁶ Some scholars believe that Lemkin originally conceived genocide as constituting much more than the violent physical destruction of groups. In an influential early writing he distinguished between *barbarism* (violence directed at the physical bodies of members of a group) and *vandalism* (violence directed at the cultural and spiritual aspects of group life), suggesting that he perceives genocide as constituted by much more than just the physical destruction of individual members of a group.

For some scholars¹⁷ it is the misunderstanding of the role played by violence in genocide and the emphasis of particularly legal scholars on genocides marked by physical destruction that reveal the lingering colonial and imperial politics that informed the drafting of the UNGC's legal definition of genocide. The drafters of the international law on genocide were mostly colonizers who thus ensured that aspects of colonial destruction of the cultures (not to mention the actual physical destructions) of colonized peoples remained excluded from consideration as genocide.

Lemkin himself dismissed the experiences of black enslavement in the US as a genocide. Consider, for example, his rebuttal of the 1951 petition of the Civil Rights Congress to the United Nations titled "We Charge Genocide".¹⁸ The document charged the US government with genocide against African Americans, noting the historical enslavement of African Americans and the conditions of enslavement and violence that they continued to suffer at the hands of the US government and

16 Although the UNGC includes as genocide "forcibly transferring children of the group to another", it is not explicit, however, about whether such a forcible transfer is considered genocidal because it signifies an attempt to eliminate a group's culture or because it does not enable a group to physically perpetuate itself, its spirituality, its worldview and its corporeal identity in its children.

17 See Shaw, *What Is Genocide?*; Moses, "Genocide"; Powell, *Barbaric Civilization*; Power, "A Problem from Hell".

18 For details of the Charge, see William L. Patterson, *We Charge Genocide: The Crime of the Government Against the Negro People*, 1970, International Publishers, 2017.

white society. Lemkin dismissed the Charge as spurious, and is quoted as stating as follows:

1. ... genocide means annihilation and destruction, not merely discrimination. The colored race in America is increasing in population.
2. The crime of genocide requires specific 'intent to destroy' a people. This is the fundamental requirement, which must be proven—not presumed.

In fact, President [Harry S.] Truman [the US president from 1945 to 1953] has been fighting to help the colored people and improve their opportunities. The Supreme Court has ruled against segregation.

3. The convention outlaws destroying in whole, or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such.' The petitioners list killings, lynchings and race riots. But these are actions against individuals—not intended to destroy a race.
4. The petitioners complain against 'serious bodily or mental harm'. Genocide does not mean simply fear. Genocide means actual disintegration of minds as a result of tortures and physical agony.
5. The petitioners complain against 'conditions of life calculated to bring about' physical destruction of a group. They cite depressing wages and difficulties in employment as examples.

These may be unjust and discriminatory, but they are not intended to destroy the colored race. Existence on a lower level is not the same as non-existence.¹⁹

It is perhaps crucial to read Lemkin's theory of genocide alongside his response to "We Charge Genocide". Such an approach may highlight the kinds of politics impelling Lemkin's thoughts and projects at the time. What is perhaps most shocking in his response is his glaring inability to appreciate the conditions of enslavement and white supremacist racism in the US as genocidal. The kind of inconsistency and perverse logic one observes in Lemkin's response to "We Charge Genocide" is probably a reason why critics such as Mahmood Mamdani would argue that there

19 Lemkin, as quoted in "UN Asked to Act Against Genocide in United States," *The Afro American*, 29 December 1951, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=mdQmAAAAIBAJ&sjid=kgIGAAAAIBAJ&dq=we-charge-genocide&pg=2113%2C3191483>, accessed 17 March 2021, p. 19.

is a politics to naming mass killings as a genocide when they are perpetrated by non-white peoples but not when they are committed by white society (with the exception of Nazi Germany). This fraught history of the concept's origins, uses, and applications has additional implications in the African context, as we will see shortly.

It is worth noting that only four countries in Africa participated as quasi-independent political entities at the drafting of the UNGC in the 1940s—Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia, and South Africa.²⁰ South Africa eventually declined to sign the convention before it came into effect in 1951, perhaps because of its policy of apartheid, which was being introduced at the time. However, it is worth pointing out that in the 1950s and 1960s colonized Africa began gaining independence from European colonialists at a remarkably quick pace, although within this rapidly changing context any links between the legal life of the UNGC from 1951 onwards and African independence from European rule remained fairly arbitrary. In the decades following independence the genocide concept and rhetoric found popular use among several African groups, who drew upon the word to agitate for different interests or to call attention to their experiences of violent abuse under different colonial and postcolonial political regimes.

For example, in 1960 the UN secretary-general Dag Hammarskjöld accused the first prime minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Patrice Lumumba, of perpetrating genocide against the Luba people in the resource-rich South Kasai region. During the same period, roughly between 1959 and 1962, Tutsi victims of Hutu uprisings in Rwanda invoked genocide rhetoric to describe the ill-treatment and human rights violations they suffered, including massacres and displacement from their homeland. Between 1966 and 1970 the Igbo and later the secessionist Biafran government labelled as genocide the massacres and persecutions across Nigeria of Igbo peoples and other groups from eastern Nigeria. These charges led to a UN investigation in 1968 to determine whether genocide was taking place.²¹ Also by 1967, the UN Commission on Human Rights suggested that the 1960 Sharpeville massacre in South Africa was genocidal. Similarly, in the late 1960s separatists from the southern parts of the former Sudan charged the north-controlled government of the country with genocide.

20 See, for example, Stapleton's *A History of Genocide in Africa*.

21 For a recent discussion of the politics of this UN investigation and its implication for how the massacres became characterized afterwards, see Karen E. Smith, "The UK and 'genocide' in Biafra," *Journal of Genocide Research* 16, nos 2–3, 2014, pp. 247–62.

The rise of totalitarian regimes in Africa from the mid-1960s to the end of the century, as well as the occurrence of many so-called civil wars during this period, was accompanied by an intensified employment of the genocide concept in accounts of mass killings of civilians happening across the continent. The brutal regimes of Idi Amin in Uganda, Mobutu Sese Seko in Congo-Zaire, Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, Jean-Bedel Bokassa in Central African Republic, Mengistu Haile Mariam in Ethiopia, and Hissene Habre in Chad, among several others, were dogged by charges of genocide. In 1972 in Burundi, for example, thousands of Hutu people were massacred by the Tutsi-led military dictatorship of Michel Micombero. The massacres drew charges of genocide by victims and international human rights observers. Similar charges of genocide were made during the bloody wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Angola, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Sudan, to name just a few sites of violent conflict. In Zimbabwe, the autocratic regime of Robert Mugabe was accused of genocide against the minority Ndebele. In addition, during the elections in Kenya in 2007 and Ivory Coast in 2010, charges and counter-charges of genocide were traded. More recently, in 2021, the leader of Ethiopia's Tigray People's Liberation Front, Debretsion Gebremichael, accused the Ethiopian government led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of waging a genocidal war against Tigray people.²²

In all these instances of charges of genocide, only the case of the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi and so-called moderate Hutu in Rwanda and, controversially, the case of Darfur in Sudan (charges that perhaps facilitated the successful secession of the country's south, which became present-day South Sudan) received official, international recognition and, in the case of Rwanda, legal prosecution by the International Criminal Court. Notwithstanding these important acknowledgements of genocidal intent, the use of the genocide concept and the rhetoric surrounding it to describe mass atrocities in Africa is not recent. Nor is it unpopular. That these charges of genocide are prevalent underscores *prima facie* evidence of the political and social currency of the genocide framework in Africa. Yet the unwillingness to officially recognize (as well as discourse in scholarship) cases of atrocities as genocide perhaps derives from an anxiety that easy applications of the term to just any case of mass murder may deprive it of political, moral, and analytical

22 See, for example, "Tigray Crisis: 'Genocidal War' Waged in Ethiopia Region, Says Ex-Leader." *BBC News*, 31 January 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55877939>, accessed 18 March 2021.

significance. Although it is not particularly the concern of this book to ask why and how such applications might make the term analytically worthless, this seeming anxiety over acknowledging that genocide is not as rare and exceptional an occurrence as many wish to believe should still be questioned.

The point being made here is not whether the use of the term meets the legal requirements stipulated in the UNGC. Nor is it to dismiss the warning by the concept's gatekeepers who would rather insist on certain narrow definitions and strict criteria for determining genocide, if only to maintain the concept's special, exceptional status as a signifier of extreme evil.²³ Rather, the point is to acknowledge the nature of the politics that is impelling the uses of the concept in Africa. Paying closer attention to this politics shows not only the "methodological problems" or conceptual crises confronting theorization of genocide and violence more generally in postcolonial Africa but also the patterns of influence shaping the discourse of genocide in Africa and beyond.²⁴ On this methodological question, the stakes include how best to determine the causes and outcomes of social action.

On the Micro-, Macro-, and Meso-Dynamics of Genocide

Over the years, the nature of scholarly contestations regarding the definitions and uses of the genocide concept has coalesced roughly around three ways of approaching why and how genocide happens. These approaches attempt to address the determining of social outcomes: are individual agents or social structures central for considering the causes of genocides? And are agents and structures mutually inclusive

23 In recent years some scholars have argued that certain evolving representational trends in the West appropriated memories of the Nazi genocide of Jews (the Holocaust) and turned them into a paradigm of extreme/absolute evil. (See, for example, Jeffrey Alexander, *Remembering the Holocaust: A Debate*, Oxford UP, 2009.) This association of the Holocaust with absolute evil accounts for how we have come to imagine genocides more generally, often leading to implicit comparisons between genocides in other places and the Holocaust. See Alexander Laban Hinton, "Critical Genocide Studies," *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2012 pp. 10–11.

24 For a discussion of some methodological challenges in theorizing genocides in Africa, see, for example, Abebe Zegeye, "Methodological Problems to the Understanding of the Rwandan Genocide," *African Identities*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2010, pp. 309–16; Katrina Jaworski, "The Methodological Crisis of Theorising Genocide in Africa: Thinking with Agamben and Butler," *African Identities*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2012, pp. 349–65.

or exclusive categories when considering the nature and causes of mass violence such as genocide?²⁵

The first school of thought proposes looking at the human agents of murder in order to understand why and how genocides happen. The focus of this approach is not primarily on broad social conditions but on the *microdynamics* of genocide. It looks for the causal role played by individual free will, personal motivations, social roles, and individual preferences. Group behaviours and psychology, or what psychologist Ervin Staub describes as perpetrators' psychological self-concepts and situations that enable them to inflict harm on their victims, are central concerns for proponents of this school.²⁶ Known broadly as intentionalism, this school of thinking considers individual agents more important for determining social outcomes than social structures. Hence the motivations to violence and the conditions generating murderous intentions are central considerations of intentionalists. For a set of violent acts or events to be considered genocidal, there must be a demonstrable murderous intention by the perpetrator to eliminate not just victims but also the victims' group. It is this special criminal intent (also referred to as *dolus specialis*), not merely the act of killing or the conditional intent as constituted by act, that constitutes the essential factor marking an atrocity as a genocide. The emphasis on intention as the locus for determining genocide is often traced to the concept's legal origins and to discourses on the psychology of genocide that informed some of the early debates about the causes of genocide.²⁷

25 For discussions of some of the stakes in the agent–structure debate see, for example, Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Addison-Wesley, 1979; David Dessler, "What's at Stake in the Agent–Structure Debate?" *International Organization*, vol. 43, no. 3, 1989, pp. 441–73. More recently, George Ritzer and Jeffrey Stepnisky, *Sociological Theory*, 9th ed., McGraw-Hill Education, 2013.

26 For studies on the microdynamics of genocide and group violence, see Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence*, Cambridge UP, 1998; James Waller, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*, 2nd ed., Oxford UP, 2007.

27 The disciplines of psychology and law have largely provided grounds for intentionalist understanding of mass atrocities. See Staub, *Roots of Evil*. For a discussion of the genocide concept as essentially a legal term, see, for example, William Schabas, "The Law and Genocide," *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*, edited by Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses, Oxford UP, 2013, pp. 123–41. For a differing view that contests genocide as a sociological term and emphasizes the influence of social structures on human agency, see Martin Shaw, "Sociology and Genocide," *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*, edited by Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses, Oxford UP, 2013, pp. 142–62. See also Waller's *Becoming Evil*.

For intentionalists, focusing on genocidal intent is important when distinguishing genocide from other forms of mass murder. It is the specific intention to commit genocide that makes genocide a different kind of crime, or what some refer to as “the crime of crimes”.²⁸ Specific intent suggests that there is a requisite motive or purpose undergirding the committal of an act. In the context of genocide, while an accused may be guilty of committing mass murder based on their act of killing, there has to be additional evidence of the accused person’s intent to murder in order to eliminate permanently a victim group. In other words, as different from general intent, the special or specific genocidal intent requires the additional evidence of an intention to eliminate a group. General intent suggests that one only need to intend one’s action.²⁹

For proponents of intentionalism, the genocidal intentions of perpetrators are a crucial point of focus which is believed to provide significantly nuanced considerations of the phenomenon of genocide, particularly in the determination of the group form that constitutes a target victim of genocide. As noted in the previous section regarding

28 Boghossian, “The Concept of Genocide,” p. 74. See also Martin Shuster, “Philosophy and Genocide,” *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*, edited by Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses, Oxford UP, 2013, pp. 219–21.

29 For a discussion of specific and general intents in the context of genocide, see Kai Ambos, “What does ‘Intent to Destroy’ in Genocide Mean?” *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol. 91, no. 876, 2009, pp. 833–58. Yet, to be sure, some Lemkinian scholars would contend that Lemkin’s view of genocidal intention differs from the UNGC’s emphasis on special or specific intent to commit genocide. Lemkin’s notion of intent, as Irvin-Erickson explains, implies a *dolus eventualis* (reasonable anticipation of one’s action), which Lemkin conceives in terms suggestive of a juridical, as against a philosophical, question implied in intentionalist thinking more generally (see Irvin-Erickson, *Raphaël Lemkin*, pp. 127–29). Lemkin explains genocide as a crime that—however broad its process—requires purposiveness and intent to exterminate target groups:

The crime of genocide involves a wide range of actions, including not only the deprivation of life but also the prevention of life (abortions, sterilizations) and also devices considerably endangering life and health (artificial infections, working to death in special camps, deliberate separation from families for depopulation purposes, and so forth). All these actions are subordinated to *the criminal intent* to destroy or cripple permanently a human group. (Lemkin, “Genocide as a Crime under International Law,” *American Journal of International Law*, vol. 41, 1947, p. 147; emphasis added)

For Lemkin, therefore, the criminal intent to destroy a human group constitutes an important indicator not merely when appreciating the operational process of genocide but, importantly, when treating it as a crime. As a jurist, Lemkin was essentially advocating for the criminalization of a practice that was not new or unique but prevalent in history.

what some scholars considered to be the flaws in Lemkin's and the UNGC's conceptualizations of human groups, some intentionalist thinkers depend on their reading of killers' intention and motives to offer what they believe is a more flexible understanding of groups. For example, in his definition of genocide the Holocaust scholar Steven Katz summarizes this strand of intentionalist understanding of the genocide concept as any "actualization of the intent, however successfully carried out, to murder in its totality any national, ethnic, racial, religious, political, social, gender or economic group, as these groups are defined by the perpetrator, by whatever means".³⁰ For Katz, victim groups in a genocide should be understood in terms of how perpetrators define their victims.

But, as Katz's definition of genocide shows, the attention on genocidal intent largely ends up in thrall to the agency of perpetrators at the expense of other significant agents in the genocidal process. Why, we may ask, should the categorical perspective of killers matter most in our determination of genocidal outcomes? What about the perspectives of victims or those designated as bystanders?³¹ To what extent do

30 Steven Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, Vol. 1, Oxford UP, 1994, p. 131. For similar positions on genocidal intention see also Chalk and Jonassohn, *History and Sociology of Genocide*; Kurt Jonassohn and Karin S. Björnson, *Genocide and Gross Human Rights Violations: In Comparative Perspective*, Transaction Publishers, 1998.

31 I have used "bystander" throughout the book not to suggest merely a passive onlooker to genocidal atrocity. Instead, I use the term to designate actors who by virtue of their status or position as "outsiders" or those Ervin Staub calls "external bystanders" ("Preventing Genocide: Activating Bystanders, Helping Victims, and the Creation of Caring," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1996, p. 189) to a conflict are not *primary* targets of or parties to violence. The concept of bystander has been popularized in social psychology through the work of John Darley and Bibb Latané, who use the phrase "bystander effect" to describe a phenomenon in which individuals fail to intervene to help victims of violence (see, for example, Darley and Latané, "Bystander Intervention in Emergencies: Diffusion of Responsibility," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 8, 1968, pp. 377–83). In the context of genocide the word "bystander" has been used to describe mostly political actors (but also humanitarian groups, journalists, and missionaries) who fail to intervene to end or ameliorate mass atrocity (For scholarship on the use of the term in the context of the Holocaust see, for example, A. Rabinbach, "From Explosion to Erosion: Holocaust Memorialization in America since Bitburg," *History & Memory*, vol. 9, 1997, pp. 226–55; Michael Berenbaum, *The World Must Know: The History of the Holocaust as Told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, Little, Brown, 1993; E. T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum*, Viking, 1995; Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, Mariner Books, 2000; Ronald J. Berger, "It Ain't Necessarily So: The Politics of Memory and the Bystander Narrative in the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum," *Humanity and Society*,

these other agents determine the nature and outcome of destructive social actions?³² One salient point often made by scholars and activists in relation to genocidal outcomes is that the actions or inactions of bystanders may significantly influence perpetrators' actions and thereby serve as important determinants of social action and outcome.³³ This point constitutes a major criticism of intentionalists' focus on perpetrator-agents: a lack of discussion of the complexities involved in determining the nature of intention and of whether intention and motive are separable from actions, or else arbitrary and difficult to interpret.³⁴

Although intentionalist understandings of genocide did not find sustained scholarly traction among scholars of African violence, from the 1970s and with the emergence of military dictatorships across the continent the figure of the dictator stood out in studies on African political mass violence.³⁵ Often depicted as a psychopathic and socio-

vol. 27, no. 1, February 2003, pp. 2–29). The phrase “bystanders to genocide” was used by Samantha Power in an essay of that title and later in her book *A Problem from Hell* to criticize the United States' apathetic response during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda (for a critical discussion of bystanders in the context of the Rwandan genocide see Howard Adelman's review article “Bystanders to Genocide in Rwanda,” *The International History Review*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2003, pp. 357–74). However, in recent years, some scholars have raised the question of whether or not the category of bystander really exists (see, for example, Paul A. Levine, “On-Lookers,” *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies*, edited by Peter Hayes and John K. Roth, Oxford UP, 2010, pp. 126–69). They argue that groups often referred to as bystanders (governmental and especially non-governmental groups such as journalists and humanitarian workers) generally play direct significant roles in shaping the nature and outcome of conflicts as against merely standing by as passive onlookers to violence.

32 I use “social action” loosely to refer to similar action that may be designated as group, mass, or collective action, action carried out by social agents working to realize common goals. In its rather Weberian suggestiveness, “social action” denotes an antipositivist understanding of the social realm in which human actions relate to or are informed by social structures within which such actions take place and from which they derive their meaning. My preference for “social action” (as against mass, group, or collective action) is because the phrase suggests much more than the action of a group of people. It is both the action of a group of people and a consideration of such group action within the context of a social realm; that is, the action of a group whose meaning is best appreciated only within the social context giving rise to it.

33 See, for example, Roméo Dallaire, *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*, Vintage, 2004; Power, *A Problem from Hell*.

34 On this point, see Shuster, “Philosophy and Genocide”; Berel Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide*, University of Chicago Press, 1990.

35 See, for example, Achille Mbembe's discussion of the African/Cameroonian despot in *On the Postcolony*. Mbembe's discussion of the despot is based not on an intentionalist

pathic aggressor and a buffoon—as, say, in the figures of Uganda's Idi Amin or Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko—the African despot seems more like the agent of irrational murderous activities.³⁶ The African despot, as generally conceived, exhibits symptoms of an authoritarian personality as understood by Theodor Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson, and Nevitt Sanford in their research on Nazi genocide perpetrators.³⁷ This authoritarian despot embodies intense prejudice towards certain groups. He is fascistic and anti-democratic.³⁸ This authoritarian configuration of the African despot has inspired distinct representations of power and violence among African writers, a body of work that some literary critics now regard as African dictator literature, so-named after the Latin-American dictator genre.³⁹

According to the standard account, supporting this despotic character is a mass of followers with a tremendous propensity to obey. Obedience to authority, as Stanley Milgram claims in his study of the same title, could be a product of altered cognition.⁴⁰ This altered

but rather on what I consider to be a post-structural explanation of the conditions of despotism.

36 For a discussion of the multiple perspectives and roles of dictators and dictatorships across the world see Natasha M. Ezrow and Erica Frantz, *Dictators and Dictatorships: Understanding Authoritarian Regimes and Their Leaders*, Continuum, 2011. See also Martin Meredith's 2005 study of the political history of several African regimes in *The State of Africa*.

37 See Theodor Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, Harper, 1950.

38 This focus on dictatorial regimes also undermines an important observation made by Michael Mann about the democratic character of genocides across the world. Mann's thesis is that modern genocides and ethnic cleansings have mostly resulted from democratic conditions in which the majority tyrannize the minority. See Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy*, Cambridge UP, 2013.

39 See, for example, Robert Spencer, "Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and the African Dictator Novel," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2012, pp. 145–58; Michael K. Walonen, "Power, Patriarchy, and Postcolonial Nationalism in the African Dictator Novel," *Journal of the African Literature Association*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2011, pp. 104–17. Some of the popular books in this emergent category of African dictator literature include Malian novelist Yambo Ouologuem's novel *Le Devoir de violence* (1968; translated into English as *Bound to Violence* in 1971), Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe's novel *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka's play, *A Play of Giants* (1984), Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* (2006), and Somali novelist Nurruddin Farah's dictatorship trilogy: *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship—Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979), *Sardines* (1981), and *Close Sesame* (1983).

40 See Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: A Case Study of Controversy in the Social Sciences*, Praeger, 1989. For a critical reading of Milgram's "Obedience to Authority" hypothesis see Thomas Blass, ed., *Obedience to Authority: Current Perspectives on the Milgram Paradigm*, Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000; see also Waller, *Becoming Evil*, pp. 107–27.

cognitive state, which Milgram called the agentic state, emerges from within the context of a strictly hierarchical setup where “one is in a state of openness to regulation by an authority”.⁴¹ In this state, moral responsibility is held hostage to authority, shielding local agents (that is, perpetrators) from taking personal moral responsibility for their actions. In the agentic state, individual conscience is substituted by the conscience of authority.

In the context of genocides and mass atrocities, the assumption is that, to determine the cause and outcome of social action against targeted groups, we have to look at the figure, intentions, and choices of the despot and the ways that the despot authorized actions to be conducted in its name. A problem with this focus, for some critics, is that genocidal intent and motives are sought in the intentions, actions, and motivations of a certain kind of perpetrator—the administrator, architect, or mastermind of genocide⁴²—precluding from consideration such actors as executioners and foot-soldiers who generally constitute the larger population of perpetrators. The attention on administrators or authoritarian figures of genocide gives the impression that the *dolus specialis* of genocide can be attributable only to directors of genocides and not to those who actually carry genocides out. In other words, the supposition is that, if in the agentic state those under authority lack the agency and responsibility of autonomous judgement, then we have to seek responsibility for social action in the wielders of authority.

A legal consequence of excluding so-called “ordinary” perpetrators of genocide from considerations of genocidal intent is that the largest population of killers in a genocide is exempted from prosecution for the crime of genocide, a situation that also fails to account for the motivations of functionaries and how such motivations shaped their operational dispositions and conduct in the course of a genocide.⁴³ The absurdity

41 Waller, *Becoming Evil*, p. 114.

42 In recent years, scholarly focus has shifted significantly to so-called ordinary peoples, who constitute the majority of killers during genocides. See, for example, in the context of Rwanda, Jean Hatzfeld’s study on genocide perpetrators in Rwanda, *Une saison de machettes* (2003; translated by Linda Coverdale into English as *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak* [Picador, 2005]). Before *Machete Season*, Hatzfeld published a study focusing on Tutsi survivors of the Rwandan Genocide called *Dans le nu de la vie* (2000; translated by Linda Coverdale into English as *Life Laid Bare* [Other Press, 2007]).

43 See Ambos, “What does ‘Intent to Destroy’ in Genocide Mean?” The point here is not that ordinary or common perpetrators of genocides go scot-free. Frequently, as was the case in Rwanda, they are prosecuted for other genocide-related offences, such

created by the focus on the *dolus specialis* of those in positions of authority is what leads Kai Ambos to propose a legal revision of genocidal intent in a way that accounts for and holds ordinary perpetrators responsible for genocide.⁴⁴ He suggests reconceptualizing genocidal intent to include a *dolus eventualis*—that is, conditional intent by which perpetrators can be held culpable for murderous acts the group-destructive outcomes of which they are reasonably expected to foresee.

Notwithstanding this proposal for reconsidering genocidal intent, the general emphasis on intent, whether focused specifically on planners or expanded to accommodate a broader spectrum of killers, seems to focus essentially on the psychopathology of perpetrators: their personalities, motivations, and general rationale for committing mass murder. To be sure, this focus may usefully call attention to the psychological conditions that radicalize a group and persuade its members to murder members of another group. It might also highlight the conditions that sponsored psychological constructions of otherness generally considered implicit in genocides. Yet it perpetuates an impression of perpetrators' abnormality, frequently resulting in characterizations of genocide as an "extraordinary evil" doable only in special mental conditions of insanity, abnormality, and irrationality.⁴⁵ As may have already

as crimes against humanity, or for minor offences depending on the nature of their participation in genocide. In Rwanda, the institution of the Gacaca court system led to the prosecution of ordinary people who participated in murders and other criminal behaviours during the genocide. These perpetrators were handed lesser sentences compared with those in authority during the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi. For a comprehensive study of the Gacaca court prosecution of genocide perpetrators in Rwanda see, for example, Paul Christoph Bornkamm, *Rwanda's Gacaca Courts: Between Retribution and Reparation*, Oxford UP, 2012.

44 There are some other intentionalist thinkers who emphasize looking at genocidal intent beyond individual agents. Such thinkers locate genocidal intent even in social systems and consciousnesses. See, for example, Charny, "Toward a Generic Definition of Genocide"; Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present*, City Lights, 1998; Michael W. Reisman and Charles H. Norchi, "Genocide and the Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan," *ISG Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1988, pp. 4–6; Arlette El-Kaïm-Sartre and Jean-Paul Sartre, *On Genocide*, Beacon Press, 1968; Henry Huttenback, "Locating the Holocaust on the Genocide Spectrum," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1988, pp. 289–304; John L. Thompson and Gail A. Quets, *Redefining the Moral Order: Towards a Normative Theory of Genocide*, Colombia UP, 1987; Tony Barta, "Relations of Genocide: Land and Lives in the Colonization of Australia," *Genocide and the Modern Age: Etiology and Case Studies of Mass Death*, edited by I. Wallimann and M. N. Dobkowski, Greenwood, 1987, pp. 237–52.

45 For an insightful discussion of nuances and the implications of focusing on the psychopathology of perpetrators see, for example, Waller, *Becoming Evil*, pp. 59–134. See

been guessed, these assumptions about genocide from the standpoint of intentionalism present even bigger challenges for thinking about genocides in Africa, considering the often racist and stereotypical charges accompanying African discourses.

Rejecting the major assumptions of genocidal intent, some of which gave the impression that genocide is an extraordinary event perpetrated by abnormal people, several other critics offered alternative explanations to account for why and how genocides happen. In what became generally known as the structural (also called formalist, objectivist, or functionalist) model, proponents emphasized what they considered to be the broader social and organizational preconditions for genocide.⁴⁶ Structuralist approaches emphasize the *macrodynamics* of social outcomes. According to the structural model, genocide is neither reducible to the intentions of its perpetrators nor is it the acts of irrational people. Rather, we have to understand genocide as the work of normal people aided by circumstances that rationalize and normalize their mass destruction of other groups. Structuralists generally trace genocidal causes back to the conditions of war, modernity, and civilization, and the attendant genocidal rationalities and bureaucratic systems that these conditions enable in the process of their emergence.⁴⁷ In answer to the question of the cause of social action and outcome, structuralists insist on the importance of social organizations and ideologies over individual agents.

One important distinction between intentionalists and structuralists⁴⁸ is that, whereas the former treat every case of genocide as intended and deliberately organized (and so view the absence of genocidal intent as signalling something other than an occurrence of

also Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*; Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, Harper Collins, 1992; Staub, *Roots of Evil*; John M. Steiner, "The SS Yesterday and Today: A Sociopsychological View," *Survivors, Victims, and Perpetrators: Essays on the Nazi Holocaust*, edited by J. E. Dimsdale, Hemisphere, 1980, pp. 359–403; Bob Altemeyer, *Right-Wing Authoritarianism*, University of Manitoba Press, 1981.

46 See Powell, *Barbaric Civilization*; Shaw, *What Is Genocide?*

47 A representative study is Zygmunt Bauman's 1989 book *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cornell UP, 2000). See also Powell, *Barbaric Civilization*; Shaw, *What Is Genocide?*

48 Note that frequently the difference between intentionalists and structuralists is only a matter of the degree of emphasis each critic places on how to determine the cause of genocide. Some structuralist thinkers would not dismiss the place of intent entirely, but may tend to emphasize its marginal rather than central place in the genocidal process. See Powell, *Barbaric Civilization*; Shaw, *What Is Genocide?* See also Jens Meierhenrich, ed., *Genocide: A Reader*, Oxford UP, 2014, pp. 3–55.

genocide), the latter (when not challenging the possibilities of agential intention) would argue that genocides often result from intended *and* unintended causes. While genocides in the literal sense of “group destruction” do occur because of the deliberate and intended activities of perpetrators, structuralists would argue that, given certain other considerations, genocides could happen even when the intent of individual perpetrators is not to destroy another group per se. For example, the activities of European colonial missionaries around the world have been seen by some scholars as destructive, even though, as some may argue, the intention of some missionaries might not have been to destroy groups.⁴⁹

For structuralists, therefore, what is more important for determining genocide is not intention but the broader social processes that collectively legitimate group destruction, making it possible for ordinary people to become perpetrators. The structuralist view aims to explain how social structures and norms contribute to the destruction of groups. For example, in dealing with the question of how so-called “ordinary” and “civilized” people in Nazi Germany could perpetrate genocide, structuralists might rather focus on how social systems such as modern Western bureaucracies and the logics and ideologies of civilization and modernity, when coupled with prevailing and longstanding antisemitism and other prejudices, gave rise to conditions that justified and normalized the mass murder of the Nazis’ victims. They would generally look to modes of political organization, such as totalitarianism and democracies, and modern social conditions, with the attendant bureaucratized institutions, scientific rationality, racism, eugenicist ideologies and the nation-state systems.⁵⁰ Intentions are not easily,

49 The assumption more generally is that genocides need not exhibit clear exterminatory intentions before acts of group destruction are considered genocides. For insightful studies on systems approaches that highlight different micro-, macro- and meso-levels that might institute genocide see Woolford et al., *Colonial Genocide*; Moses and Stone, *Colonialism and Genocide*. See also Andrew Woolford, *The Benevolent Experiment: Indigenous Boarding Schools, Genocide, and Redress in Canada and the United States*, University of Manitoba Press, 2015.

50 See, for example, Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Viking Press, 1963; Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*; Alex Alvarez, *Governments, Citizens and Genocide: A Comparative and Interdisciplinary Approach*, Indiana UP, 2001; Mark Levene, *Genocide in the Age of the Nation-State: The Meaning of Genocide*, Vol. 1, I. B. Tauris, 2008; *Genocide in the Age of the Nation-State: The Rise of the West and the Coming of Genocide*, Vol. 2, I. B. Tauris, 2013; Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*; Waller, *Becoming Evil*; Powell, *Barbaric Civilization*; Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy*.

if ever, measurable. The variance in intent evident in an action, over the course of which intentions may evolve or change, poses additional challenges for those intentionalists seeking to explain occurrences of genocide. As a result of these and other challenges, structuralists prefer to view genocide not as the work specifically of authoritarian sociopaths and psychopaths intent on eliminating targeted groups, but rather as a more general phenomenon that could potentially result from the convergence of immoral ideologies and nationalisms, the nature of political and governing structures of society, and similar social conditions that are conducive to group destruction.

However, according to the structuralist explanation of why and how genocides happen, an account of individual intent or of how perpetrators come to internalize and normalize dangerous ideologies that numb their moral intuitions and recognition of the Other's humanity is reduced to a chain of structural conditions. This makes structuralists more invested in the structure than in the intimate and performative dimensions of genocide.⁵¹ Structuralist approaches have also been criticized for their de-emphasis of the experiential dimensions of genocide⁵² and for their rather deterministic appreciation of what they regard as destructive social systems and structures. The flux and contingencies generally observed in specific instances of genocide are not easily accounted for by excluding the subjective aspects of individual agents.

While structuralist insights offer useful ways of looking at how the nature of society—its politics and its ideological structures—could together produce genocides, they also seem to suggest that without these structures genocides might not happen. However, we should ask the questions: were modern bureaucracy, racism, and scientific rationality the enablers of Nazi Germany's genocide of Jews and other targeted victim groups? Have genocides not happened in contexts lacking the kinds of modern systems of organization and institution often blamed for genocidal violence? Didn't so-called pre-modern social and ethical systems—marked by deeper investments in pre-modern ideologies such as religion, nationalism, civic pride, and so on—also produce genocides?⁵³ How do we explain that similar social structures

51 See Powell, *Barbaric Civilization*, p. 38.

52 See, for example, A. Dirk Moses, "Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the 'Racial Century': Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust," *Colonialism and Genocide*, edited by A. Dirk Moses and Dan Stone, Routledge, 2007, pp. 148–80.

53 Several scholars have called attention to how genocide is far from being a

produce genocide in one place but not in another location, even when both are broadly structurally the same? Perhaps most significantly, do we not risk exculpating agents from responsibility for their murderous actions by emphasizing social structures and systems as the primary causes of genocidal evil?

To remedy the limitations of the agent–structure debate scholars are now turning to a kind of multi-level analysis that in the social sciences is generally referred to as a meso-level explanation of social actions and outcomes. This middle-ground approach combines conditions in the micro–macro levels to explain how and why genocides happen. A psychopathological interpretation of killers cannot in itself explain convincingly why and how genocides happen. Traits such as prejudice, psychological constructions of otherness, and stereotyping may be constant among group relations, but the reality of genocide is not constant and genocide does not always result in individuals manifesting these prejudicial traits.⁵⁴ Similarly, structural conditions cannot account convincingly for why and how genocides happen “[b]ecause large processes such as modernization, state-building, and democratization are typically slow-moving [and] understanding their logic does not always contribute to knowledge about individual and collective decision making in times of genocide”.⁵⁵ In other words, the incentives of large-scale social change or the motivations behind war and mass conflict do not by themselves explain why ordinary people murder others in peculiarly pernicious ways. Accordingly, it becomes important to understand how structures combine with desires and ideologies within specific contexts to produce genocide.

The meso-level approach aspires to create a middle ground between the micro and macro levels characteristic of earlier ways of analyzing genocide. This approach is fundamentally relational. Rather than

specifically modern phenomenon. While Samuel Totten and William S. Parsons “named” the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries as the “centuries of genocide”, genocides have been prevalent in so-called pre-modern times; indeed, several scholars have called attention to how genocide is far from being a specifically modern phenomenon. See Totten and Parsons, editors, *Century of Genocide: Critical Essays and Eyewitness Accounts*, Routledge, 2009. See also Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses, editors, *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*, Oxford UP, 2013; Dan Stone, editor, *The Historiography of Genocide*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; Levene, *Genocide in the Age of the Nation-State*, Vols I and II.

54 See Scott Straus, “Second-Generation Comparative Research on Genocide,” *World Politics*, vol. 59, no. 3, 2007, pp. 476–501; see also Meierhenrich, *Genocide*, pp. 12–13.

55 Meierhenrich, *Genocide*, p. 13.

creating a dichotomy between agents and structures, the meso-level approach seeks to show how these categories relate and make sense in their particular and immediate contexts. The value of this approach is that it allows an understanding of genocidal outcomes to emerge from multiple considerations.⁵⁶ These multiple considerations call attention to what sociologist Andrew Woolford has described as “the mesh”,⁵⁷ or dynamic network, of relations, conditions, temporalities, changes, resistances, and complexities propelling and legitimating social action. This approach treats genocide as a process in which individuals perpetrate genocides as a result of their relation to the prevailing conditions of their society, their relation to other individuals, and their relation to the steady and constant processes of social and individual becoming and unbecoming.

Yet, like the agent–structure problems described above, the meso-level approach is concerned with the question of the causes and effects of genocidal actions and outcomes. It answers this question by treating agents and structures as mutually constituted and mutually inclusive categories. As mutually constituted and inclusive categories for considering genocides, we have to understand social outcomes as an interactional process between agents and structure within specific and unique temporal and spatial contexts. Agents and structures are not fixed and constant. Nor are they stable categories. They must be understood as fluid and complex, as well as real and material. Additionally, the determination of outcome cannot be fixed. Outcomes relate to specific temporal situations and to specific modes of consciousness. For example, we may argue that the outcome of decades of structural processes and individual actions in Rwanda is the 1994 genocide. The suggestiveness of an outcome, nonetheless, implies definitiveness of an event in ways that fail to appreciate how what is called an

56 Representative applications of this approach to studies of genocide include Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians*, Oxford UP, 2005; Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda*, Cornell UP, 2006; Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur*, Yale UP, 2007; Powell, *Barbaric Civilization*; Andrew Woolford, “Discipline, Territory, and the Colonial Mesh: Indigenous Boarding Schools in the United States and Canada,” *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America*, edited by Andrew Woolford, Jeff Benvenuto, and Alexander L. Hinton, Duke UP, 2014, pp. 29–48.

57 Woolford uses the notion of the mesh to explain colonialism as a network of complex and processual relations and activities that are not reducible to a single formulation or frame of understanding. See Woolford, “Discipline, Territory, and the Colonial Mesh.”

outcome relates to perhaps broader ongoing activities. For example, many scholars have called attention to how the civil war and genocide in Rwanda spiralled into and fuelled even bigger catastrophes in the Great Lakes region in Africa, catastrophes that consumed many more millions of people and caused immense instability and ruptures in relationships that have continued to endure.⁵⁸

Some of the methodological cleavages surrounding questions of genocidal agency and structure are important to consider when dealing with genocide in postcolonial Africa. This is because each writer and scholar entering the domain of mass atrocity representations in and about postcolonial Africa has invariably had to grapple with the agent–structure question. Each writer's ways of imagining, representing, answering, or dealing with this question shape their general outlook on the subject of genocide and mass atrocity in Africa in ways discussed in a later section of this chapter.

Genocide in Africa's Postcolony

For many scholars grappling with genocides and mass atrocities in Africa's postcolony, a dominant inclination has been to seek links between European colonialism and postcolonial violence. It has become widely accepted in scholarly and other circles that European civilization was founded on an ideology that normalized and rationalized the colonization of Others. That this (racist and imperialist) ideology sanctioned violence and was destructive to colonized peoples has become in recent times generally uncontested (at least, overtly). The question for consideration has focused, rather, on how the history of Europe's colonial project in Africa has continued to shape and determine violence in Africa's postcolony. In other words: to what extent do the agency and structure of postcolonial violence directly relate to or derive from the history and legacies of colonialism? The dominant response to this question by many African scholars has been

58 See, for example, Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*; Kenneth W. Harrow, "Ancient Tribal Warfare: Foundational Fantasies and Ethnicity History," *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2005, pp. 34–45; Maurice T. Vambe and Abebe Zegeye, "Racializing Ethnicity and Ethnicizing Racism: Rethinking the Epistemic Conditions of Genocide in Africa," *Social Identities*, vol. 14, no. 6, 2008, pp. 775–93; Filip Reyntjens, "Rwanda, Ten Years on: From Genocide to Dictatorship," *The Political Economy of the Great Lakes Region of Africa: The Pitfalls of Enforced Democracy and Globalisation*, edited by S. Marysse and F. Reyntjens, Macmillan Palgrave, 2005, pp. 15–47.

that genocides and mass atrocities occurring in Africa's postcolony are largely the direct products and legacies of European colonization.

Understanding this claim requires us to understand the colonial as implicitly and intrinsically genocidal.⁵⁹ This understanding is believed to hold the promise of explaining the nature of violent structures and agencies arising from the colonial experience and constituting a significant basis of genocides in the postcolony. The assumption is that, to understand genocide in Africa's postcolony, we should seek a better appreciation of the nature of colonialism and the rationality that instigated it.

This way of thinking about genocides in the postcolony is for the most part indebted to a structuralist view of violent outcomes occurring on the continent. In part, it is also a dismissal of certain scholarly attempts to separate what some believe to be the ideal form and promise of European civilization or modernity from its supposedly deviant colonial excesses.⁶⁰ In such scholarly attempts at separation, European civilization and modernity are construed as embodying "the ideals of universal reason"⁶¹ that are not entirely despicable, but that, when misused, misunderstood, or exploited, license the kinds of contradiction that engender genocides.⁶² This pattern of thinking tries to separate the *real* from its *ideal*, as if such a separation, as the philosopher Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze observes in his edited anthology *African Philosophy*,⁶³ is ever possible, as the ideal is already implicated in the historical realities that constituted it.

In recent years, genocide studies scholars have begun discovering or rediscovering the vexed links between colonialism and genocide. The

59 For example, noting Raphael Lemkin's original conception of genocide, Dirk Moses has argued in the context of Australian settler colonialism that genocide should be seen as "*intrinsically colonial*" (see A. Dirk Moses, "Genocide and Settler Society in Australian History," *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History*, edited by A. Dirk Moses, Berghahn, 2004, pp. 3–48). For more on recent scholarly discussions of the linkages between colonialism and genocide see also the contributions in the edited collection by Moses and Stone, *Colonialism and Genocide*.

60 See, for example, Abiola F. Irele, "Contemporary Thought in French Speaking Africa," *African Philosophy: Selected Readings*, edited by Albert Moseley, Prentice Hall, 1995, pp. 263–300. Irele believes that, while colonialism was a destructive phenomenon, it embodied certain positive ideals that must not be ignored.

61 Irele, "Contemporary Thought," p. 296.

62 For a criticism of this way of describing European civilization see, for example, Powell, *Barbaric Civilization*.

63 Eze, "Western Philosophy and African Colonialism," *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, edited by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, Blackwell, 1998, p. 218.

goal of their inquiries seems to be to use such connections to broaden our understanding of genocide and colonialism as mutually inclusive categories.⁶⁴ In a number of these recent studies, however, the approach has been to focus on instances of group destruction (whether physical, biological, or cultural) within a colonial system. This approach leaves the impression that only in instances of certain forms of physical and cultural harms can we construe colonialism as genocide. For example, in an edited collection by A. Dirk Moses and Dan Stone entitled *Colonialism and Genocide*, most of the contributions focus on cases of colonists' massacres, so as to describe certain colonial activities as genocide. For some of these studies, genocide has to be seen as one of the patterns of violence deployed under the colonial system. This kind of violence frequently manifested in attempts to physically destroy colonized groups, such as indigenous Tasmanians⁶⁵ or Namibia's Herero and Nama peoples,⁶⁶ and the range of biological and cultural abuses of colonized peoples in settler colonies. In this consideration of colonialism and genocide such phrases as "colonial genocide" and "cultural genocide" have become convenient terms for describing colonialism as constituting patterns of violence that could be regarded as genocidal. Even when scholars such as Moses argue that Raphael Lemkin's original conception of genocide suggests that "genocide is *intrinsically colonial*,"⁶⁷ the trend has still been to treat colonialism and genocide as two separate

64 See Moses and Stone, *Colonialism and Genocide*; A. Dirk Moses, ed., *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History*, Berghahn Books, 2004; Woolford et al., *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America*; Jurgen Zimmerer, "Colonial Genocide: The Herero and Nama War (1904–8) in German South West Africa and Its Significance," *The Historiography of Genocide*, edited by Dan Stone, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 323–43.

65 See Ann Curthoys, "Raphael Lemkin's 'Tasmania': An Introduction," *Colonialism and Genocide*, edited by A. Dirk Moses and Dan Stone, Routledge, 2007, pp. 66–73. See also Sven Lindqvist, *The Dead Do Not Arise: "Exterminate All the Brutes" and Terra Nullius*, The New Press, 2014.

66 See Zimmerer, "Colonial Genocide."

67 Moses, *Genocide and Settler Society*, p. 27; emphasis in original. One can invert Moses's phrase and ask to what extent we can consider colonialism as intrinsically genocidal. Contra scholars such as Helen Fein, who argued that to treat both terms as one and the same thing would lead to a misuse of terms or a "rhetorical abuse" and "semantic stretch" that trivializes and offers little analytically for explaining the phenomena of genocide and colonization (see Fein, "Genocide, Terror, Life Integrity and War Crimes: The Case for Discrimination," *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions*, edited by George J. Andreopoulos, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994, p. 96), I think that we stand to learn more, in fact, when we think about colonialism as genocide—in other words, as an intrinsically destructive exterminatory process.

phenomena: the former constitutive of good and evil; the latter an evil element that may be found subsumed and only occasionally active within the former.

This view of genocide as an occasional occurrence within the colonial system runs counter to the view of some anticolonial thinkers, such as Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, who were writing in the 1950s and 1960s. For instance, Césaire, writing in *Discourse on Colonialism*, sees no difference between colonialism and genocide, and in fact describes Hitler's Nazi genocides in Europe as the colonial norm:

People are surprised, they become indignant. They say: "How strange! But never mind it's Nazism, it will pass!" And they wait, and they hope; and they hide the truth from themselves, that it is barbarism, the supreme barbarism, the crowning barbarism that sums up all the daily barbarisms; that it is Nazism, yes, but that before they were its victims, they were its accomplices; that they tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimized it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples; that they have cultivated that Nazism, that they are responsible for it, and that before engulfing the whole edifice of Western, Christian civilization in its reddened waters, it oozes, seeps, and trickles from every crack.⁶⁸

For Césaire, as well as other influential anticolonial thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, European colonialism embodies the ideology of Western civilization and, through its practice, the West legitimized its savagery and justified its abuse and extermination of other peoples. European colonialism, as Fanon puts it, is founded on the logic of "a Manichaeic world".⁶⁹ This Manichaeic world is a racist system that dehumanizes the colonized and casts them as irredeemably evil. Viewed through such a racist lens as ontologically evil and pitched into a perpetual conflict with the forces of good (the colonizer), the colonized invariably becomes the object of exterminatory violence.

Some thinkers on postcolonial violence in Africa build on this understanding of colonialism as implicitly genocidal. Their assumption

68 Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 1972, translated by Joan Pinkham, Monthly Review Press, 2000, p. 36.

69 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington, Penguin, 2001, pp. 31–32.

is that there is a rationale or an “epistemic condition”⁷⁰ that is impelling genocides in Africa’s postcolony and has to be seen as the direct legacy of colonialism. This legacy is founded on what Achille Mbembe has described as *colonial rationality*.⁷¹ This colonial rationality, which is governed by necropower, is responsible for settling the nature of subjects and subjection constituted under European colonization.⁷² By “subjects” in this case I mean those living under the *rule* and *governance* of the colonial sovereign.

To understand this colonial rationality, according to Mbembe, its necropolitical *commandement* (governing order) and its operations, we have to underscore the notion of *right* that it establishes: the right to own, to appropriate, to occupy “native” territories; the right of conquest, the notion of protectorates or the right to “protect” colonized property or contract out occupied territories to companies and agents given the responsibility to “develop” it on behalf of the colonial sovereign. For Mbembe, these rights coalesce around at least three forms of violence: founding violence; violence used to legitimate founding violence; and violence that authorizes and makes permanent the exercise of violence.

The founding violence of colonialism is the violence of rights over the racialized Other categorized pejoratively in colonial vocabulary as “the native”. This violence presupposes its own legitimacy, in that it derives from the right of conquest. Through conquest the colonist establishes the space of his rule by exception by introducing his own supreme, unconditional laws—“the supreme denial of rights” to the conquered.⁷³ Mbembe elaborates this process further: having founded his right to occupy using violence, the colonist sets out to legitimate this right. To carry out this legitimation, he creates imaginaries and languages that normalize his violent mission. In these legitimating

70 Eze, “Epistemic Conditions,” pp. 115–29.

71 Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, pp. 24–58. Mbembe also elaborates on this violent order in his book *Necropolitics* (translated by Steven Corcoran, Duke UP, 2019). On other discussions of colonial rationality as violent rationality see, for example, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, nos 2–3, 2007, pp. 240–70.

72 Necropower is the name Mbembe calls the exercise or practice of necropolitics, a term he uses to describe the ways that politics works or functions in the determination over who lives and who dies. This type of power, according to Mbembe, is governed essentially by racism. Its operational logic is addressed to “the generalized *instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations*” (see Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, p. 68; emphasis in original).

73 Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p. 25.

imaginaries and languages there is no distinction made between ruling, civilizing, colonizing, killing, and enslaving. This violent situation is the condition of absolute subjection: that is, a condition in which the colonial sovereign decides what constitutes common sense, claiming for himself the right to make meaning, thus transforming the colonial subject into the property of the sovereign—the object of power. To make permanent by way of maintaining this imaginary of absolute subjection to the colonial *commandement*, a third violence has to be regularly performed through punitive “wars” and pogroms until catastrophes become banal, “constituting the central cultural imaginary that the [colonial] state shared with society [colonized subjects], and thus ha[ving] an authenticating and reiterating function”.⁷⁴

These patterns of violence, according to Mbembe, combine to act both as *authority* and *morality*, thus eliminating “the distinction between ends and means” and establishing what constitutes right and wrong. As a result, the colonized remains in a perpetual condition of wrongfulness, and whatever is done to him constitutes a *right*. The colonial state uses naked force as it wills or acts to destroy or recycle social forms. In the colonial state, as Mbembe puts it, “[t]he lack of justice of the means, and the lack of legitimacy of the ends, conspired to allow an arbitrariness and intrinsic unconditionality”⁷⁵ that characterizes the supreme sovereignty of colonialism. One manifestation of this arbitrariness is that in the exercise of its supreme will colonial power could conscript any colonized subject to satisfy its absolute desire to create, manipulate, or destroy. This kind of colonial rationality is what, for Mbembe, is reappropriated in the postcolony: “This reappropriation was not merely institutional; it also occurred in material spheres and in the sphere of the imaginary.”⁷⁶

To elaborate further on the notion of postcolonial genocide as derivative of a kind of rationality, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze argues that there are “epistemic conditions of genocide”.⁷⁷ These epistemic conditions are not to be understood as a single factor or phenomenon of violence. Rather, they encapsulate exterminatory ideologies operating on an Us/Them binary, as well as several other social, cultural, political, and historical conditions. By “epistemic”, Eze means the “mental and historical forms in which we know things”, which inform how we come

74 *On the Postcolony*, p. 25.

75 *On the Postcolony*, p. 26.

76 *On the Postcolony*, p. 40.

77 Eze, “Epistemic Conditions,” pp. 115–29.

to rationalize and justify our actions and inactions.⁷⁸ This “epistemology of genocide” is a matter of rationality, a kind of rationale underpinning violent mass action in the postcolony. For Eze, the question to ask, then, is: “[a]re there systems of thought that could be said to constitute either necessary or sufficient conditions for genocidal act?”⁷⁹ Closely following this question is the agent–structure question: what is the connection between thought and action? For Eze, the link between action and thought can be found in the historical conditions within which we come to think and behave as rational beings. Genocide becomes possible, according to this view, simply because we can think. Genocide is thus to be understood as a practice, which, like most other kinds of collective action, is guided by a *rationale*, or *colonial rationality à la Mbembe*.⁸⁰

One possible objection to the notion of genocide as propelled by rationality may result in the following question: if rationality can propel and constrain action, could we not also consider irrationality—taken in a common sense to mean insanity or madness—to propel collective actions such as genocide? Put differently, could not some kind of group or collective madness, resulting, say, from a breakdown of law and social cohesion, be held accountable for genocides? This cannot be for Eze, since the preconditions of genocidal outcomes are collective and systematic action, organization, purposiveness, and a commitment to this murderous purpose. In addition, according to Eze, as there are no historical examples of genocides resulting from collective madness *per se*, we have to look instead towards what Norman Cohn has described as the “ideological warrants”⁸¹ driving murderous social action. Such ideological warrants explain why killers deny or continue to justify

78 “Epistemic Conditions,” p. 128.

79 “Epistemic Conditions,” p. 118.

80 For varied and incisive discussions of genocide as a rational practice, see the contributions in John K. Roth, ed., *Genocide and Human Rights: A Philosophical Guide*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. See also Karla Poewe, *The Namibian Herero: A History of their Psychological Disintegration and Survival*, Edwin Mellen, 1985; Samuel Totten, William S. Parsons, and Israel W. Charny, eds, *Genocide in the Twentieth Century: Critical Essays and Eyewitness Accounts*, Garland, 1995; Alexander Laban Hinton, ed., *Annihilating Difference: The Anthropology of Genocide*, University of California Press, 2002.

81 See Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World-Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Harper and Row, 1967. In this book Cohn explores the historical processes and nature of the circulation of *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a document purporting to describe a Jewish conspiracy to control the world. Cohn suggests that the forged *Protocols* provided ideological grounds for anti-Semitism in Europe and was popular in the Third Reich.

their murderous actions before, during, and after genocides. For Eze, as well as Mbembe, social action embodies an authorizing rationale. Our task should, therefore, be to underscore the nature of this rationale and its operational forms.

Similarly, following insights derived from Fanon, Mahmood Mamdani claims that the question of how to make sense of genocides occurring among formerly colonized peoples requires us to consider these genocides as in some sense continuing and extending the conditions characteristic of European colonialism. These colonial conditions derive largely from the racialization of colonized groups by the colonist. This racialization is a complex process that extends beyond the binary of colonizer–colonized categories. This racialization of colonized groups enabled the colonial system to appoint among the colonized delegates responsible for helping with the business of governing. These delegates—often racialized as non-natives, albeit still colonized—occupied “a contradictory middle ground between settler citizens [Europeans] and nativized [colonial] subjects”.⁸² In addition, according to Mamdani, implicit in this colonial racialization is a politicization of group identities along the lines of autochthonous natives and nativized aliens. The colonizer described the former group as true native and the latter as migrant-settlers from places assumed to share affinities with Europeans, at least in the context of Rwanda. This racialization and politicization of group identities among colonized groups culminated in a struggle between those categorized as native and settler.

Mamdani claims that the operational genocidal impulse of the colonial system is twofold: it consists of (1) the colonizer’s eliminationist violence directed against the native; and (2) the counter-violence of the colonized, intended to root out the violent colonizer. In this latter impulse, Mamdani notes, the colonized saw the colonizer’s violence as despicable, and thus imagined his or her own violent resistance against colonialism as redemptive, justifiable, democratic, decolonizing, and an affirmation of denied humanity.⁸³ In the exercise of this impulse to eliminate the settler, explains Mamdani, based on his study of Rwanda, the native turned also on other colonized groups designated as settlers. The struggle against colonialism led the “native”—a term that in the colonial lexicon represents a pejorative designation for those lacking in rationality and so endowed by nature

82 Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, p. 16.

83 *When Victims Become Killers*, pp. 9–10.

with the base instincts of animals—to translate his or her “nativity” into a positive moral weapon against the colonizer and those perceived as the colonizer’s delegates. Following this reconceptualization of nativism, the “native” perceives him/herself as the defender of the land, an autochthone whose very existence depends on the annihilation of the threatening outsider.

The native’s genocide, for Mamdani, is at first clothed in (and legitimated by) the logic of nationalism (in whichever way the nation is defined) and it finds expression in an inclination to root out the threatening alien who constitutes a problem for the integrity of the native’s nation. The crime of colonialism in Africa, according to Mamdani, involves much more than the expropriation of the native: it was specifically “*to politicize indigeneity in the first place*: first negatively, as a settler libel of the native; but then positively, as a native response, as a self-assertion”.⁸⁴ The political categories of the settler–native dialectic did not end with the official end of colonization or with the exit of the European settler. These categories carried into the postcolony in consequential ways.

This politicization of racialized identities among colonized groups as indigene and settler within the colonial state is precisely what Mamdani claims as one of the main conditions propelling the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda. The colonizers of Rwanda racialized the Hutu as autochthones and the Tutsi as settlers who migrated into the region from Ethiopia. Their doing so accounts for why the campaign against the Tutsi was xenophobic, extreme, and eliminative. This genocide, for Mamdani, did not begin and end in 1994. To be understood it has to be seen as part of a longer history that emphasizes the activities of Rwanda’s colonists.

The notion of the native genocide seems applicable in some other postcolonial African contexts. For example, the genocide of Omani people of Arab descent by Zanzibaris in what is now commonly known as the Zanzibar Revolution of 1964 was based on the perception of Omani people as alien settlers and non-indigenes.⁸⁵ Likewise, the massacres of Igbo peoples across Nigeria from 1966 to 1970 was based

84 *When Victims Become Killers*, p. 14; emphasis in original.

85 See, for example, Chris Oke, “The Forgotten Genocide of the Zanzibar Revolution,” *Field Notes*, 12 January 2014, <http://speakjhr.com/2014/01/forgotten-genocide-zanzibar-revolution/>, accessed 15 February 2016; Samantha Spooner, “Africa’s Forgotten Genocide Marks Its 50-Year Anniversary,” *Mail and Guardian Africa*, 16 August 2014, <http://mgafrica.com/article/2014-08-15-africas-forgotten-genocide-marks-its-50-year-anniversary>, accessed 15 February 2016.

on xenophobic practices that identified the Igbo as settlers in parts of the country in which they were targeted for elimination. The atrocities witnessed during the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, which in part began as the “native’s” revolution against descendants of freed slave settlers from Europe and the Americas, and the massacres in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi, among several other places in postcolonial Africa, all bear traces of the native–settler friction.⁸⁶

Often, the group that sees itself as indigenous to a territory within the postcolonial state resorts to exterminatory violence against so-called foreigners and settlers. Mamdani describes this situation as the crisis of postcolonial citizenship, in which those defined as native or indigene assume inalienable ownership of the state (or portions thereof), thereby claiming for themselves the *right* to rule, depose, kill, govern, and colonize those seen as aliens. Mamdani’s argument in favour of viewing the 1994 genocide in Rwanda as a native’s genocide is useful for underscoring how the process of othering and identity construction within the colonial system carries into the postcolonial moment, contributing to a marked tendency towards genocidal violence among African groups.

However, a major challenge in his explanation of genocide in Rwanda results from Mamdani’s claims that *only* within the situation of racialized identity forms can genocide result. Mamdani distinguishes between what he describes as “ethnic” and “racial” forms of violence in postcolonial Rwanda. He contends that the category of Tutsi identity was constructed in racial (as opposed to ethnic) terms by European colonial anthropological literature that insisted that the Tutsi were racially superior to their Hutu neighbours, and that this superiority was essentially a by-product of their phenotypical and genotypical differences. Both groups were believed to have migrated into the Great Lakes region of Rwanda, Burundi, and some parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo from different places, Tutsis being the late arrivals. This colonial politicization of group identity along racial lines is what Mamdani identifies as the essential precondition of the 1994 genocide. He claims that race, and not ethnic difference, explains the character of the exterminatory violence experienced by Tutsi victims in 1994:

This is not an “ethnic” but a “racial” cleansing, not a violence against one who is seen as a neighbor but against one who is

86 Pade Badru, “Ethnic Conflict and State Formation in Post-Colonial Africa: A Comparative Study of Ethnic Genocide in the Congo, Liberia, Nigeria, and Rwanda-Burundi,” *Journal of Third World Studies*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2010, pp. 149–69.

seen as a foreigner; not a violence that targets a transgression across a boundary into home but one that seeks to eliminate a foreign presence from home soil, literally and physically. From this point of view, we need to distinguish between racial and ethnic violence: ethnic violence can result in massacres, but not genocide. Massacres are about transgressions, excess; genocide questions the very legitimacy of a presence as alien.⁸⁷

Mamdani's argument is generally that ethnicity suggests dynamism and a mutually inclusive identity form in which groups see themselves as different from other ethnicities because of dynamic social and cultural conditions and practices. Race, on the other hand, constitutes an ontological, unchangeable category, a mutually exclusive and irredeemable identity form based on the condition of being an alien to a place. Mass violence based on the former, according to Mamdani, does not lead to a genocide, unlike violence resulting from the latter.

Mamdani's distinction between racial and ethnic violence is problematic on several counts.⁸⁸ First, it assumes that genocides can occur only under circumstances of group othering that is based on biological, social, and political racism. Second, it excludes for consideration as victims of genocide in Rwanda people loosely referred to as "moderate Hutu", a silence that leads some critics to dismiss Mamdani's writing about the genocide in Rwanda as serving the interests of Tutsi elites who ended the genocide and won the civil war in 1994.⁸⁹ This criticism is also a reaction to Mamdani's pregnant silence in his book *When Victims Become Killers* over the violent activities that followed the 1994 genocide, particularly the violence perpetrated by the post-genocide Rwandan government on the Hutu and other peoples in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Yet I will argue further that we can attribute Mamdani's race-centric view of genocide to his tendency of "thinking [African genocides]

87 Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, p. 14. For an elaboration of the process of this racialization see Chapter Three of Mamdani's *When Victims Become Killers*.

88 For a criticism of Mamdani's theorization of postcolonial African genocide see, for example, Vambe and Zegeye, "Racializing Ethnicity and Ethnicizing Racism," pp. 775–93.

89 On this point, see Vambe and Zegeye, "Racializing Ethnicity and Ethnicizing Racism"; R. Lemarchand, "Bearing Witness to Mass Murder," *African Studies Review*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2003, pp. 93–101; R. Lemarchand, "Disconnecting the Threads: Rwanda and the Holocaust Reconsidered," *The Political Economy of the Great Lakes Region of Africa: The Pitfalls of Enforced Democracy and Globalisation*, edited by S. Marysse and F. Reyntjens. Macmillan Palgrave, 2005, pp. 48–70; Reyntjens, "Rwanda, Ten Years on".

through the Holocaust”,⁹⁰ a tendency that leads him to exceptionalize the historical conditions of genocide in Rwanda’s postcolony. For instance, Mamdani sees genocide as emanating from xenophobia driven by racism.⁹¹ His discussion of the Nazis’ extermination of European Jews focuses mainly on how nationalist ideologies that constructed Jewish people as dangerous foreigners and settlers inspired the violence against them. It is this xenophobic dimension of the Nazi genocide, rooted in racist anti-Semitism against people believed to originate from elsewhere, that Mamdani projects onto genocides occurring in Africa’s postcolony. He excludes the fact that implicit in Nazi genocides is also the notion of lives more and less worthy of living, an idea fundamental to the Nazi view of non-alien “Aryan Germans” such as gay people, along with the physically and mentally challenged, as being unworthy of life to such an extent that their elimination from society can be justified. Mamdani’s discussion of genocide in the postcolony emphasizes biological racism as an essential precondition of genocide in ways that reinforce the notion of groups as immutable and fixed. Through his emphasis on racism against supposed foreigners as the mainspring of genocide he excludes other important elements—such as scientific rationality, eugenicist thinking, modern state bureaucracy, and the vicissitudes of war—that other scholars have included in their accounts of the preconditions for the attempted annihilation of different groups under the Nazis and in the Rwandan context.

Mamdani’s distinction between the violence arising from racism and that attributable to ethnicity treats genocide with the kind of exceptionalism that heralded not only the Holocaust uniqueness debate⁹² but also a similar exceptionalism in the use and application of the genocide concept.⁹³ Mamdani seems to consider the massacre of the Tutsi in Rwanda a genocide because it resembles the Nazi genocide

90 Mahmood Mamdani, “Making Sense of Political Violence in Postcolonial Africa,” *Identity, Culture and Politics*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2002, p. 2.

91 Mamdani, “Making Sense,” pp. 1–24.

92 The debate around the uniqueness of the Holocaust centred on the idea that the Nazi genocide of Jews was unique, singular and unprecedented. What is at stake in this debate is the insistence on seeing the Nazi genocide of Jews as singular and unparalleled. For an incisive review of the stakes involved in this debate see Moses, “Conceptual Blockages”. For a philosophical argument about the paradigmatic status of the Holocaust resulting from debates about its uniqueness see Raimond Gaita, “Refocusing Genocide: A Philosophical Responsibility,” *Genocide and Human Rights*, edited by John Roth, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 153–66.

93 On this point, see, for example, Meierhenrich, *Genocide*, pp. 3–55.

of European Jews, which for him was similarly founded on a specific history of European racialism and carried out using an organized state apparatus.⁹⁴ Mamdani also assumes that only within the category of racialized figurations of irreconcilable ontological differences is it possible to conceptualize the exterminatory violence of genocide. Hence he chastises Western media and scholars for labelling the atrocities in Darfur as a genocide.⁹⁵ He does not see the kinds of racialism at work in Darfur that he believes were operative in Rwanda.⁹⁶

In the case of the genocide of the Igbo in Nigeria between 1966 and 1970 scholars do not generally tend to make distinctions between ethnic and racial forms of violence.⁹⁷ Rather, the politicization of ethnic/racial identities is always adduced by scholars such as G. N. Uzoigwe as the cause of these atrocities. In his historical analysis of how the Igbo became targets for genocide in Nigeria during the calamitous events of 1966, Uzoigwe calls attention to colonial and postcolonial discourses and structures that politicized ethnic identities in the country. Through this politicization, Nigerian groups came to imagine others in stereotypical terms that informed their relations with them. For Uzoigwe, the Igbo during and after colonization have been constructed as democratic, progressive, clever, resourceful, domineering, mercantile, clannish, and stereotypically “Jewish”.⁹⁸

94 It is worth noting that the kinds of racialism and eugenicist thinking found in European colonial activities were also present in Arab and Islamic activities in several parts of Africa, especially in Libya, Mauritania, and the former Sudan. That Mamdani excludes this factor in his dismissal of genocide in Sudan is telling, as some scholars have pointed out. See, for example, his opinion piece “The Politics of Naming: Genocide, Civil War, Insurgency,” *London Review of Books*, vol. 29, no. 5, 2007, pp. 5–8.

95 Mamdani, “The Politics of Naming”.

96 Several critics dismissed Mamdani’s claims that the atrocities in Darfur did not constitute a genocide. Not only, according to some of these critics, is racism central to these atrocities, but there are also clear-cut signs of state-organized mass murders of targeted groups. See, for example, Vambe and Zegeye, “Racializing Ethnicity and Ethnicizing Racism”.

97 See A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten, eds, *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide: The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967–1970*, Routledge, 2018. Yet, like Mamdani, some scholars of the 1966–70 genocide of the Igbo in Nigeria emphasize racism (construed problematically in terms suggestive of a confluence of biological traits and cultural and religious practices) as the major basis on which Igbo peoples were massacred across Nigeria. See, for example, Ekwe-Ekwe, *The Biafra War: Nigeria and the Aftermath*, Edwin Mellen Press, 1990; and *Biafra Revisited*, African Renaissance, 2007.

98 See Uzoigwe, *Visions of Nationhood*, pp. 93–123. See also Achebe, *There Was a Country*. On colonial and postcolonial literatures expressing racial/ethnic stereotypes of Nigerian groups see, for example, Edmund Dene Morel, *Nigeria: Its Peoples and Its*

This ethnic caricature of the Igbo character would ordinarily not have had any significant wider implications in the 1960s, given that the practice of stereotyping groups using negative and pejorative terms was prevalent and characterized the order of perceptions and relations in colonial and postcolonial Nigeria. However, according to Uzoigwe, from late colonial to postcolonial times different ethnic identities in Nigeria became entangled with contentious political activities and visions. This fragmentation of Nigerian social and political solidarity meant that in the Nigerian national imaginary individuals represented not just unique persons but also the political visions and claims associated with their particular ethnic group. For Uzoigwe, this politicization and ghettoization of ethnicities, underway since colonial times, also accounts for why the categories of indigene and settler citizens exist and continue to trouble relations in Nigeria.⁹⁹ The indigenous citizen is the Nigerian resident in his or her ethnic homeland. The settler citizen is the Nigerian resident outside his or her ethnic homeland. Between May and October 1966 “Igbo” settlements in most parts of the then Northern and Western Regions of Nigeria (that is, not the Igbo’s traditional territory) disappeared as a result of massacres and forced deportation, as Uzoigwe explains, because they were considered as settlers.

Although one can clearly hold European colonization responsible for contributing to the proliferation of mass atrocities occurring across postcolonial Africa, colonialism is by no means solely responsible for the emergence of dangerous and vulnerable identity patterns in Africa. Nor is racism (and the production of politicized ethnicities) a unique byproduct of Western colonization, being marked only by a single

Problems, Smith, Elder & Co., 1911; G. T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, Seeley, Service & Co. Limited, 1921; Paul Anber, “Modernisation and Political Disintegration: Nigeria and the Ibo,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1968, pp. 163–69; A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary History*, Oxford UP, 1971, 9 vols; de St. Jorre, *The Brother’s War*; James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, Brouburg, 1986; Richard L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation*, Princeton UP, 1983. For recent discussion of the racialization and politicization in Nigeria of Igbo identity as resourceful and progressive see, for example, Douglas Anthony, “‘Resourceful and Progressive Blackmen’: Modernity and Race in Biafra, 1967–70,” *The Journal of African History*, vol. 51, 2010, pp. 41–61.

⁹⁹ For a discussion of the continued tension between settler and indigenous citizenship in Nigeria see Laurent Fourchard, “Bureaucrats and Indigenes: Producing and Bypassing Certificates of Origin in Nigeria,” *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute*, vol. 85, no. 1, 2015, pp. 37–58.

definition based on an historically specific idea of biological superiority.¹⁰⁰ Even scholars such as Uzoigwe would not go as far as Mamdani and suggest that racism is uniquely responsible for genocide in Africa's postcolony. Instead, he and others would argue (and Mamdani would agree) that it makes better sense to understand genocide in Africa as a modern phenomenon. As a modern phenomenon, genocide proceeds from circumstances involving the collision of politicized ethnicity and religion, modern state forms, democratization processes, and technological scientism.¹⁰¹ What remains common to scholarly claims about genocide in Africa's postcolony is their acknowledgement of a peculiar kind of rationality that is responsible for propelling forward and intensifying exterminatory practices. Furthermore, these scholarly claims insist that this genocidal rationality is modern and colonial.

It is perhaps important to reiterate the more than cursory influence of European colonialism in not only the historical and political contexts of genocides occurring in Africa's postcolonies but also in the histories and politics of applying the genocide concept to mass atrocities in Africa's postcolonies. It is clear, therefore, that the genocide concept has been strongly entangled in colonial and postcolonial discourses in Africa. My aim in the present project is not to advocate for disentangling the genocide concept from its multiple roots or from its roots in the relatively recent history of European colonialism. Perhaps such a project may help to broaden considerations of genocidal rationales at work in different African contexts while offering more nuanced accounts of the causes and outcomes of genocide in Africa. My interest is essentially to underline these entanglements in ways not generally accounted for in the cultural representations of genocides occurring in Africa's postcolonies, especially when the genocide concept serves

100 For discussions about the history and practice of Western racism and on the notion of modern states and scientific rationality as racist see, for example, David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State*, Blackwell Publishers, 2002; Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Cornell UP, 1999; George M. Frederickson, *Racism: A Short History*, Princeton UP, 2003; Eze, ed., *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, Blackwell Publishers, 1997.

101 See, for example, Jacques Depelchin, *Silences in African History: Between the Syndromes of Discovery and Abolition*, Mkuki na Nyota, 2005; Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, University of California Press, 1985; Jacobs, *The Brutality of Nations*; Okpaku, ed., *Nigeria: Dilemma of Nationhood: An African Analysis of the Biafran Conflict*, The Third Press, 1972; Uzoigwe, *Visions of Nationhood*; Omar McDoom, "War and Genocide in Africa's Great Lakes Since Independence," *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*, edited by Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses, Oxford UP, 2013, pp. 550–75.

as the vocabulary governing how such mass atrocities have come to be understood, challenged, struggled with, and written about. One important missing link in the conception of African genocide as derived from and underpinned by Africans' experiences of European colonialism is due acknowledgement of the extent to which Africans', and indeed the world's, understanding of postcolonial mass violence has been shaped by the representational tropes and practices associated with the legacy of the Holocaust. I will now go on to discuss in the next chapter how the Holocaust serves as the "political unconscious"¹⁰² of cultural representations of African genocides, and thus as a significant bedrock for imaginative representations of genocide in Africa's postcolonies.

102 I use this phrase as Fredric Jameson uses it in his book *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Cornell UP, 1981), to highlight the implicit ideological elements governing representations of genocide in Africa.

2

The Holocaust and Literary Representation of Postcolonial African Genocides¹

Genocidal atrocities in Africa have provoked a body of imaginative literature which, among other things, has attempted to imagine the conditions giving rise to genocides. Taken together, this literature has tried to make genocides in Africa thinkable in certain ways. Importantly, it highlights a confluence of sensibilities shaping atrocity writing in Africa since the mid-twentieth century. It is noteworthy that at the heart of this important literary confluence lies the Holocaust. Hence I call attention in this chapter to the relationship of the Holocaust to this literature on genocide in postcolonial Africa.² My contention is that only when these literatures are read within the broader cultural contexts within which they have been written will their importance be fully realized. To be sure, literary works on postcolonial African genocides are not isolated from the political discourses that appropriated the genocide rhetoric for different political aims. My interest is more in how literary works not only are entangled in the political contexts

1 Some sections of this chapter have been previously published as “Genocide and Postcolonial African Literature,” *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2019, pp. 423–42. They are reprinted with permission of Cambridge University Press’s *Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*.

2 In recent years, scholars are beginning to make “the case for seeing Jewish studies and postcolonialism as part of a historical constellation that has mutual filiations and genealogies” (Willi Goetschel and Ato Quayson, “Introduction: Jewish Studies and Postcolonialism,” *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2016, p. 1). My study highlights aspects of these filiations and genealogies as underpinned by the influence of the Holocaust on African genocide literature.

of violence but also, importantly, function to produce meanings of genocide through their representations of violent forms.

The implication of the Holocaust in African traumatic memory motivates a reappraisal of recent African literary histories through the lens of literary, historical, and philosophical responses that supply the vocabularies through which colonial and postcolonial African suffering has been rendered thinkable. Figurations of European racism against Jews, Jewish suffering, martyrdom, and survival inform dominant literary and historical themes emanating from genocidal contexts in postcolonial Africa. Accordingly, as I will go on to show in the specific Nigerian and Rwandan contexts, representations of African suffering since late colonial and postcolonial times have depended to some extent on verbal and symbolic languages of violence supplied by those attempting to depict the Holocaust. In trying to witness and make genocides occurring in the African postcolonies thinkable, African and non-African writers have appropriated cosmopolitanized memories of the Holocaust in ways resulting in the depiction of African genocidal suffering understood in Eurocentric terms. Consequently, African literary debts to representations of the Holocaust in Europe and North America may suggest a kind of continuing colonization of the language of mass violence on the continent. To appreciate the depth of my claims in this chapter, it is important to further understand the discursive nature and critical receptions of writings responding to genocidal mass atrocities in Nigerian and Rwandan contexts.

Writing the Genocide of the Igbo in Nigeria: Rethinking the Genre of War Fiction

To date, no event in Nigeria's colonial and postcolonial history has produced more literary and historiographical responses than the genocide and war of 1966–70. Hundreds of literary works—including novelistic, biographical, poetic and dramatic texts—have appeared since 1968.³ The first published novel about these events was in German in 1969: Victor Nwankwo's *Der Weg nach Udima* [*The Road*

3 See Wendy Griswold, *Bearing Witness: Readers, Writers, and the Novel in Nigeria*, Princeton UP, 2000; Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, "From the Horse's Mouth: The Politics of Remembrance in Women's Writing on the Nigerian Civil War," *Body, Sexuality, and Gender: Versions and Subversions in African Literatures*, edited by Flora Veit-Wild and Dirk Naguschewski, vol. 1, Editions Rodopi, 2005, pp. 221–30.

to *Udima*].⁴ This novel was also the only one on the subject published during the war. It highlights the realities of the ways both the Nigerian and Biafran militaries used or disposed of civilian Igbo people/Biafrans, seemingly at will. The use of deceitful slogans and wartime propaganda, especially by the Nigerian military, feature prominently in Nwankwo's novel. Some characters in the story resemble historical German figures, a notable example being Ukpabi Asika, an Igbo working as civilian administrator for the Federal Military Government of Nigeria, whom the Biafrans nicknamed "Lord Haw Haw", a reference to the World War II propagandist William Joyce.⁵

After the end of the war in January 1970 a tremendous number of publications began to emerge.⁶ In very important but not always direct ways, many of these writings address themes of genocide and war, reimagining the circumstances fuelling mass atrocities. Nevertheless,

4 The manuscript was originally written in English. Nwankwo met the German journalist Ruth Bowert, who was covering the war at the time. She liked the story and gave it to Franz-Josef Stummann, who translated it into German and got it published in 1969. The original English manuscript was lost during the war and an English translation of the German version was published as *The Road to Udima* in 1985 (Fourth Dimension, 1985). For a discussion of the publication history and Nwankwo's thematic concerns in *The Road to Udima* see, for example, Nikolai Jeffs, "Ethnic 'Betrayal', Mimicry, and Reinvention: The Representation of Ukpabi Asika in the Novel of the Nigerian-Biafran War," *Revue LISA/LISA e-journal*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2012, pp. 280–306.

5 Jeffs, "Ethnic 'Betrayal'," pp. 283–85.

6 A few notable examples that received and continue to receive critical attention include the following: J. P. Clark's poetry collection *Casualties* (1970); Chinua Achebe's poetry collection *Beware Soul Brother* (1971) and his short story collection *Girls at War and Other Stories* (1972); Wole Soyinka's prison memoir *The Man Died* (1971), his play *Madmen and Specialists* (1971), and his novel *Season of Anomy* (1973); Sebastian Mezu's *Behind the Rising Sun* (1971); Kole Omotosho's novel *The Combat* (1972); John Munonye's novel *A Wreath for the Maidens* (1973); Elechi Amadi's memoir *Sunset in Biafra* (1973) and his novel *Estrangement* (1986); Eddie Iroh's novel trilogy *Forty-Eight Guns for the General* (1976), *Toads of War* (1979), and *The Siren in the Night* (1982); Flora Nwapa's novel *Never Again* (1975) and her short story collection *Wives at War and Other Stories* (1984); I. N. C. Aniebo's novel *Anonymity of Sacrifice* (1974); Chukwuemeka Ike's novel *Sunset at Dawn* (1976); Isidore Okpewho's novel *The Last Duty* (1976); Rosina Umelo's memoir *Felicia* (1978); Chinua Achebe's and Dubem Okafor's poetry collection *Don't Let Him Die* (1978); Cyprian Ekwensi's novels *Survive the Peace* (1976) and *Divided We Stand* (1980); Buchi Emecheta's novel *Destination Biafra* (1982); Kalu Okpi's *Biafra Testament* (1982); Ossie Enekwe's novel *Come Thunder* (1984); Leslie Jean Ofoegbu's memoir *Blow the Fire* (1985); Ken Saro-Wiwa's novel *Sozaboy* (1985); Festus Iyayi's novel *Heroes* (1986); Anthonia Kalu's short story collection *Broken Lives and Other Stories* (2003); and Chimamanda Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006).

critical reception of these books has conspired to mute the theme of genocide, as critics have mainly discussed them as examples of war literature. My discussion here focuses on the critical reception of novels, as the novel as a literary genre has so far received the most sustained and committed scholarly attention. But what I say about the so-called war novels in Nigeria applies to other genres of writing related to that violent past.

Taken broadly, critics have tended to categorize any novels representing the violent events of 1966–70 in Nigeria as “war novel[s]”, “civil war novel[s]”, “Nigerian [civil] war novel[s], or Biafra War novel[s]”.⁷ To be clear, these novels embody themes of war in ways that necessitate their reading as war fiction as well—as long as we understand it to mean a war of extermination. In fact, Lemkin conceives genocide as war, except, for him, genocide signifies total war in which no distinction is made between enemy combatants and civilian non-combatants. Recent scholarship, especially in political studies, has also highlighted the nexus between war and genocide.⁸ The strength and coherence of claims concerning the existence of links between these two violent processes requires the revision of our conceptions of genocide and war, otherwise understood as mutually exclusive processes/categories.

For example, in the case of the Biafra–Nigeria War one such critical link connects war and genocide to nationalism. Frequently, nationalism is the driving force of both war and genocide. Ironically, at the same time nationalism is often a response to (and outgrowth of) war and genocide. The relation of war to genocide in the Nigerian context is not marginal, but rather central to understanding literatures written in response to the atrocities of 1966–70. However, the discourse on the Biafran War has tended to sideline any critical consideration of

7 For some notable recent scholarly discussions of some of these novels as war fiction see, for example, Coundouriotis, *The People's Right to the Novel*; Hugh Hodges, “Writing Biafra: Adichie, Emecheta and the Dilemmas of Biafran War Fiction,” *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 43, no. 4, 2013, pp. 49–68; Falola and Ezekwem, *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War*; see also some important older scholarly accounts: Willfried F. Feuser, “Anomy and Beyond: Nigeria's Civil War in Literature,” *Presence Africaine: Revue Culturelle du Monde Noir/Cultural Review of the Negro World*, vols 137–38, 1986, pp. 113–51; Chinyere Nwahunanya, “The Aesthetics of Nigerian War Fiction,” *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 37, no. 3, 1991, pp. 427–43; Chidi Amuta, “The Nigerian Civil War and the Evolution of Nigerian Literature,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1983, pp. 85–99.

8 See, for example, Straus, “Destroy Them to Save Us”.

genocide and its representation in the Nigerian context in ways that have ended up excluding from serious consideration some important questions about that violent past. The point is that the particular forms of the discourse on war in Nigeria barely accommodate an understanding of the exterminatory character of the violence witnessed and experienced at the time. Recovering the discourse of genocide in creative and critical responses to Nigeria's traumatic past, as I argue, offers the possibility of more complete readings of novels taking the Biafran conflict as their subject.

As war fiction, what seems most pertinent to any scholarly discussion of these novels is the following: (1) how the experience of war propels a rethinking and reimagining of postcolonial nationhood from the viewpoint of "ordinary people";⁹ (2) how the emergence of "the Nigerian war novel" or "Biafra War novel" presupposes an evolving "Nigerian national literature" that is based on apprehensions of war as a crucible of national births or rebirths;¹⁰ (3) how the aesthetic choices evident in Nigerian war fiction suggest fictional, historiographical, and ethical dilemmas implicit in writing war in Nigeria;¹¹ and (4) how writings about the Nigerian civil war provide a template for reimagining Nigerian nationhood in terms of gender and class justice.¹² Scholars who have taken up these issues have produced work that tends to advance two broad theoretical claims. The first holds up so-called Nigerian war fiction as a "people's history" that reimagines Nigerian nationhood based on the experiences of common peoples and in some other accounts based on the experiences of gendered subjects. The second regards this body of literature as dramatizing a contest between relatively "introverted" and "extroverted" national literatures.

9 See, for example, Coundouriotis, *The People's Right to the Novel*.

10 See, for example, Amuta, "The Nigerian Civil War"; Iniobong I. Uko, "Of War and Madness: A Symbolic Transmutation of the Nigeria-Biafra War in Selected Stories from *The Insider: Stories of War and Peace from Nigeria*," *War in African Literature Today*, vol. 26, 2008, pp. 49–59.

11 See, for example, Hodges, "Writing Biafra"; Feuser, "Anomy and Beyond"; Nwahunanya, "The Aesthetics of Nigerian War Fiction".

12 See Adimora-Ezeigbo, "From the Horse's Mouth"; Marion Pape, "Nigerian War Literature by Women: From Civil War to Gender War," *Body, Sexuality, and Gender: Versions and Subversions in African Literatures*, edited by Flora Veit-Wild and Dirk Naguschewski, vol. 1, Editions Rodopi, 2005, pp. 231–41; Oike Machiko, "Becoming a Feminist Writer: Representation of the Subaltern in Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra*," *War in African Literature Today*, vol. 26, 2008, pp. 60–70.

According to Eleni Coundouriotis,¹³ considered as a genre that articulates a popular Nigerian history, the Nigerian war novel is prodigiously a witness literature or set of proxy accounts testifying to the travails of common or ordinary peoples in their quest for survival during wartime. According to this reading, writers of war fiction in Nigeria's postcolony represent war using the "language of suffering" of people often sidelined by official histories.¹⁴ Owing to war writers' inclination to articulate the suffering of ordinary peoples and turn that suffering into a protest against war in general, Coundouriotis contends that the discourses of humanitarianism and victimization remain conspicuous in the Nigerian war novel. These discourses developed around a naturalistic aesthetic practice, particularly since naturalism is "historically entangled with the emergence of humanitarianism".¹⁵ The perceived ethical imperative to relate fully the horror and immensity of human suffering is one reason for naturalism's proclivity for details, which are supposed to invite the audience to empathize with sufferers, whose misery is documented in extremely fine detail.

Coundouriotis explains that writers' focus on ordinary people is their way of undermining official histories in favour of a more democratic explanatory project. This project condemns the divisive and militarized ethnic nationalisms fuelling conflicts in Africa's postcolony. The preference for naturalist aesthetics predisposes writers to stage war as an abnormal circumstance occurring in "an environment in which man appears as different from what he normally is, unmasking a self that he must subsequently struggle to disavow".¹⁶ Amid such chaos, human behaviour and action become the sum of the prevailing conditions

13 My focus is on Coundouriotis's book *The People's Right to the Novel*. It is a recent and perhaps definitive critique of African war fiction. In a compelling discussion it brings together as war literature some of the most important literatures of catastrophe in Africa's postcolony.

14 Coundouriotis also notes that the Biafran War influenced Western humanitarian practice by institutionalizing humanitarianism as a "proxy testimony" account of suffering. For more explanations of Biafra and Western humanitarian practices see, for example, Kevin O'Sullivan, "Humanitarian Encounters: Biafra, NGOs and Imaginings of the Third World in Britain and Ireland, 1967–70," *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 16, nos 2–3, 2014, pp. 299–315. For a discussion of humanitarianism as a practice that is based on accounts of traumatic experiences using vocabularies addressed to suffering see Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*, translated by Rachel Gomme, Princeton UP, 2009. See also Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, University of California Press, 2012.

15 Coundouriotis, *The People's Right to the Novel*, p. 3.

16 *The People's Right to the Novel*, p. 9.

of anomy. For Coundouriotis, writers of war fiction use their work to dramatize the nature of this chaotic environment and to caution against its deterministic elements, which undermine individual moral agency.¹⁷

Central to this reading of Nigerian/Biafran war fiction is the agent-structure question, and more specifically the causes and implications of social actions that are representationally dominant in these novels. I do not disagree with the critical reading calling attention to the prevalence of naturalist aesthetics in these novels. Issues of nationhood, audience, and aesthetic practice raised by this reading are also relevant for the consideration of these novels as genocide literature. However, a major problem with this reading of “Nigerian war novels” concerns the idea of “ordinary people” and their history. To be clear, *ordinariness* in this context suggests the conditions of deprivation, poverty, and, in some accounts, illiteracy that poor and common peoples of a nation usually experience. These ordinary peoples’ experiences frequently do not make it into official discourses and mainstream historiography, which is a reason why fiction writing that sheds light on marginal voices and perspectives becomes important. As Coundouriotis rightly notes, fictions of this kind provide a means to recover relegated experiences and put them at the centre of consideration regarding war and nationhood.

Yet this perspective on “ordinary people” in the context of a genocidal war makes no distinction between people conceived of as ethnic (or similarly identitarian) entities and people broadly understood as the *demos* (common people) of a nation. Indeed, the “people” of the novels are not, properly speaking, the ordinary people most affected by the events in Biafra. In fact, these so-called ordinary/common people are mostly Igbo peoples and other minoritized groups persecuted across Nigeria at the time of the conflict there. Their experiences were not by and large the experience of common Nigerian peoples generally. Rather, as many of the stories underline, Igbo peoples or Biafrans were victimized by a regime in Nigeria that was backed by the elites and the common peoples alike of other ethnicities. Between 1966 and 1967 this regime—the Federal Military Government of Nigeria

17 On this point about naturalism in African literature see also Neil Lazarus, “Realism and Naturalism in African Fiction,” *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, edited by Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson, Blackwell, 2007, pp. 340–44. Lazarus suggests in this essay that African naturalism is different from European naturalism because of “its commitment to a transindividual utopia” and its opposition “to the totalizing collectivities affirmed by realism” (p. 343).

led by Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon—supervised the targeted mass murders of thousands of mostly Igbo peoples who were living in Northern and Western Regions of Nigeria.¹⁸ And during the ensuing war between Nigeria and Biafra from July 1967 the Gowon government executed a draconian war policy of indiscriminate bombing of Biafran combatants and civilians alike, as well as using a strategy of blockade and starvation that led to more than two million casualties in Biafra.¹⁹ Therefore, to describe so-called “Nigerian war fiction” as part of the genre comprised of the Nigerian people’s novel ignores the genocidal circumstances of the Biafran crisis and its legacies that formed a crucial node in many literary accounts of that past.

Scholarly readings of the “Nigerian war novel” such as Coundouriotis’s attempt to make the case for reading works of this kind as literature of the people and for the people, the people here signifying the common peoples of the Nigerian nation. Such scholarship encourages us to view the Nigerian war novel as writing the Nigerian nation. Coundouriotis’s claims about “Nigerian war fiction” as the “people’s novel” echo popular scholarly work from the 1970s and 1980s that treats some of this “war” literature as narratives of an emergent Nigerian nationalism. The emergence of this scholarship coincided with the rise of socialist and feminist activism in the 1970s. Many critics and authors with these ideological leanings began at this time to reconsider the terms standard in discussions of the Biafra–Nigeria crisis.²⁰ Their aim was to

18 Chinua Achebe writes in moving detail about his own experience of escape and his observations of the systematic massacres of Igbo people in Lagos at the time. See his memoir *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, Heinemann, 2012. For a related experience based on escape from massacres occurring at the time in parts of the Northern Region of Nigeria see Dilorah Chukwurah, *Last Train to Biafra: Memories of a Biafran Child: A Personal Family Experience*, Grosvenor House, 2014.

19 For scholarly accounts on the Biafran crisis as genocide see, for example, Moses and Heerten, *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide*; Uzoigwe, *Visions of Nationhood*; Chima J. Korieh, editor, *The Nigeria-Biafra War: Genocide and the Politics of Memory*, Cambria Press, 2012; Ekwe-Ekwe, *Biafra Revisited*; Frederick Forsyth, *The Making of an African Legend: The Biafra Story*, Penguin, 1977; Jacobs, *The Brutality of Nations*.

20 For examples of some important socialist/Marxist criticisms proposing sociological readings of African/Nigerian literature see Omafume Onoge, “The Crisis of Consciousness in Modern African Literature,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1974, pp. 385–410; Amuta, “The Nigerian Civil War,” pp. 85–99. See also Craig W. McLuckie, *Nigerian Civil War Literature: Seeking an Imagined Community*, Edwin Mellen, 1990. For scholarly discussion of war fiction by women as indicative of an emergent feminist consciousness in Nigeria suggestive of a gender war see, for example, Pape, “Nigerian War Literature by Women,” pp. 231–41.

shift the analytical focus away from ethnicity and racism, as emphasis on the latter was assumed to be polarizing, tended to exceptionalize Igbo suffering, and appeared inadequate for thinking about the crisis from a widely shared national position. Hence scholars and writers with socialist and feminist bents began to interpret the Biafran crisis as one impelled by class and gender injustice, and not specifically ethnic/racial injustice. By focusing on class and gender struggles, these critics and writers downplayed the subject of genocide. The ethnic/racial underpinnings of the violent events of 1966–70 become muted in favour of an appreciation of suffering cashed-out broadly enough to accommodate experiences of injustice and hardship widely shared by other Nigerians.

In 1974 the Marxist–socialist critic Omafume Onoge published an influential essay titled “The Crisis of Consciousness in Modern African Literature”, wherein he makes the case for a sociological appreciation of modern literary history in Africa. Onoge claims that from the late colonial period African literature has developed in response to three writing impulses or consciousnesses: nativist, critical realist, and socialist. The nativist consciousness, exemplified in the Negritude writings of the Senegalese Leopold Sedar Senghor, is a literature of self-assertion responding to colonial violence. Critical realism, by contrast, characterizes the literature of postcolonial disillusionment, lamenting the failures of postcolonial African states to realize their promise of freedom and independence. For Onoge, the problem with these two creative impulses is that they fail to underscore the history of capital impelling the conditions of exploitation that these literatures are lamenting and, as such, fail to offer a usable vision of redress. For the critic, usable redress should organize around and dramatize class struggles by way of provoking in working peoples a new awareness of their place in the postcolonial capitalist world order. Accordingly, Onoge describes literatures thematizing class struggles as being impelled by a socialist impulse/consciousness. He endorses this consciousness because, for him, it allows authors to reimagine the postcolonial African state by dramatizing class struggles and by using the tensions constitutive of class conflict to mobilize working-class people against the neocolonial African state.

Drawing on Onoge’s sociological criticism of African literature and his endorsement of the socialist impulse, the critic Chidi Amuta sees in writing about Biafra an emerging Nigerian national literature that brings the popular concerns of working-class peoples of various ethnicities into the national consciousness. He notes thus: “literary works based on or inspired by the civil war in Nigeria, as well as those

that have arisen with the liberation struggles and other anti-imperialist struggles in Africa, represent some of the most important manifestations of the national imperative in African literature.”²¹ For Amuta, the focus in these writings on working-class experience suggests that the war helped to rid “Nigerian literature of the disturbing infestation of [ethnic] gods and godlings”,²² thus serving as an artistic response to a national experience of capitalist exploitation foisted by colonialism: “With the receding ethnic base, the sacred groves of ethnic deities are relieved of the unwholesome duty of serving as moral sanctuaries for people who pour libation with beer and imported spirits.”²³ Amuta suggests in this quote that the emergent Nigerian war novel, focusing on Nigerian common and working people’s experience, has come to remedy the distractions aided by previously ethnic-driven literary works that he regards as complicit in neocolonial capitalist exploitations of the working people. According to Amuta, this remedy is possible because these war novels have been underpinned by Marxist ideologies that predisposed writers to dramatize the crisis of postcolonial nationhood as based on class struggle.

Insisting on viewing postcolonial violence in terms of class struggle, these critics, and some writers,²⁴ dismiss previous literary works concerned with realities in Nigeria’s postcolony as problematic. According to the critics, these works, the kind Onoge has categorized as driven by nativist and critical-realist consciousness, are problematic because they represent the national experience of capitalist exploitation as localized ethnic experiences. Accordingly, as critics such as Amuta suggest, many of these writings about the problems of postcolonial nationhood infused with ethnic consciousness contributed to the crisis in Nigeria because they failed to envision the postcolonial state as resting on shared structures of meaning and experience, particularly the shared experiences of working peoples’ impoverishment and

21 Amuta, “The Nigerian Civil War,” p. 86.

22 “The Nigerian Civil War,” p. 93.

23 “The Nigerian Civil War,” p. 93.

24 There are writers whose novels appear deliberately to reimagine the 1966–70 crisis from apparently Marxist perspectives. See, for example, Okpewho’s *The Last Duty*, Iyayi’s *Heroes*, and Saro-Wiwa’s *Sozaboy*. Yet, even in these novels—for example, Okpewho’s *The Last Duty* and Iyayi’s *Heroes*—the subject of genocide is not overly sacrificed for an entirely class understanding of the crisis. In part, Okpewho’s novel centres on the genocidist politics informing relationships between Igbo residents and other ethnicities in the then Mid-Western Region of Nigeria during the war. Iyayi’s *Heroes* recounts a Nigerian journalist’s testament to the deliberate and systematic violence against Igbo civilians.

suffering across ethnicities. These critics propose that, by focusing on class, writers could speak to common experiences of exploitation and suffering in ways that serve to promote a Nigerian victimization narrative, as opposed to more fragmentary narratives tied to the experience of “other” victims belonging to distinct ethnic groups.

The obvious problem with such a view is that it tends to obscure the extent of the chaos brought about by colonialism’s forceful integration of different, previously autonomous groups into the colonial state. Dismissing this reality cannot resolve the problems it presents. The suggestion that focusing on certain shared experiences, such as class and gender injustices, can resolve the problem of ethnic strife in the postcolony is simply unrealistic. On the one hand, it tends to assume that the experiences of so-called working peoples are the same across ethnicities within the postcolonial state. As several writers show in their novels, many Igbo working people killed in the massacres of 1966 or forced to leave their places of residence in other regions outside the East suffered prejudice and aggression for several reasons, including the fact that, as Igbo, they were viewed as an economic threat to working members of other ethnicities. It may be worth recalling that most of the people who, responding to this *threat*, took active part in the 1966 campaigns to exterminate *nyamiri* (a derogatory Hausa term for the Igbo) across the Northern Region were, in fact, members of the *Talakawa* (the proletariat or commoner in Hausa), whose cause progressive political leaders such as Aminu Kano championed. The suffering of Igbo working people contending with postcolonial capitalist exploitation and ethnic prejudice in their regions of settlement cannot at the same time serve to advance an understanding of the widely shared experiences and commonalities of other Nigerian peoples.

To be sure, there is more to the muting of ethnicity in the literature of war and genocide in Nigeria. In fact, I suspect that in muting ethnicity critics such as Amuta were also trying to correct historical memory and position class as a more encompassing paradigm for understanding the challenges of the postcolonial state. One recalls that, from the outset, the crises that led to the genocide and war in Nigeria always had a class dimension. In colonial and post-independence Nigeria it was largely the members of the elite (the “traditional” rulers and the Western-educated political class) who dominated the competition for power, wealth, and prestige. However, as Chinua Achebe’s novel *A Man of the People* suggests, the elite class used the terminology of “the tribe”, which decades of colonial discourse had entrenched as an explanatory device for everything African, to mobilize support. This device came in handy

before and during the war as a way of characterizing it as a *national* event. However, if it helped them to explain the war, it was less helpful in explaining the *ethnic* emphasis in the violence against the Igbo that preceded the war and the programme of starvation that the Nigerian state adopted in its prosecution of the war. If nationalism and Marxist ideology inspired Amuta et al. to mute the *ethnic* identity of the victims of ethnic extermination in Nigeria, so did the impulse to correct prior mischaracterizations of the war.

Equally, Igbo writers from the Biafra region have produced the majority of the novels later claimed as Nigerian war novels. Many of these authors, writing during and after the defeat of Biafra, have used their work to account for their experience as “Igbos/Biafrans”, as opposed to “Nigerians”, or to account for the intergenerational legacies of that conflict. For example, in her discussion of women’s writing on the violent events of 1966–70, scholar and writer Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo observes that no woman outside the Biafra region has yet written a full-length literary work or a memoir centring on the experience.²⁵ However, at the same time she classifies her selection of writings by Biafran/Igbo women as an instance of Nigerian civil war literature. Even so, she never explains how these writings serve or function as specifically “Nigerian” literature.

Like that of several other critics, Adimora-Ezeigbo’s feminist criticism of Biafran writing takes what are arguably specifically “Biafran” (or, to distill it further, “Igbo”) stories and claims them as articulations of an emergent Nigerian national feminist consciousness, one suggestive of writers’ attempts to transcend an ethnic imaginary in favour of one that is more broadly national. This scholarly claim misrecognizes the commitments of writers who reject identification with the project of Nigerian nationalism, a cause in the pursuit of which many Igbo people/Biafrans lost their lives. One way to understand such scholarly distortions is to consider the question of the audience of this body of literature.

Again, I turn to Coundouriotis. We may consider part of her attempt in *The People’s Right to the Novel* as one of breaking with critical practices that have always interpreted African writing as directed at Western audiences. For example, Eileen Julien has argued that the implied reader of much African writing is Western. She describes this supposed attribute in African writing as marking what she refers to as “extroverted” literature. The notion of extroverted literature designates African literatures that are essentially addressed to Western audiences

25 Adimora-Ezeigbo, “From the Horse’s Mouth,” p. 223.

located outside of Africa.²⁶ Coundouriotis uses her reading of so-called African war novels to challenge the claim that African writers address Western audiences in their work. For Coundouriotis, African/Nigerian war fiction disrupts this extroverted tradition. She instead moves to explain the specifics of what she views as a set of “introverted” representational practices yielding works directed towards African audiences. Introverted literature speaks to the people within the nations whose traumas are being depicted, and so Coundouriotis views Nigerian war fiction as contributing to efforts to redefine the nation in Africa’s postcolony.

Contrary to Coundouriotis’s claims that so-called Nigerian war fictions are introverted and primarily address Nigerian audiences, I argue first of all against any such dichotomy between introversion and extroversion. For instance, if we consider the possibility that some Igbo writers might have considered Nigerians residing outside the immediate traumatic contexts of the violence as their audience, then the claim about an introverted literature becomes complicated. By itself, even if we accept hypothetically—because in reality this is far from the case—that the primary audience of such writing consists of members of the Nigerian nation, writing [to] Nigeria will not automatically presuppose introversion, as the Nigerian audience in question resides outside the immediate traumatic context of Biafra that informs the writing.

Second, a major problem with seeing so-called Nigerian war fiction as introverted is that doing so conceives of this kind of writing as contributing to the postcolonial nation state’s establishment. This is perhaps one major flaw with critical discourses on African war writing in general: its emphasis on the nation and the national project. Some of the novels Coundouriotis and other critics read as examples of national literature—such as Soyinka’s *Season of Anomy*, Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and so on—resist any such pigeonholing/localizing. If anything, they speak against and beyond the nation.

What changes in our understanding of these so-called “war” novels when we approach them as responses to a genocide? By reading these fictions as genocide literature, it becomes possible to problematize sweeping claims that they perform a service for postcolonial Nigeria. The scholarly de-emphasizing of the specifically ethnic character of the Biafran conflict in favour of references to broader categories of class and gender identity shifts attention away from the exterminatory

26 See Eileen Julien, “The Extroverted African Novel,” *The Novel, Volume I: History, Geography, and Culture*, edited by Franco Moretti, Princeton UP, 2006, pp. 667–700.

character of the violence meted out against those identified as Igbo. By so doing, many critics of this literature ignore questions of genocide and privilege the notion of the shared struggles and plights of oppressed Nigerian peoples generally conceived. In this way, too, the peculiar circumstances that condemned targeted groups to destruction in the postcolonial state is presented by these critics as a measure of national class and gender oppression, even when both wealthy and poor Igbo peoples, men as well as women, were targeted for massacres and expulsion across different parts of Nigeria. This kind of scholarship demonstrates a general and enduring failure to respond to the violence against the Igbo as such in Nigerian and Biafran writing. This is a significant failure, as it obscures links between the traumatic experience of genocide, defeat in war, and an emergent exilic and diasporic consciousness among the defeated that led several writers to appropriate a different, universalizing vocabulary in order to articulate their experience of suffering.

Many of the novels held up by critics as Nigerian war novels barely depict battlefield combat. Most of these novels focus on atrocities perpetrated against civilians, not on military operations per se.²⁷ These novels chronicle the trauma that the massacres across other regions in Nigeria, the imposition of an economic blockade on Biafra, and the endless shelling of towns and villages by the Nigerian military caused the Igbo civilian population. In other words, they appear to describe a war of extermination that is total. To enlist these novels as “Nigerian civil war novels” without qualification or nuance is to take for granted something about the nature of the violence these writers are attempting to imagine. While it is noteworthy that war fiction is an expansive genre, which in recent years has come to include experiences of suffering unrelated to battlefield encounters, one still needs to view differently a sustained literary practice that has consistently focused on atrocities perpetrated against defenceless civilians. If, as Lemkin explains, genocide is also a kind of war systematically directed against a population in a way that blurs the boundary between combatant and civilian, then any conception of war fiction needs to account differently

27 The few novels that show military combat are written mainly by soldiers who fought during the war. Examples of this kind of work are Aniebo's short stories and his novel, *Anonymity of Sacrifice*, which represents the combat experiences of Biafran soldiers. Other novels that portray significant details of battlefield encounters include Iroh's trilogy *Forty-Eight Guns for the General*, *Toads of War*, and (marginally) *The Siren in the Night*, as well as Mezu's *Behind the Rising Sun*.

for bodies of imaginative writing calling attention to, respectively, aggression against civilians and the violence of the combat experience.

The failure in Biafra scholarship to account for the genocidal character of postcolonial violence has affected cognizance of writers' attempts to create a vocabulary supple yet probing enough to capture the contradictions inherent in African violence, some of which are exterminationist. This scholarly snub of genocide and its related discourses in and about Biafra has resulted in neglect and misrecognition of certain dominant representational approaches in literatures about that past, mostly manifest in the influence of the Holocaust on these writings.

To be sure, I am by no means claiming that reframing the discourse on Biafra using the frame of genocide is less problematic, or that it will adequately answer all the complex questions which that past and its legacies raise. In fact, as I will go on to elaborate in subsequent sections of this chapter and in the book generally, the frame of genocide as it has been represented in the literature brings its own challenges. One major tendency in the artistic representation of the crisis as a genocide has been to compare it to the Holocaust, which in part is a way that writers try to legitimize it as a genocide. But, by so doing, the violence is frequently deterritorialized from its historical contexts and presented as a story of absolute evil. The question here is thus: what is gained and what is obscured by calling it a genocide? As I will elaborate shortly in the context of Rwanda, by deploying the specific forms of the rhetoric of genocide (indebted to the Holocaust) as an artistic frame the violence is pulled out of the history of colonialism, ethnic violence, and even African geopolitics, and is instead regarded as a self-sufficient event with a beginning and an end that can be understood in comparison with the Holocaust. This tendency often simplifies complicated history into a story of evil in response to a moral imperative. Yet my goal in calling attention to the prevalent theme of genocide in these writings is to highlight an important subject in the discourse that critical practices over the years have excluded from the discussion. Importantly, too, it is crucial to think about the questions of what is gained, obscured, or left out by framing discussion of violent events in Africa as war or genocide.

Writing Rwandan Genocide: On the Emergence of an African Genocide Canon

Apart from journalistic accounts of atrocities and a few unpopular literary publications, committed writing about the 1994 atrocities

in Rwanda did not begin until after 1998. In 1996 a US-based Rwandan academic, Aimable Twagilimana, published the first novel about the events leading up to the genocide, *Manifold Annihilation*.²⁸ Although published two years after the 1994 genocide, *Manifold Annihilation* focuses on pre-1994 events in Rwanda apparently because the writer completed the book in 1993. Unlike most accounts of the genocide, Twagilimana's novel concentrates on events leading up to the genocide, highlighting the conditions of violence that were an omnipresent feature of the Rwandan civil war. Twagilimana remains one of a few writers to write about the civil war. In other words, *Manifold Annihilation* remains one of the only available literary works that addresses the 1990s Rwandan crisis from a perspective of war that provides context for thinking about the prevailing circumstances in the early 1990s that prompted the genocide of 1994.

By the time *Manifold Annihilation* appeared in 1996, only a few testimonial and personal accounts of the genocide had been published. Most of the work in print at this time had been reports of investigations into the genocide. The best known of these documentary texts include the influential African Rights reports published in 1995 as *Rwanda: Death, Despair and Defiance*, reports and investigative documents by Alison Des Forges such as *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*, published in 1999, and *Rwanda: Histoire d'un genocide* ["Rwanda: History of a Genocide"] by Colette Braeckman. In 1997 the first survivor testimony, by Yolande Mukagasana, was published in French under the title *La Mort ne veut pas de moi* ["Death Does Not Want Me"]. In addition, journalistic reports and other works of non-fiction, such as Philip Gourevitch's *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families* and Jean Hatzfeld's *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak*, were influential in calling attention to the Rwandan genocide.

Many scholars, however, believe that the event that most crucially shaped artistic responses to the 1994 genocide was a commemorative project from 1998 known as *Rwanda: Ecrire par devoir de mémoire* ["Rwanda: Writing as Duty to Memory"].²⁹ This project was

28 For a discussion of Aimable Twagilimana's *Manifold Annihilation* (Rivercross Pub, 1997) in terms suggestive of genocide and civil war fiction see, for example, Nicki Hitchcott, "Visions of Civil War and Genocide in Fiction from Rwanda," *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 48, no. 2, 2017, pp. 152–65.

29 Boubacar Diop renders the theme as "Rwanda: Writing against Oblivion". See Diop, *Africa beyond the Mirror*, translated by Wülfing-Leckie and Beschea-Fache, Ayebia Clarke, 2014, p. 5.

first proposed in 1995 by Chadian writers Nocky Djedanoum and Maimouna Coulibaly, who were the directors of the festival Fest’Africa in Lille, France. According to Boubacar Boris Diop, one of the writers who participated, the project arose out of some African writers’ expression of commitment to write about violent realities occurring on the continent following the 1995 execution of writer and environmental rights activist Ken Saro-Wiwa by the Nigerian military government of Sani Abacha.³⁰ The writers gathered at the festival thought that it was about time African writers took a more active role in writing about violent events taking place on the continent, particularly the atrocious realities beyond each writer’s national borders. During the discussions at the 1995 Fest’Africa, as Diop recollects, it became apparent to many of the writers that they had mostly failed to write about the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda, an attempted extermination that Diop considered to be “one of the greatest tragedies of the twentieth century”.³¹

To remedy this failure, the Fest’Africa directors decided to send ten African artists to Rwanda to bear witness to the genocide in order to demonstrate African writers’ ethical commitment to memorializing the tragedy. With the sponsorship of *Fondation de France* and the French Ministry of Cooperation, as well as with the support of the Rwandan government, participating writers travelled to Rwanda in 1998 to memorialize the genocide in its aftermath and interact with survivors four years after it took place. There was barely any doubt in the minds of the artists that the event they were tasked to represent constituted a genocide. The guiding objective of the project was to attempt genocide memorialization out of a sense of the writer’s moral duty³² “to act against forgetting and to express solidarity with the Rwandan people”.³³

A central feature of the publications from this project is that all the works focused essentially on events that took place in Rwanda between April and July 1994.³⁴ In narratives of the events the trope of descent

30 See Véronique Tadjo, “Interview with Boubacar Boris Diop,” *African Identities*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2010, pp. 425–30. See also Diop, *Africa beyond the Mirror*.

31 Tadjo, “Interview with Boubacar Boris Diop,” p. 426.

32 For a discussion of the project’s theme see, for example, Audrey Small, “The Duty of Memory: A Solidarity of Voices after the Rwandan Genocide,” *Paragraph*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2007, pp. 85–100.

33 Martina Kopf, “The Ethics of Fiction: African Writers on the Genocide in Rwanda,” *Journal of Literary Theory*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2012, p. 66.

34 A list of the ten writers and artists who participated in the project: two Rwandan artists, Jean-Marie Vianney Rurangwa (who published a fictional interview exploring

is prevalent, perhaps because the writers and artists visited Rwanda as tourist-outsiders. It is remarkable that in the wake of the “*Rwanda: Ecrire par devoir de mémoire*” project a tremendous number of cultural and artistic responses to the genocide in Rwanda and by Rwandese began to emerge, including films and survivors’ memoirs.³⁵

The *Rwanda* project was not without its controversies, however. First among its critics were scholars. In response to participants’ framing of the project as a manifestation of their moral duty to remember, critics were quick to question the legitimacy and ideological foundations of a memory project sponsored by the French government, a key player in the genocide. Furthermore, some critics expressed concern about whose memory would be privileged in the project—that of the writers,

the causes of the genocide, *Le génocide des Tutsi expliqué à un étranger* (Le figuier, 2000) [“The Genocide of the Tutsi Explained to a Foreigner”] and Vénuste Kayimahe (who published a testimonial account of the genocide, *France-Rwanda. Les coulisses du génocide. Témoignage d’un rescapé*, 2001 [“France-Rwanda: Behind the Scenes of a Genocide: Testimony of a Survivor”]); Senegalese journalist, writer, and professor Boubacar Boris Diop (who published a novel in response to the genocide, *Murambi, le livre des ossements*, 2000 [translated into English by Fiona Mc Laughlin as *Murambi, the Book of Bones*, 2006]); Ivorian writer and poet Véronique Tadjo (who published a travelogue, *L’ombre d’Imana. Voyages jusqu’au bout de Rwanda*, 2000 [translated into English by Veronique Wakerley as *The Shadow of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda*, 2002]); Chadian writer Nocky Djedanoum (who published a poetry collection, *Nyamirambo!* 2000); Chadian-born writer Koulsy Lamko (who published a novel, *La phalène des collines*, 2000 [“A Butterfly in the Hills”]); Guinean writer Tierno Monénembo (who published a novel, *L’ainé des orphelins*, 2000 [translated into English by Monique Fleury Nagem as *The Oldest Orphan*, 2004]); Djibouti writer Abdourahman Ali Waberi (who published a travelogue, *Moisson de crânes. Textes pour le Rwanda*, 2000 [“A Harvest of Skulls: Texts for Rwanda”]); Burkina Faso writer Monique Ilboudou (who published a novel, *Murekatete*); and Kenyan writer Meja Mwangi, the only Anglophone writer in the group. Mwangi suspended publishing his own account. Nasrin Qader sees Mwangi’s inability to complete his Rwanda project of a duty to memory not as failure per se, but rather as a sign of “how a project [on memory] may resist its own end” (see Qader, *Narratives of Catastrophe: Boris Diop, ben Jelloun, Khatibi*, Fordham UP, 2009, p. 18). However, Mwangi later released a novel, *The Big Chiefs*, in 2007, an apocalyptic story of greed, power, and genocide, albeit not specifically focused on Rwanda.

35 See, for example, Paul Rusesabagina and Tom Zoellner, *An Ordinary Man: An Autobiography*, Viking, 2006; Immaculée Ilibagiza and Steve Erwin, *Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust*, Hay House, 2006; Esther Mujawayo and Souâd Belhaddad, *Survivantes*, Editions de l’Aube, 2004, and its sequel *La Fleur de Stéphanie*, Flammarion, 2006, testimonial works on trauma, recovery, and reconciliation. See also Gilbert Gatore, *The Past Ahead: A Novel*, translated by Marjolin de Jager, Indiana UP, 2012; Clemantine Wamariya and Elizabeth Weil, *The Girl Who Smiled Beads: A Story of War and What Comes After*, Doubleday, 2018.

survivors, perpetrators, or bystanders. This was not an unreasonable concern given that most of the texts emerging from the *Rwanda* project were published in France, and their translations generally addressed Western readerships. Martina Kopf summarizes the anxieties raised about the usefulness of such a project: “in addition to the question, whose memory they transmit and recreate, the question invariably arises, whose memory they nourish and intend to transform. Is it the collective memory of Rwanda, the collective memory of Africa or of an equally vague ‘world public’?”³⁶

The artists involved were well aware of the problems of the *Rwanda* project and concerned about the contribution it would make to discourse on the genocide. In response, they attempted to use their writings to foreground these problems.³⁷ As a result, even given legitimate ethical worries about language, audience, and the politics of memory, as well as the choice of style and representational strategies for writing about the genocide, many critics agree that the project was remarkably successful, if only because it popularized the genocide and shaped the nature of subsequent discussions about the atrocities that were committed before, during, and after the events of 1994. Some scholars thought that the project was significant for at least two major reasons. First, it provided a much-needed “African” perspective on the genocide, one that helped to reclaim the explanatory initiative from journalists and writers from the so-called Global North.³⁸ Second, the project contributed to modifying the ways of thinking and writing about genocide characteristic of the legacy of the Holocaust.³⁹

36 Kopf, “The Ethics of Fiction,” p. 68. For more on criticisms of the project see also Véronique Porra, “Y a-t-il une spécificité africaine dans la représentation romanesque de la violence génocidaire?” *Violences postcoloniales. Représentations littéraires et perceptions médiatiques*, edited by Isaac Bazié and Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, Berlin, 2011, pp. 145–63; Small, “The Duty of Memory”.

37 For more on these challenges and on writers’ ways of managing the ethical demands of writing about the 1994 genocide in Rwanda see, for example, Nicki Hitchcott, *Rwanda Genocide Stories: Fiction After 1994*, Liverpool UP, 2015.

38 See Alexandre Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda: Dismembering and Remembering Traumatic History*, Lexington Books, 2010, pp. 87–166.

39 See, for example, Kopf, “The Ethics of Fiction”. Zoe Norridge has also called attention to the “genericity” of literary works responding to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, arguing that the literatures “conform” to ideas about genocide from elsewhere, making the Rwanda genocide writings comparative by nature. See Zoe Norridge, “Writing against Genocide: Genres of Opposition in Narratives from and about Rwanda,” *Postcolonial Poetics: Genre and Form*, edited by Jane Hiddleston and Patrick Cowley, Liverpool UP, 2011, pp. 240–61.

It is worth examining the social and political processes that repressed considerations of mass atrocity as a genocide in one context (Nigeria) and canonized them in another (Rwanda).⁴⁰ In both the Nigerian and Rwandan contexts, literary works and the discourses shaping their interpretation serve to mark certain violent experiences as worth imagining and writing about, and others not. In the case of Nigeria, discussions of writing about the massacres of “Igbo people” or “Easterners” between 1966 and 1967 and during the war from 1967 to 1970 have tended to focus on vague ideas of civil war while sidelining the subject of genocide. Likewise, in the case of Rwanda, literary and critical responses to the Rwandan crisis have concentrated on the genocide of the Tutsi, but not often on the brutal civil war that began in that country around 1990 and which was being fought alongside the genocide that took place in 1994. The basis of post-1994 Rwandan national trauma, which may be detected in imaginative and critical writings about the country and its genocide, as well as the Rwandan state’s rules and regulations governing commemorative activity generally, focus almost entirely on the targeted mass killings that took place between April and June of 1994.

Unlike in Nigeria, where an allegedly genocidal Federal Military Government who won the war was in a position to define what meanings were ascribed to events in their aftermath, the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) insurgency defeated the government in Rwanda, a development that has contributed in important ways to how the memory of the violent past has been shaped subsequently. Some aspects of the memory of the war have not served the RPF government well as the basis for post-1994 Rwandan nationalism, since accounts of the conflict implicate the RPF in its extreme violence and atrocities.⁴¹

40 What these processes underscore crucially is the nature of what, for example, Jeffrey C. Alexander has described in his work concerning the emergence of the Holocaust as a cultural icon of genocide (see Alexander, *Remembering the Holocaust*). According to Alexander, the Nazi killing of Jewish peoples in Europe did not at first come to be regarded as a genocide or as the Holocaust. It was much later that some of the terms and frames of meaning that we now associate with the Nazi atrocities developed into what we know today as the Holocaust. The process that led to the emergence of the Holocaust as an icon of evil is rooted in narratives; in other words, is based on a signifying process. The signifying process is not always straightforward, but often involves a chain of complex activities working to authorize and regularize meanings—for example, legal processes, the erection of museums, rituals of commemoration, and different narrative forms and discussions shaping the ways that we come to understand events.

41 The official Rwandan government narrative of the war often emphasizes that the RPF fought the war to end genocide, a narrative that downplays some of the major political

Whereas in Nigeria the discourse of genocide did not gain traction in constructions of a post-war national consciousness,⁴² in Rwanda genocide figured prominently in the new Rwandan national identity. In order to sustain that consciousness, the Rwandan government of Paul Kagame has systematically repressed the memory of the long civil war and invested instead in a national imaginary organized around the memory of the 1994 genocide, which it officially conceives of as an extreme evil perpetrated almost entirely against the Tutsi that is on a moral par with the Holocaust.

As a result of this official shaping of Rwanda's national memory culture, artistic and discursive practices in the country have become heavily invested in the project of genocide representation. Many of the artists writing about the Rwandan genocide are non-Rwandans or Rwandans resident in Europe and North America. So far, their works have found significant traction with audiences outside of Rwanda. In order to address this global audience, a majority of whom are European and North American, many writers have drawn on vocabularies of suffering that are likely to resonate with readers located outside the specific traumatic context of their writing. Contrary to Coundouriotis's claim that "African" writers responding to postcolonial wars and genocide on the continent are writing [to] the nation, we can instead see an attempt in these genocide writings to write *beyond* the postcolonial and post-genocidal nation-state. If the violent encounters associated with colonialism motivated thinking about independence nationalism and the nation-state, postcolonial genocidal violence seems to inspire a radical rejection of the state, as well as any idea of the state's autonomy.

issues leading to the war, such as power-sharing and the reallocation of land to displaced Tutsi refugees. See, for example, Reyntjens, "Rwanda, Ten Years on".

42 The notion of a war fought in defence of Nigerian unity became the organizing condition for national consciousness. Igbo/Biafran victims lost the war. The narrative of their victimization cannot at the same time be the basis of the national consciousness of their oppressors. Hence the state represses the narrative of genocide that charges it with guilt in favour of a war memory that continues to describe that past as victory for Nigerian unity and as the heroic feat of Nigeria's military. To date, no significant monuments are erected in any part of the country to commemorate civilian victims. The date 15 January is known as Armed Forces Remembrance Day in Nigeria. The day is used to mark the official surrender of Biafra and kept in honour of "the unknown soldier" who sacrificed "his" life for Nigeria's unity.

**The Holocaust as Cultural Icon of Genocides in Africa:
The Examples of Nigeria and Rwanda Genocide Literatures**

During the Biafra–Nigeria War in the late 1960s a US-based Igbo poet, Jemie Onwuchekwa, compared the murder of Igbo peoples in Nigeria before and during the war to the murder of Jews by Nazi Germany, writing thus in a poem he titled “Requiem”:

Once in 53
Three times in 66
Nigerians shoot civilians
through the ears
rehearsing all known tortures
murdering all males
and raping old women
forcing teenage girls in leper clinics
hundreds butchered...
the 30,000 innocents
mowed down Nazi fashion
a final solution
that failed again.⁴³

In these lines, the poet–persona catalogues what they see as a historical process of persecutions and systematic murders of Igbo civilians by other Nigerian groups (especially in the North) occurring before and after Nigeria’s independence from Britain, which he considers similar to the Nazis’ “final solution”. The lines “a final solution / that failed again” encapsulate the poet’s defiant view that Biafra will survive the genocidal onslaught from Nigeria. The poet does not intend his funerary song in this poem to mourn the demise of Biafra. Rather, he intends it at the time as an oration to the murdered “innocents” whose deaths envisioned in the collection as a sacrifice are propelling the emergence of a new nation (Biafra), similar to the State of Israel rising from the ashes of the Holocaust following World War II. “Biafra,” writes the poet earlier in the collection, will emerge to “shake up / the bloody / [African] continent.”⁴⁴ But by the time Onwuchekwa’s collection

43 Jemie Onwuchekwa, *Biafra: Requiem for the Dead in War*, Papua Pocket Poets, 1970, p. 28.

44 Onwuchekwa, *Biafra*, p. 6.

appeared in 1970, Biafra had been defeated and no African Israel resulted from the Nigerian state's mass killings of the Igbo.

Similarly, employing complex biblical symbolism based on imagery depicting Jewish exile and return, Michael Echeruo addresses the raging war in Nigeria in his poetry collection *Mortality* (1968) by metaphorizing it as some kind of a creative process arising from catastrophe. In a poem titled "The New Jerusalem", the poet-persona describes the New Jerusalem of his imagination as "the loitering memory / of sweet birds / in Eden".⁴⁵ Like Onwuchekwa, Echeruo was living in the US at the time. He imagines himself as an exile in the US charmed by recollections of songs from an idyllic African home now encircled by chaos. In an explanatory note to this poem, Echeruo describes this New Jerusalem as "a conjunction of African and Jew",⁴⁶ linking the history of the Jewish state of Israel with modern African states, ostensibly Biafra in this case. Echeruo sees these nations, like the Jewish state of Israel, as being born from catastrophe.

To be sure, during the Biafran War in the late 1960s the Holocaust had not yet become the paragonic symbol of genocidal suffering that it is today. However, following the Eichmann trial in Israel and the Auschwitz trials in Germany in the early 1960s, awareness of the genocide of Jews by Nazi Germany was spreading beyond the western world. Such comparisons of suffering elsewhere to the Nazi genocide of Jews, as found in Biafra writing and its media reports, reveal the growing awareness of the Holocaust in African conflict zones at the time. The overt and implicit references to Nazi Germany's atrocities in Onwuchekwa's and Echeruo's poems cited above are not coincidental. Several literary accounts of the mass atrocities in Nigeria during and after the crisis years compared the experience of Igbo peoples in Nigeria to the Holocaust. In such literature, the comparison of Igbo suffering to the Holocaust (sometimes implicit and quite marginal) provides the basis for writers to champion the international recognition of the violence against the Igbo as a genocide and for recognizing the secessionist Biafra as a sovereign state necessitated (as in the case of Israel) in response to a genocide. Some other works that came after the defeat of Biafra were less nationalistic in their advocacy but made references to the Holocaust to pass a moral message on a supposedly universal condition of human cruelty. Consider a few other examples. In a

45 Michael Echeruo, *Mortality*, Longman, 1968, p. 19.

46 Echeruo, *Mortality*, p. 54.

poem titled “Vultures” from his 1971 collection *Beware Soul Brother*,⁴⁷ Chinua Achebe links the atrocities in Nigeria to Nazi atrocities at the death camps during World War II. The poem provides a reflection on a troubling realization that human beings possess simultaneously a capacity for human care and a vulture’s inhumane savagery. The poet–persona imagines atrocities in Nigeria by describing them to a vulture and his lover feasting on a corpse. The poet compares the Nigerian condition to the Commandant of the Nazi death camp at Belsen:

Thus the Commandant at Belsen
Camp going home for
the day with fumes of
human roast clinging
rebelliously to his hairy
nostrils will stop
at the wayside sweetshop
and pick up a chocolate
for his tender offspring
waiting at home for Daddy’s
return⁴⁸

Achebe’s reference to the Nazi atrocities in these lines evokes a popular conception of Nazi death camps as a site of savagery often symbolized using the imagery of the crematoria: that is, “fumes of / human roast”. These lines are also evocative of the “grave in the sky” metaphor used by Paul Celan in his “Death Fugue”, which describes the cremation of Jewish victims in the Nazi camps. But Achebe is more interested in his own poem in the ironies of human character, the human capacity for monstrosity and affection as situations dictate. Reference to the Holocaust in Achebe’s poem thus serves to provide an occasion for meditating on the ironic conditions of human cruelty and humaneness.

We find a related idea of the Holocaust as a metaphor for moralizing about the human condition in Wole Soyinka’s 1972 prison memoir

47 The collection was later republished, with a few additional poems, as *Collected Poems*. Yet the original structure of the collection was retained as follows: “Prologue”, “Poems about War”, “Poems Not about War”, “Gods, Men, and Others”, and “Epilogue”. Besides allusions to actual historical incidents in Biafra and Europe, the collection is saturated with a mixture of Igbo folklore and Judeo-Christian mythology.

48 Chinua Achebe, *Collected Poems*, Anchor Books, 2004, p. 52.

The Man Died. The Nigerian Federal Military Government had jailed Soyinka at the time because of his activist attempts to mediate between Biafra and Nigeria to resolve the crisis. In this memoir Soyinka expresses his frustration over the unending cycles of brutality and the pattern of genocidal murders taking place in Nigeria, a pattern he compares to the Holocaust:

How much longer will it go on, this pattern of power-initiated crime and the political scapegoat? A hideous image looms from those Nazi mists, the blood-thirst of a bestiality of power, a rabid snarl and slaving model for the Yisa Adejos⁴⁹ of the world, animalistic regressions which evoke a shudder even from the reconciled heart of carnage.⁵⁰

Just as with Achebe's reference to the Holocaust in his poem, Soyinka here evokes the Nazi death camp to convey his moral commentary on the banal and routinized nature of human cruelty. His other publications based on the 1966–70 crisis equally make references to Jewish experiences of atrocities in order to give moral commentaries about cruelty. For example, in his celebrated poetry collection *Idanre and Other Poems*, Soyinka justifies borrowing "alien" imagery from Germany for articulating local concerns. In a poem he wrote while in Berlin addressing the massacre of the Igbo in Northern Nigeria in 1966, titled "Massacre, October '66", he employs the imagery and symbols of autumn—the oak tree shedding its acorns that he observed in Berlin—to describe the massacres as a season of desecration. In the final lines he writes:

I borrow seasons of an alien land
In brotherhood of ill, pride of race around me
Strewn in sunlit shards. I borrow alien lands
To stay the season of a mind.⁵¹

In these lines Soyinka suggests that his representation of local experience using foreign imagery helps in a pragmatic way to promote

49 Yisa Adejo was one of the military officers that Soyinka encountered in a prison where he was held and interrogated during his twenty-seven-month incarceration between 1967 and 1969.

50 Wole Soyinka, *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka*, Harper & Row, 1972, p. 93.

51 Soyinka, *Idanre and Other Poems*, Methuen, 1969, p. 52.

an understanding of the massacres as a genocide by linking them to the more widely known “seasons of an alien land”.

Such comparison between Biafran/Igbo suffering and the Holocaust with the intention of conveying a moral message about a general condition of human cruelty and depravity pervades the atmosphere of Flora Nwapa’s 1975 Biafra novel, *Never Again*. Nwapa is the first female novelist from Nigeria and the first Biafran woman to publish a work of fiction on the crisis. “Never Again” echoes the credo of “Never Again Auschwitz”, which in part is a charge against global indifference to human suffering as well as an appeal to the world’s conscience so as to ensure that genocides and wars never recur. Having experienced severe suffering and witnessed extreme human cruelty during the crisis, Kate, the novel’s hero, meditates thus on the situation of human idiocy: “What folly! What arrogance, what stupidity led us to this desolation, to this madness, to this wickedness, to this war, to this death? When this cruel war was over, there will be no more war. It will not happen again, never again. NEVER AGAIN, never again.”⁵² Kate’s emphatic “never again” expresses her enduring commitment to witness atrocity and war suffering as a moral duty to posterity. “Never again” is also her way of stressing the reality of anguish that requires a more sober, intimate, and spiritual response to mass atrocity.

The comparison of Biafra to the Holocaust has implicitly continued in recent writings about Nigeria’s traumatic past, as in, for example, Nnedi Okorafor’s post-apocalypse fantasy *Who Fears Death* (2010), and notably too in Chimamanda Adichie’s novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), among others.⁵³ As in Nwapa’s *Never Again*, the comparison of the massacres of the Igbo to the Holocaust in some of these recent accounts reveals the writers’ attempts to construct an ethical vision of atrocity that gestures towards a wider global experience. In Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*, for example, among several other linkages to Holocaust memory in the novel, including direct comparison of Igbo victims to Jewish victims of Nazi genocide, the journal sub-text of the novel is significant for establishing linkages to the Holocaust. The journal’s title, “The World Was Silent When We Died”, evokes a moral indictment notable in Holocaust

52 Flora Nwapa, *Never Again*, Africa World Press, 1992, p. 73; emphasis in original.

53 For a scholarly exploration of the correlations between storytelling strategies in Holocaust literatures and contemporary “African trauma literature” see Robert Eaglestone, “‘You Would Not Add to My Suffering If You Knew What I Have Seen’: Holocaust Testimony and Contemporary Trauma Literature,” *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 40, nos 1–2, 2008, pp. 72–85.

writing, markedly in Elie Wiesel's *Night*. The original Yiddish version of *Night*, from which the French translation was derived, is titled *And the World Remained Silent*. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the charge of "silence" against "the world" is a moral indictment of indifference and a clarion call to act to end the suffering of others. These examples underline the more than cursory linkage of the Holocaust to the cultural representations of Igbo/Biafran suffering in Nigeria.

However, in these and other examples, the comparison of Igbo/Biafran suffering to the Holocaust should be understood as significantly decontextualizing, as well as dehistoricizing and depoliticizing, the writers' message from its local setting, invariably transforming it into a moral message on a broadly construed human condition. Lasse Heerten notes in *The Biafran War and Postcolonial Humanitarianism* that in the late 1960s, during the Biafra–Nigeria War, the Holocaust had not become "the symbolic core of a memory culture focused on genocidal suppression and violence"⁵⁴ but that it still played a significant symbolic function in helping to internationalize Biafran suffering. In his study, Heerten focuses on Western media representations of the war to show how Biafran humanitarian advocacy and Western media reports of the war compared the suffering of Biafrans to that of Jewish people caught up in the Nazi genocide. This comparison of Biafra to the Holocaust, according to Heerten, served to make both events visible in distinct ways while at the same time rendering aspects of both violent phenomena invisible. While on the one hand the Holocaust provided an analogue conducive to comprehending Biafran suffering as a genocide, on the other hand images of Biafran suffering provided Western audiences at the time with striking visuals that were depicted in the media as analogous to the suffering and anguish inflicted on Jewish people by the Nazis. Such comparisons, according to Heerten, contributed to shaping the Nazi genocide of Jews into the Holocaust in which "the murder of European Jews ceased to be one entry on a long list of Nazi crimes" but became instead "the historical and symbolical *core* of a new understanding of National Socialist rule and the Second World War".⁵⁵ This pattern of entanglement of Biafran and Holocaust memories that Heerten has described is what Michael Rothberg has explained as a "multidirectional" process through which atrocity memories mutually shape one another.

54 Heerten, *The Biafran War*, p. 177. See also Moses and Heerten, *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide*.

55 Heerten, *The Biafran War*, p. 202; emphasis in original.

Rothberg has argued that the emergence of the Holocaust as an icon of suffering evolved through a process of cross-referencing Jewish suffering under the Nazis with suffering elsewhere, particularly during the period of decolonization. Writing in *Multidirectional Memory*, Rothberg challenges the linear trajectory of memorialization used to consider the emergence of the Holocaust as a symbolic core for understanding genocide. The traditional understanding of the Holocaust's emergence as a cultural icon insists on three major moments: the Eichmann trials in Jerusalem in the early 1960s; the Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt from 1963 to 1965; and the 1978 American *Holocaust* miniseries. Rothberg contests this linear history and instead suggests a model of multidirectionality or cross-referencing in which memories of the Nazi genocide became entangled with those of atrocities elsewhere. A notable example in this regard is the Algerian War of Independence (1954–62) against colonial France, during which anti-war activists in Europe and decolonization thinkers compared the torture of and violence against Algerians with the Nazis' torture and murder of Jewish people during World War II.⁵⁶ Through such entanglements, the Holocaust facilitated the articulation of other histories of suffering at the same time as it developed into an icon of suffering able to shed light on events having little or nothing to do with it. For Rothberg, the entanglement of Holocaust memories with other atrocities is possible because "the public sphere" of atrocity representation is "a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions but actually come into being through their dialogical interactions with others".⁵⁷

Given this multidirectionality, it becomes possible to understand how the rhetorical comparison of Igbo suffering with the Holocaust in

56 Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, pp. 175–98.

57 Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 5. There is no consensus regarding how the Holocaust emerged as a cultural icon of genocidal suffering following World War II. The controversies hover around two broad claims: those suggesting that the distinct nature and enormity of violence perpetrated against Jewish people by the Nazis is the reason for the Holocaust's iconic status (see, for example, Avishai Margalit and Gabriel Motzkin, "The Uniqueness of the Holocaust," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1996, pp. 65–83) and those contending that the Holocaust became a powerful icon of suffering through complex social and political processes aided by cultural representations and comparison with atrocities elsewhere (see, for example, Alexander, *Remembering the Holocaust*; Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, Temple UP, 2006; Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*; Heerten, *The Biafran War*). My own discussion falls precisely within the latter discourse.

the media and cultural works—ostensibly through showing famished Biafran children as resembling the “Musselman” in the Nazi death camps, or by portraying victims’ corpses as heaps or collectives and not as individuals—participated in the creation of what was then an emerging international iconography of suffering founded on the idea of genocide, genocide taken in this sense to mean a racist, hate-driven violence directed against innocent victims.⁵⁸ In addition, Biafran and Western media representations of Biafran suffering, as Heerten’s study shows, thrived on the use and spectacularization of photographic images of famished Biafran children, which were used to advocate for humanitarian support and international intervention in the conflict. Hence Biafran war propaganda and Western media and humanitarian activism combined to represent Biafran suffering as comparable to the suffering of Jewish people in Nazi Germany. The claim is also that such Biafran media and cultural representations further exploited colonial narratives that stereotyped Igbo peoples as resembling Jews in order to champion Biafra’s struggle as one similar to that of the Jews and therefore to elicit support from the Western world. These representations created “rhetorical equivalence” between Biafran suffering under Nigerian onslaught and Jewish suffering under the Nazis in order to not only foster an understanding of the Biafran suffering as a genocide⁵⁹ but also to promote the recognition of the secessionist Biafra as a sovereign state—the idea being that Israel came after and as a consequence of the Holocaust and that Biafra was supposed to follow a similar line of emerging as a sovereign state following the Nigerian state’s genocide of the Igbo.

However, a focus on the representational practices at the time of conflict, as in Heerten’s study, generally leads us to conclude, erroneously, that the practice of comparing Biafran and Jewish suffering is essentially informed by an awareness of emergency actions required in response to the demand to end suffering in Nigeria by campaigning for the international recognition of atrocity as a genocide. But as such comparisons continued in conflict literature for years afterwards we must consider more closely the factors behind these practices. Heerten is probably right to conclude that representations of Biafra in the heat of the conflict left little room, particularly for Western audiences, who were the primary targets of such representations, to understand the complex causes and effects of the Biafran conflict. The result has been

58 Heerten, *The Biafran War*, pp. 178–85.

59 Heerten, *The Biafran War*, p. 202.

perhaps an oversimplification of secondary understandings of the conflict and consequently proposals offering easy solutions to complex and multifaceted problems. A major implication of this pattern of rhetorical comparison that uses “the imagery of innocent victims as universalized icons of humanity” is that it “depoliticizes, decontextualizes, and [frequently] dehistoricizes our understanding of complex emergencies”.⁶⁰ By comparing Biafran suffering to Jewish experiences in media representations at the time of conflict and in literature, both histories become deterritorialized and effectively reduced to a series of narrative acts focused on making atrocities public (at least, at the time of conflict) and on depoliticizing conflicts so as to privilege a more narrowly moral, humanitarianist agenda. In the context of Biafra, the narrative regime of genocide, addressed both at the time of conflict and afterwards to a moral imperative for humanitarianism, results in the suppression of the serious, unaddressed political questions of self-determination and justice in the genocide’s aftermath.

In the case of Rwanda, comparisons of the 1994 Rwandan genocide to the Holocaust are even more telling in literature and other media. Unlike Biafra, the Rwandan genocide happened at a time when the consciousness of the Holocaust in the West was established and pervasive.⁶¹ Popular accounts of the 1994 Rwandan genocide referenced the Holocaust frequently. In his book *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families*, Philip Gourevitch opens his moving chronicle of Rwanda’s genocide by suggesting that atrocities in the country outweigh the Holocaust in terms of rate and speed of death: “The dead of Rwanda accumulated at nearly three times the rate of Jewish dead during the Holocaust.”⁶² This pattern of comparison runs implicitly throughout Gourevitch’s book. Similarly, Jean Hatzfeld, in his chronicle of Rwanda’s genocide perpetrators, *Machete Season*, makes comparisons to the Holocaust because, as Hatzfeld claims, he found close analogies between both genocides:

I have often mentioned the Jewish genocide, and not the Armenian, Gypsy, or Cambodian genocides, because I am more

60 Heerten, *The Biafran War*, p. 173.

61 On this point about “Holocaust consciousness” in the West see Novick, *The Holocaust*, and Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler, How History Is Bought, Packaged, and Sold*, Routledge, 1999).

62 Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*, Picador, 1998, p. 3.

familiar with it—thanks to many memoirs, books, and the film *Shoah*—and because during my visits to Rwanda, I noticed many analogies between the Jewish and Tutsi genocides, especially regarding the way in which they were implemented.⁶³

The association of Rwandan violence with the Holocaust in both works seems to provide the reader a prism through which to think of and legitimize the atrocities in Rwanda as genocidal to an immensely horrifying degree.

Popular accounts of the genocide by African writers show the same comparative tendencies. In Boubacar Boris Diop's influential novel *Murambi, the Book of Bones*, cultural memories of the Holocaust pervade the whole atmosphere of the story. Several characters in the novel seem to emerge not specifically from Rwanda's historical contexts but from the Nazi death camps. For example, the nihilist Dr Joseph Karekezi in the novel is arguably the literary offspring of Nazi doctor Josef Mengele. Paul Rusesabagina's genocide memoir *An Ordinary Man* (written with Tom Zoellner) references cultural memories of the Holocaust, setting it against a Rwandan genocidal context wherein the capacity for human good and evil may be rethought. Through citations of Nazi atrocities in Europe and their representations, Rusesabagina's memoir seems intended to acknowledge the banality of human virtue, ostensibly establishing a dialogue between itself and such relatively more pessimistic historical accounts of the Holocaust as Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men*, as well as Hannah Arendt's notion of the banality of evil.

In 2008 Rwandese Gilbert Gatore published a novel in France titled *Le passé devant soi* (translated into English as *The Past Ahead* by Marjolijn de Jager in 2012). The novel presents a diaristic account of the genocide, dramatizing events as though they were impressions in a child's mind. Gatore's publisher includes the following biographical information about the author: "Gilbert Gatore was born in Rwanda in 1981. On the eve of the civil war, his father gave him *The Diary of Anne Frank* to read. Profoundly moved, the young boy decided, like the heroine, to keep a diary throughout the conflict."⁶⁴

One can argue that such attempts to reproduce Holocaust memory in Africa, as Gatore's novel and other examples cited above show,⁶⁵

63 Hatzfeld, *Machete Season*, p. 208.

64 Gatore, *The Past Ahead*, p. xi.

65 A recent memoir, *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, by a Rwandan genocide survivor

highlight the workings of a largely Western culture industry that lies behind and is responsible for the production of these works, one that is perhaps intent on exploiting the cultural significance of Holocaust memory in order to “sell” African genocides to Western audiences. In Canadian Gil Courtemanche’s novel *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, the Rwandan genocide becomes the African Holocaust, one that the “White Man” encounters in Africa as one legacy of a colonial racism that continues to shape his relation with, and place on, the continent.

As in the case of Biafra, the rhetorical comparison of the Rwandan genocide to the Holocaust depoliticizes, decontextualizes, and deterritorializes the Rwandan atrocities. It is not merely a coincidence, therefore, that in these cultural representations little to no reference is made to the Rwandan civil war that was occurring alongside and importantly contributing to the genocide. Hence the narration of genocide can be seen to set in motion representational practices that depoliticize mass conflict in favour of the promotion of a moral humanitarian vision.

One way to think about the prevalence of Holocaust comparisons in African atrocity representations is to consider it as providing a basis for enlisting African suffering into an international framework of memory of genocide sufferers. The process through which traumatic memories of violence become synchronized into a community is perhaps what we find in the enlistment of Holocaust memories in African conflict zones—that is, in the sense of Rothberg’s multidirectionality. In this way one sees the entanglements of Holocaust memories with memories of African atrocities as facilitating (at least for victims) a shared sense of belonging to a global community of genocide survivors. The synchronicity of memories of African atrocities with those of the Nazi genocide may also highlight the process through which new and old victim communities attempt to enter—through representations of their respective traumas conveyed in terms common to both—into an expanding community of genocide survivors.

The consequences arising from these strangely under-theorized and in the main unacknowledged traces of the Holocaust in representations of African mass atrocity suffering are significant. One consequence is in the enthronement of what Carolyn Dean has described as the global moral witness. In her 2019 book *The Moral Witness*, Dean traces the process of the emergence of the figure of moral witness who testifies

Clemantine Wamariya (written with Elizabeth Weil), similarly compares the child Clemantine’s experience in Rwanda to the kind recounted in Elie Wiesel’s *Night*.

against genocides and mass atrocities to twentieth-century responses to genocidal mass atrocities. This figure came later to be defined exclusively by Holocaust survivors. From their emergence in the mid-twentieth century, the Holocaust survivor came to serve as a kind of moral emissary bearing witness on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves. In the exercise of this moral service, the Holocaust survivor became deterritorialized, dehistoricized, and depoliticized in order to allow them to speak not only on behalf of Jewish victims of Nazi atrocities but also for all victims of atrocities. According to Dean, by the 1990s this Holocaust moral witness facilitated the emergence of the global moral witness, who is “a rhetorical figure with no distinctive features, characterized by a generic helplessness”.⁶⁶ Hence:

In the absence of a moral witness tied to a specific event or place, today the Holocaust witness remains the predominant reference and a point of comparison when genocidal violence is imagined and conveyed. It persists as an icon even as the Holocaust is known to be one among many other genocides. Its continued symbolic power indicates the power of the imaginary, historical, and institutional constraints that define the meaning of suffering [...]. Indeed, the invocation of the Holocaust witness as often as the global victim to summon states and the international community to invest resources or to act boldly has turned the Holocaust into an explanation for the recognition of some crimes and the forgetting or marginalization of others, past and present. This rhetorical use of the Holocaust surely reflects the absence of a deep Western moral consensus about victims other than Holocaust survivors, whose experience ultimately embodied Western moral conscience.⁶⁷

We can also understand what Dean is talking about by thinking about the distillation of Holocaust memories into African representations as perpetrating a kind of “symbolic violence” on African social and moral self-consciousness. Symbolic violence, as Pierre Bourdieu explains it, is a kind of violence that is “exercised upon social agents with his or her complicity”.⁶⁸ It results from an exercise of misrecognized

66 Dean, *The Moral Witness*, p. 177.

67 *The Moral Witness*, p. 178.

68 Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Polity, 2002, p. 167.

and normalized symbolic power shaping thoughts and perceptions. Symbolic power shapes how we make meaning and imagine ourselves to be in the world. Frequently we misrecognize or see no harm in our representational practices. Symbolic violence occurs when certain dominant discourses successfully conceal their cultural, economic, and political harms and thus mask our positional awareness of their effects on us.⁶⁹

What I am suggesting here is that the circulation of Holocaust memory within African genocide narratives functions as a kind of Lacanian Master-Signifier around which representations of postcolonial African genocides may accrete and stabilize. Every discourse, as Slavoj Žižek explains, is “ultimately grounded in a violent imposition of a Master-Signifier which is *stricto sensu* ‘irrational’”.⁷⁰ It is irrational because it needs no justification for its position as the “Master” of meaning: it simply is so because it is so. The Holocaust as the Master-Signifier and the primary constituent of genocide discourse cannot guarantee open and equal representation of all other genocides. Instead, it encourages an asymmetrical encounter with African genocides in ways that hinder cultural representations of mass violence in Africa’s postcolonies. This hindrance is probably most obviously manifest in the lack of coherent visions of political remedies and justice concerning how to deal with the legacies of Africa’s postcolonial genocidal past and present.

69 Alexander Laban Hinton explains that people generally come to an understanding of such phenomena as genocide through metaphors, metonyms, or prototypes. In the context of genocide understanding, Hinton notes, “the Holocaust has long served as the prototype of genocide and Auschwitz as one of its key metonyms. What this means is that in the back of our minds many, if not most, of us have the Holocaust prototype in mind when discoursing about [other genocides]” (“Critical Genocide Studies,” p. 11). In the context of African genocides, what this means is that the enormity of African suffering continues to fail to produce an extensive and widely shared vocabulary for comprehending African suffering in the same way that the Nazi genocide of the Jews has done. While this act of symbolic violence may serve the interests of those (Western political, economic, and cultural establishments) with the cultural capital to provoke the misrecognition of realities of African genocides, its deeper implications manifest in the depoliticization of African mass atrocities. Also on this point of genocide studies and Holocaust canonization see A. Dirk Moses, “Toward a Theory of Critical Genocide Studies,” *Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence*, 18 April 2008, <http://massviolence.org/Toward-a-Theory-of-Critical-Genocide-Studies>, accessed 24 July 2018.

70 Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Picador, 2008, p. 62; original emphasis.

The Motifs of the African Genocide Novel

The nexus of the Holocaust and fictional representations of African mass atrocities perhaps accounts for the major elements that characterize the African genocide novels of Nigeria and Rwanda. These motifs are: (1) the presentation of genocide as an encounter with hell; (2) genocide conceived of as ritual sacrifice; (3) genocide memorialization understood as a moral imperative; and (4) an aesthetic of naturalism propelling graphic narratives of suffering inflicted on the body—that is, narratives emphasizing what Elaine Scarry has described as *the body in pain*.⁷¹ These motifs emerge from a confluence of writers' representations of the events comprising a genocide, as well as of victimization, perpetration, survival, and genocide witnessing. The prevalence of these features in narratives suggests that genocide literature has developed into a distinct literary form in postcolonial Africa. Their recurrence in atrocity representations in Nigeria and Rwanda—two distinct geographical, political, cultural, and temporal contexts—further shows that genocide literature has been evolving in the African postcolonies through associations with the Holocaust, albeit with not identical results.

The first motif—the imagination of genocide as an encounter with hell—constitutes the pivot on which many stories of African genocides revolve. Overt exemplifications of this motif can be found, for example, in Soyinka's novel *Season of Anomy* and Diop's *Murambi*. *Season of Anomy* dramatizes the genocide of Nigeria's Igbo people by restaging the Orpheus myth and Dante's journey through hell in a fictional postcolonial African country. The encounter with genocidal atrocity happens in hell, and the writer who witnesses hellish horrors emerges afterwards with a new, richer, and more nuanced moral awareness. Similarly, in *Murambi* the writer-witness to genocide journeys through massacre sites that he understands as an encounter with hell. He returns afterwards declaring a commitment to write the horrors of genocide as a moral imperative. We find related depictions of encounters with atrocity as journeys through hell in Adichie's characterization in *Half of a Yellow Sun* of Ugwu's experience of warfare and Olanna's visit to Northern Nigeria just before the massacres occurring there take place, as well as in Courtemanche's characterization in *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali* of Bernard Valcourt's exposure to genocide in Rwanda,

71 Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Oxford UP, 1987.

among several other accounts. This framing of genocidal encounters as journeys through hell shows that the descent narrative is the form in which African genocide literature has been evolving. While the descent narrative is not peculiarly absent in African literary traditions generally, the particular instances of this trope in postcolonial African genocide literature show evidence of influence by post-World War II Western descent narratives, themselves largely shaped by Holocaust writing.

In her book *Hell in Contemporary Literature*, Rachel Falconer argues that the Hell trope or the descent narrative is popular in Western writing and that it evolved to occupy a central place in Western literature following World War II. Although this trope is a very ancient one, the difference between its articulation in ancient literature and in post-1945 narratives is that “while the descent to Hell still functions as a quest for knowledge, reparation of loss or superhuman power, the descent occurs within a context which, unlike their classical predecessors, is already understood to be infernal”.⁷² Hence post-1945 hellish narratives are often fatalistic and address metaphysical questions about the scope and limits of agential (moral and other) determinism. This is especially notable in the Holocaust’s witness narratives, such as those by Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi. The representation of traumatic encounters as Hell, according to Falconer, usually proceeds as an infernal journey through the depths of evil in what Falconer describes as a “katabatic imagination”.⁷³ The katabatic imagination portrays traumatic experience as some kind of hellish journey. The descent into Hell is also deliberately outside history and in significant ways involves absolute evil in a mythic time. The genocide novel is governed by a katabatic imagination, which “conceives [the coming into moral] selfhood as the narrative construct of an infernal journey and return”, a journey that is founded on the notion of a self or a moral subjectivity that is “being forged out of an infernal journey”.⁷⁴ This way of imagining has become a dominant trope in writings about genocides in Nigeria and Rwanda.

A major consequence of the katabatic imagination for the representation of African genocides is that it conceives of genocide in important ways as some form of ritual sacrifice. The prevalence of the theme of sacrifice reveals attempts in African genocide novels to imagine victims’

72 Rachel Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature: Western Descent Narratives since 1945*, Edinburgh UP, 2007, p. 4.

73 Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature*, p. 2.

74 *Hell in Contemporary Literature*, pp. 2–4.

death as a “hecatomb”—a term used by ancient Greeks and Romans to designate ritual practice based on the idea that public sacrifice leads to the wellbeing of the community. By conceiving of genocidal murder as implicated in some form of a hecatomb, writers seek to identify a purpose or meaning to the deaths of victims.

The third motif—witnessing genocide as a moral imperative—is most telling in the prominent presence of the figure of the journalist, the writer, and the artist as the hero or anti-hero of the African genocide novels that I examine. This figure of creative production tours massacre sites in search of meaning. By the end of such infernal travels, he or she declares a commitment to serving as a witness to genocidal horrors, a position occupied in part out of a felt sense of moral duty to the genocide victims and to posterity. A consistent feature in African genocide literature is that most writers insistently reject cynicism and despair in the aftermath of their encounters with genocide. They propose instead memorializing genocide so that public memory can be used as a moral guide to prevent the recurrence of such catastrophes.

Finally, the impulse to memorialize genocide as a moral imperative in atrocity narratives is conducive to a kind of naturalism. By naturalism, I refer to the artistic tradition underpinned by the worldview that the environment shapes human actions and that true representations of reality should be based on detailed scientific observation. This literary tradition, as Coundouriotis has explained, is traceable to the nineteenth-century work of the French writers Edmond and Jules Goncourt, who attempted in their “urban fiction” to present graphic details of ordinary people’s experience that barely made it into art.⁷⁵ However, according to Coundouriotis, it was the French writer Émile Zola who popularized this form as adequate for giving visibility to ordinary people’s lived experience.⁷⁶ Naturalism emphasizes “the materiality of the body”⁷⁷ and, because most nineteenth-century naturalist writing in Europe focused on common people’s experiences of deprivation, the form encourages a spectacularization of suffering. For this reason, Thomas W. Laqueur contends that nineteenth-century literary naturalism gave vent to the “humanitarian narrative” because this body of literature “came to speak in extraordinarily detailed fashion about pains and

75 Coundouriotis, *The People’s Right to the Novel*, pp. 5–6.

76 For a scholarly account of Zola and nineteenth-century contemporaries of his associated with realism and naturalism see, for example, Harry Levin, *The Gates of Horn: A Study of Five French Realists*, Oxford UP, 1966.

77 Coundouriotis, *The People’s Right to the Novel*, p. 6.

deaths of ordinary people in such a way as to make apparent the causal chains that might connect the actions of its readers with suffering of its subjects".⁷⁸ In other words, naturalism's propensity to create spectacles of suffering invariably makes it exploitable in the hands of writers aiming to mobilize some form of empathy for suffering subjects or marginalized groups.⁷⁹

In the context of postcolonial Nigerian and Rwandan genocides, vivid descriptions of suffering and the portrayal of genocide as physical violence directed against victims' bodies reveal a slightly different artistic sensibility that spectacularizes suffering as a means not simply to secure empathy for victims and advocate for humanitarian intervention but also to decolonize and rehumanize a genocidal African society. Naturalism in this context, therefore, encourages readers to take a closer look at the mutilated and wounded bodies of victims, ostensibly in an attempt to restore the order of humanity and the moral consciousness that the conditions of genocide attempted to upend.

78 Thomas W. Laqueur, "Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative," *New Cultural History*, edited by Lynn Hunt, University of California Press, 1989, p. 177. Lynn Hunt has made a similar observation in her book *Inventing Human Rights: A History*. For more discussion on the connections between naturalism and humanitarianism see Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason*.

79 For a scholarly work calling attention to the representations of the "African" body in pain and to the prevalence of pain in African literature (especially pain made present and particularized for affective purposes) see Zoe Norridge, *Perceiving Pain in African Literature*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

PART II

Artistic Quests
for Meaningfulness in
the Hells of Postcolonial
African Genocides

3

Genocide as a Tragedy

Soyinka's Tragic Vision of Genocide in *Season of Anomy*

History is full of failed prometheans [sic] bathing their wounded spirits in the tragic stream.

Destroy the tragic lure! Tragedy is possible solely because of the limitations of the human spirit. There are levels of despair from which, it rightly seems, the human spirit should not recover. To plunge to such a level is to be overwhelmed by the debris of all those anti-human barriers which are erected by jealous gods. The power of recovery is close to acquisition of superhuman energies, and the stagnation-loving human society must for self-preserving interest divert these colossal energies into relatively quiescent channels, for they constitute a force which, used as part of an individual's equipment in the normal human struggle cannot be resisted by the normal human weapons. [...] To ensure that there is no re-assertion of will the poetic snare of tragic loftiness is spread before him—what greater sublimity than the blind oracular figure, what greater end to the quest for self than acceptance, quiescence and senescence!¹

In his book *Myth, Literature and the African World* (*Myth*, subsequently) Wole Soyinka notes that the “African” tragic genre, like tragedy elsewhere in the world, derives from a state of anguish based

1 Soyinka, *The Man Died*, p. 88.

on “the fragmentation of essence from self”.² This fragmentation generally occurs, according to Soyinka, as historical ruptures or catastrophes severing society from its normal state of being.³ The shared or communal experience of historical catastrophe often threatens the collective psyche of a people, throwing it into a liminal, existential gulf. The tragic genre emerges as a kind of symbolization enacted as a ritual ceremony that society stages in order to navigate this existential gulf and emerge on the other side of the liminal zone with a new social awareness and harmony. In other words, the tragic impulse rendering shared historical experience of catastrophe into a tragedy, according to Soyinka, is a symbolized ritual practice of appeasement, a gulf-bridging rite of passage. As such, tragedy as a representational form is a reparative artistic project.

Soyinka’s theory of tragedy deals with how best to represent catastrophe and transform representation into a reparative cultural practice. Soyinka privileges the tragic form as the suitable representational mode of not only witnessing catastrophe but also dealing with the stress of its traumatic aftermaths. As a ritual of appeasement, tragedy, for Soyinka, demands sacrifice from the artist in order to placate the cosmic forces guarding the existential gulf of history. While it is not clear from Soyinka’s book what these cosmic forces are and why they require constant appeasement, the writer’s theorizing of the tragic impulse he describes as “African” is based largely on his own interpretation of the Yoruba tragic cosmology. As Soyinka sees it, the Yoruba tragic impulse emphasizes the place and importance of the human realm, a fundamental distinction, according to Soyinka, between this impulse and the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman impulses fused in the Western/European tradition, which celebrate abstractionism by their fixation on either the heavenly or the “chthonic realm”.⁴ The Yoruba tragic impulse, Soyinka contends, may encourage plunging “straight into the ‘chthonic realm’, the seething cauldron of the dark world will and psyche, the transitional yet inchoate matrix of death and becoming”.⁵ But it also refuses to freeze the tragic process within this liminal gulf. It ascends from the chthonic realm in order to reassert stability and celebrate “the cosmic struggle” of existence.⁶ However, the Western/European tragic

2 Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Cambridge UP, 1995, p. 145.

3 *Myth, Literature and the African World*, p. 145.

4 *Myth, Literature and the African World*, pp. 2–5.

5 *Myth, Literature and the African World*, p. 142.

6 *Myth, Literature and the African World*, p. 143.

impulse, according to Soyinka, succumbs to the trauma of the abyss, entranced by horror, and becomes unable to bridge the gulf of historical ruptures. Soyinka describes the representational impulse that freezes the tragic process at the zone of horror as a failure of artistic will, symptomized by an artistic incapacity to follow through the tragic ritual to its conclusive end.

Soyinka's artistic response to the massacre of the Igbo across Nigeria and the resulting Biafra–Nigeria War between 1966 and 1970 was one of reinserting the message of recovery and regeneration. In doing this he speaks against hopelessness/meaninglessness and what he calls “the tragic lure”⁷ in post-World War II Western artistic and philosophical responses to catastrophe. More than any of Soyinka's other writings directly dealing with the atrocities perpetrated by the Nigerian state against the Igbo in the late 1960s, his novel *Season of Anomy* (*Season*, subsequently) and his prison memoir *The Man Died* (*Man*, subsequently) articulate this vision of recovery and regeneration. In these works, Soyinka advocates against a cynical attitude to disaster: “Destroy the tragic lure!”⁸

The present chapter looks at the representation of the 1966–70 crisis in Nigeria in Soyinka's writing, particularly in his novel *Season*. I argue that in *Season* Soyinka imagines the crisis as a genocide and renders it according to his vision of tragedy as a regenerative process. In the novel Soyinka shows a massacre that resembles the Holocaust and is ostensibly inspired by the 1966 pogroms of Igbo peoples in Northern Nigeria. To be sure, *Season* is set in an unnamed fictional country. The victims of genocide are from a progressive community called Aiyéro, which is a Yoruba community (if only because they worship the Yoruba God, Ogun). The Aiyéro represent a valuable political principle—an egalitarian philosophy set against a greedy neocolonial capitalist state—which is a reason for their victimization by the state. Hence the novel invites an ideological reading in which the process of the neocolonial state organizing and radicalizing a mob against a progressive socialist community is considered.

In addition, Soyinka depicts the atrocities perpetrated by the state against the Aiyéro people—who are, I will argue, a symbolic representation of the Igbo in the novel—as a genocide comparable to the Nazis' genocide of Jewish peoples in Europe. The comparison of the Igbo experience in Nigeria to that of the Jews serves in Soyinka's

7 Soyinka, *The Man Died*, p. 88.

8 *The Man Died*, p. 88.

novel as a basis for understanding the crisis as a genocide and for the dramatization of the writer's tragic vision of genocide in the postcolony. This comparison finds its most articulate portrayal in the novel's characterization/racialization of victims as a special, chosen breed of "Innocents" murdered because of their distinctive progressive attributes as a racialized cultural group. So represented, victims of genocide appear in *Season* as sacrificial scapegoats whose atrocious deaths provide the moral basis for reworking the terms of nationhood in the postcolony.

At the centre of this revisionist project of post-genocidal nation-building in *Season*'s story world lies the figure of the artist or the writer. This figure embodies Soyinka's tragic vision of catastrophe through his performance of witnessing genocide, which he sees as a moral imperative. The artist is the one who, through his act of witnessing, shapes a wider understanding of the tragic aspects of genocidal atrocities, so turning witnessing of the sort he can provide into a moral project. Witnessing genocide unfolds in Soyinka's novel as expiatory and the artist witnessing atrocity serves a priestly function, as the act of witnessing results in a kind of social cleansing. The novel dramatizes this cleansing or witnessing through the deployment of tragic mythological tropes based on journeys through hell. The recurring theme of this journey is the exercise of will. In *Season*, the artist exercises immense will in forcing himself to tour massacre sites just so that he can witness the horrors therein and demand that society acknowledge its moral failings. Genocide as hell in *Season* typifies senseless acts of torture and murder within a postcolonial African state. The motivation impelling this hell is racism, portrayed in Soyinka's novel as killers' sense of hollowness, expressed through their attempt to annihilate the Other as a means of asserting their own existence and identity. In the world of Soyinka's *Season*, the artist's task in the hell of genocide must be to help society confront this hell and transcend its liminal condition and resulting anomy⁹ to help society move towards a social harmony based on a reconceptualization of nationhood.

9 While the influence of Émile Durkheim's concept of anomie is present in Soyinka's, the latter's particular understanding and depiction of the concept differs slightly. In his 1897 book *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (translated by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson, The Free Press, 1951), Durkheim uses "anomie" to describe a breakdown of social norms leading to an abandonment of self-regulatory morals. Anomie, for Durkheim, manifests as a structure of everyday life and is symptomatic of individual self-destruction, or what Durkheim describes as "anomic suicide". In Soyinka's particular delineation of the concept in *Season* and in some of his other works, such as the play

Yet, though insightful, Soyinka's tragic vision of genocide in Nigeria helps to highlight a problematic impulse in some artistic responses to the atrocities. This tragic vision, with its underlying optimism and its aim of constructing meaning out of the theatre of genocide, serves to dehistoricize the political conditions of genocide in Nigeria. By so doing, it proffers a rather metaphysical response to the reality of catastrophe and avoids the more challenging demands inherent in advancing a usable historical and political vision of justice in a genocide's aftermath. A major challenge with Soyinka's portrayal of genocide, as I go on to argue, can be found in the representation of genocide victims in *Season*. In the novel victims of genocide figure as a special breed and as sacrificial objects. While acknowledging that this image of victims in *Season* echoes those found in Holocaust literature and, like them, derives from Soyinka's attempt to find moral and political meaning in the mass deaths of Igbo victims, I instead read Soyinka's *Season* as entangled in a political culture of ethnic/racial essentialism in Nigeria that enabled the genocide in the first place.

Even more consequential, the portrayal of genocide victims as sacrificial objects enlists victims as a means of atonement, and so they become thinkable as a crucial prerequisite for the harmony of their killers. This view coincides with the killers' rationale for murder, and further inhibits clear thinking about remedy in a genocide's aftermath. These challenges, as I will show, underscore the limitations of the tragic genre, as exemplified in Soyinka's writing, in terms of providing a satisfactory representational form for writing about African genocide. The reason for these limitations, at least in *Season*, is the genre's valorization of sacrifice, its fatalism, and its dependence on heroism in the attempts to represent genocide. These elements of Soyinka's tragic vision have consequences not just for victim representations but also for representations of women, as we shall see shortly.

The overall aim of this chapter is to locate Soyinka's *Season* in a particular historical moment in the emergence of postcolonial African genocide fiction, one recognizable through the novel's appropriation of the conventional forms of tragedy as a fitting artistic form for witnessing genocide. I will provide the context needed in order to understand the contributions of Soyinka's *Season* to genocide fiction in Africa's postcolony. I argue, in parts, that Soyinka's artistic and moral

Madmen and Specialists, anomie functions in such limited cases as war and genocide and is symptomatic not only of suicide, as Durkheim would have it, but of genocide and the destruction of social conscience.

vision of genocide is influenced by representations of the Holocaust, and I will show how this influence manifests itself in his artistic responses to the crisis of the late 1960s in Nigeria. My argument will unfold in the broader context of an analysis of *Season's* tragic vision of genocide, which I contend is a dramatization of atrocity witnessing as a journey through hell, while stressing the limits of Soyinka's tragic vision of genocide in Nigeria.

Context

Soyinka is one of the most important figures to emerge from the turbulent events of 1960s Nigeria. His remarkable activism at the time turned him into an international figure of renown. He insistently advocated that African writers should play an active part in the political realities of their societies, remarking at a Stockholm Conference in 1967 (a few months before his arrest by the Nigerian military): "The artist has always functioned in African society as the record of the mores and experience of his society *and* as the voice of vision in his own time. It is time for him to respond to this essence of himself."¹⁰ As the massacres of Igbo people across Northern and Western Nigeria broke out in 1966 following military coups in the country, Soyinka was among a few non-Igbo citizens who publicly condemned the atrocities. Soyinka was unequivocal in calling the atrocities genocide. In *Man*, he describes the massacre of Igbo people in the North as "ATROCITIES"¹¹ and as a "holocaust"¹² "on a scale so vast and so thorough, and so well-organized that it was variously referred to as the Major Massacres [...], genocide, and sometimes only as disturbances and [...] a state of anomy!"¹³

Soyinka writes in his prison memoir of his shock during a 1966 visit to Northern Nigeria as part of his effort to mobilize his colleagues in the region against violence when he realized that many of them were complicit in the planning, organization, and execution of Igbo massacres in the region.¹⁴ During this visit, the writer chanced upon a

10 Soyinka, "The Writer in a Modern African State," *The Writer in Modern Africa: African-Scandinavian Writers' Conference, Stockholm 1967*, edited by Per Wästberg, Africana Publishing Corporation, 1969, p. 21; original emphasis.

11 Soyinka, *The Man Died*, p. 119; emphasis in original.

12 *The Man Died*, p. 165.

13 *The Man Died*, p. 119.

14 *The Man Died*, pp. 164–69.

circulating document that called for the extermination of Igbo people in the region:

It was an open, inflammatory call for a Jihad against the “yamirin” [a Hausa pejorative for the Igbo, literally meaning water-beggars/-seekers]. It called teachers to keep their schools closed, parents to keep their children at home and all true natives of the soil to stay within doors until “we have wreaked our will on the southern infidels”.¹⁵

For Soyinka, the genocide of the Igbo in the North, at least, was well planned and served as a pretext for certain Nigerian political elites to shore up political power, concentrating it to themselves by scapegoating a vulnerable group in their region.¹⁶

In August 1967 the Federal Military Government of Nigeria under Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon arrested Soyinka on allegations of espionage for Biafra. By this time, war had broken out between Nigeria and the newly declared sovereign state of Biafra. The former Eastern Region of the country had declared its independence from Nigeria on May 30, 1967, in response to the killings of Igbo people living outside the East. It had renamed itself the sovereign state of Biafra. Soyinka had travelled to meet with Lieutenant-Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, the military head of Biafra, and other influential people on the Biafran side, including the Yoruba military commander of a Biafran regiment, Major Victor Banjo. According to Soyinka, a third force, more like a peacekeeping force, was required to be put in place in order to broker peace between the two warring sides of the Biafran and the Nigerian militaries.¹⁷ He considered his mission to be primarily concerned with negotiating such a third force (real or symbolic) into existence, and thus creating conditions suitable to brokering peace between the warring parties.

Soyinka’s incarceration triggered protests internationally, and he became one of Amnesty International’s prisoners of conscience.¹⁸ The Nigerian military government refused to release him,

15 *The Man Died*, p. 167.

16 *The Man Died*, pp. 107–09.

17 *The Man Died*, pp. 47–56; Soyinka, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*, Random House, 2007, pp. 99–122.

18 See Monthly Newsletter from Amnesty International: *Postcards for Prisoners Campaign*, November 1967, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/204000/nws210121967en.pdf>, accessed 18 March 2016.

notwithstanding pressure from different international groups. In his prison memoir Soyinka writes about the government's plans to assassinate him in prison, his experience of torture, and his suffering from solitary confinement in Kaduna Prison. The government held him in different prisons for twenty-seven months between August 1967 and October 1969. Even though incarcerated, he managed to smuggle out poems and protest letters criticizing the Federal Military Government of Gowon.

Following his release in October 1969 Soyinka began publishing work on his traumatic prison encounters, including some of the ideas he had developed while in prison. Much has been said about how his prison experience influenced his perspective on art and society from the 1970s onwards.¹⁹ What is not generally discussed is Soyinka's preoccupation with the subject of genocide following the commission of atrocities in Nigeria in the late 1960s. Even criticism of his post-1970 writing has essentially ignored the subject of genocide in his work.²⁰ Instead, many of these studies focus on the ideological implications of what is believed to be Soyinka's complex aesthetics, his articulation of his commitment to freedom, and his mythologized visions of tragedy. The latter is particularly relevant to my reading of *Season*, which I take to be a novel preoccupied with genocide and its representation.

Season, first published in 1973, is one of several works by Soyinka that responds directly to the mass killings of Igbo people in Nigeria.

19 See, for example, C. Tighe, "In Detentio Preventione in Aeternum: Soyinka's *A Shuttle in the Crypt*," *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka*, edited by James Gibbs, Heinemann, 1981, pp. 186–97. In this essay Tighe, among other things, makes a passing connection between Soyinka's *A Shuttle in the Crypt* as well as *The Man Died* and Holocaust writings by Hannah Arendt, Peter Weiss, and Arthur Koestler.

20 For example, none of these notable book studies of Soyinka's writings, including some focusing on his writings responding to the atrocities of 1966–70 in Nigeria, touches on the writer's visions and commitment to the themes of genocide in his writings: Gerald Moore, *Wole Soyinka*, Evans, 1971; Eldred Jones, *The Writings of Wole Soyinka*, Heinemann, 1973; Stephan Larsen, *A Writer and his Gods: A Study of the Importance of Yoruba Myths and Religious Ideas to the Writing of Wole Soyinka*, University of Stockholm, Dept. of the History of Literature, 1983; Ketu Katrak, *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy: A Study of Dramatic Theory and Practice*, Greenwood Press, 1986; Lindfors, *Long Drums and Canons*; Biodun Jeyifo, *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Postcolonialism*, Cambridge UP, 2004. See also essay collections on the writer's work, such as James Gibbs, editor, *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka*, Heinemann, 1981; Oyin Ogunba, editor, *Soyinka: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Syndicated Communications Ltd, 1994; and Biodun Jeyifo, editor, *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity*, University Press of Mississippi, 2001.

His earliest writings on the atrocities and on his experience of imprisonment began to emerge in 1967 with the publication of his poetry collection *Idanre and Other Poems* and continued late in 1969 with *Poems from Prison*, a collection of poems he managed to smuggle out from prison to friends. From 1971 onwards, more works appeared: *Before the Blackout*,²¹ the play *Madmen and Specialists* (1971), his prison memoir *The Man Died* (1972), and the collection of poems, *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972). Several critics of these works describe them as cynical, pessimistic, and nightmarish, and as providing an outlook on Soyinka's traumatic prison experience. Yet, in these criticisms, there is no significant acknowledgement of the writer's focus on genocide, nor is there evidence of any attempt being made to trace the influence of the Holocaust on Soyinka's way of writing about the Nigerian crisis.

Such influence is demonstrable. For example, in *The Man Died*, Soyinka remarks on his conviction that what the Nigerian state did to the Igbo was a genocide, a view strongly shaped by his fascination with Hannah Arendt's writing on the banality of evil. He writes, "For nearly six weeks I have lived in close company with two products of what Hannah Arendt (Eichmann in Jerusalem) described by that strange expression—the banality of evil."²² The "company" Soyinka refers to here is a group of two soldiers, Ambrose Okpe and Gani Bidan, who murdered an Igbo photographer, Emmanuel Ogbona. Following an international media outcry, the government staged the semblance of a justice process by arresting and imprisoning the two soldiers. Soyinka observes the regal and heroic treatment given to the soldiers prior to their eventual acquittal and during their short stay in the same prison where he was being held. Drawing on Arendt's thought about evil's banality, which Soyinka views as the authorization and normalization of malevolence and immorality, Soyinka concludes that genocide and a state of anomy are "what happens to human beings and to a nation when any group within that nation is tacitly declared to be outside the law's protection and is fair game for any man with the slightest grudge of fanatical inclination that turns

21 *Before the Blackout* consists of selections of revues Soyinka staged in theatres in Lagos and Ibadan between 1964 and 1965. It was published in 1971, but did not deal directly with the 1966–70 crisis. See Dapo Adelugba, "Wole Soyinka by Gerald Moore; The Writing of Wole Soyinka by Eldred Durosimi Jones and Wole Soyinka; Wole Soyinka by Eldred Durosimi Jones," *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1974, pp. 254–59. Yet Soyinka's title, "Before the Blackout", helps to underline a crucial imagery of darkness in his vision of the late 1960s crisis and mass atrocities.

22 *The Man Died*, p. 20.

to homicide”.²³ This state of anomy in Nigeria, according to Soyinka, is similar to that which pertained during the Nazi atrocities against Jewish peoples in Europe. In the specific Nigerian context, it is based on the authorization of the Nigerian military government making normal the murder of a target group (the Igbo). In such a situation of anomy in which there is no legal consequence for violence done to an outlawed group, even practising humanists can easily transform into pathological killers. Soyinka depicts the nature of this pattern of transformation in his play *Madmen and Specialists* (*Madmen*, subsequently). *Madmen* dramatizes a series of absurd events in which a medical doctor transforms into a pathological killer during the course of a war, events culminating in his killing of his own father. The play’s hero, Dr Bero, resembles the cynical Doctor in Rolf Hochhuth’s 1963 play *The Deputy*, which is based on Nazi mass atrocities. Hochhuth’s Doctor is a dramatic portrayal of the notorious Nazi doctor Josef Mengele, the so-called “Angel of Death”. In *Season*, a similar doctor character, this time Lebanese, is present as a figure of cynicism and degeneracy before the artist–hero of the story uses words to heal and rehumanize him. The circumstances surrounding the transformation of a specialist sworn to protect human life into a pathological murderer preoccupies some of Soyinka’s writings on the 1966–70 catastrophe in Nigeria.

According to Soyinka, social anomy results from the corrupting influence of absolute power as it may be found accreted in fascist regimes.²⁴ In *Man*, Soyinka shows the condition of human degeneracy, in this case the degeneration of the intellect because of tyrannical power’s onslaught. This degeneracy—in part based on the traumatic condition of imprisonment, solitude, and torture by denial of access to books and other intellectual resources—manifests in Soyinka’s memoir as an attempt by fascistic power to suppress the intellect. As Soyinka posits in this memoir, a vibrant intellect may serve as a bulwark against the idiocies inherent in fascism and absolutism. This helps to explain fascism’s violence against intellectual structures and members of the thinking and creative classes. In the face of fascism’s assault on the intellect and intellectuals, too often the writer (along with other intellectuals) capitulates and descends into silence or cynicism. As Soyinka puts it in his famous statement: “the man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny”.²⁵

23 *The Man Died*, pp. 20–21.

24 *The Man Died*, pp. 107–10.

25 *The Man Died*, p. 13.

Contrary to claims by some critics that Soyinka's *Madmen, Man* and other writings dealing with the late 1960s crisis and war in Nigeria present a rather bleak view of life,²⁶ I contend that the cautious, revolutionary optimism of the writer's statement against cynicism is central to his writings on the crisis. This revolutionary optimism undergirds the project of Soyinka's tragic vision, as I will show through an extensive discussion of *Season*. The central anxiety in Soyinka's work of the 1970s responding to the atrocities in Nigeria raises the question of how artists can resist the force of cynicism wrought by catastrophe. With what vocabulary can the writer speak and articulate the horrors of genocide to an indifferent world and to a society implicated in the commission of its crimes?

For example, Soyinka's 1972 poetry collection, *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, depicts a remarkable attempt to find such a vocabulary through a portrayal of efforts not only to speak against cynicism but also to offer a vision of regeneration. This vision comes from deep self-meditation. Like *Man*, *Shuttle* is a poet's expression of a will to survive in which survival depends entirely on the poet-hero's acute resort to the egotistic assertion of willpower.²⁷ The "shuttle in the crypt" of a debased world is the poet's vision of his soul-searching and of his wanderings in the abyss of death. He refuses to allow his imagination to be entranced by a fascination with horror. His emergence from this crypt signifies an assertion of the intention to transcend the horrors of hell, and so his survival. The motif of a descent into hell is central not only to this poetry collection but to most of Soyinka's writings dealing with the catastrophic events in the late 1960s Nigeria, particularly in *Season* (as I shall show below). It is through the trope of a descent into hell—his katabatic tragic paradigm—that Soyinka delineates his tragic visions of the cosmic violence of genocide and the role of the artist following such failures of humanity.

The Tragic Vision of Genocide in *Season of Anomy*

Season is set in an unnamed fictional country that resembles Nigeria, which is populated mostly by members of a community called Aiyétómò. This setting affords the writer licence to project ideas and advance his views on incidents leading to and during the genocide. The

26 See, for example, Tighe, "In Detentio Preventione in Aeternum".

27 Tighe, "In Detentio Preventione in Aeternum," pp. 187–89.

critic Willfried F. Feuser notes that this use of a fictional state in *Season* underscores Soyinka's attempt to stylize "history into myth" in order to free himself from the "material fatigue of history and the humdrum events of a calendar-type chronology" that was normative practice in writing the Biafra–Nigeria crisis in the early 1970s.²⁸ In *Season*, Ofeyi, a promotions officer working for a corrupt cocoa corporation, rebels against the corporation after experiencing a cultural epiphany during his encounter with the communal ethos of Aiyéro, a cocoa community that the novel describes as not bound by "the shackles of memory" like its mother country Aiyétómò.²⁹ The cocoa corporation is run by a cartel of regressive and corrupt individuals who represent a neocolonial capitalist regime and a corrupt postcolonial government. Before his rebellion, Ofeyi and his "woman" Iriyise have been helping to promote the corporation's deceitful business, which robs the people of their community's common wealth.

Tension with the corporation arises after Ofeyi's and Iriyise's transformative encounters at Aiyéro. Turning dissident, Ofeyi uses the cartel's propaganda machinery, which he oversees, to spread Aiyéro's communal, anti-capitalist values of progress and egalitarianism by way of revealing the corporation's lies to the people: "Ofeyi envisioned the parallel progress of the new idea, the birth of the new man from the same germ as the cocoa seed, the Aiyéro ideal disseminated with the same powerful propaganda machine of the cartel throughout the land."³⁰ Ofeyi sees in Aiyéro men the perpetuation of indelible communalist values and resourcefulness. To begin evangelizing about Aiyéro values, he "plants" Aiyéro men across the country and has them lead other communities towards acceptance of their progressive worldview. Confronted with an impending revolution owing to the spread of Aiyéro's communitarian values, the corrupt cartel moves quickly to attack the Aiyéro. Fearing that the Aiyéro have influenced the Aiyétómò population unduly much, the cartel launches a violent campaign of calumny, radicalizing the population against the Aiyéro, scapegoating them and representing them as a plague in need of a final solution. Soon after, bloodthirsty groups in Aiyétómò begin hunting down any Aiyéro person in sight. Aiyéro people become the scapegoats required to secure the cartel's grip on power. During the course of this genocidal outburst against the Aiyéro, the cartel kidnaps Iriyise,

28 Feuser, "Anomy and Beyond," p. 146.

29 Soyinka, *Season of Anomy*, p. 9.

30 *Season of Anomy*, p. 19.

detaining her in a place called Temoko prison, which is described in the novel as a wasteland that resembles Dante's vision of hell in the *Inferno*. The kidnapping of Iriyise sets Ofeyi on a journey into Temoko to retrieve his woman, a narrative device paralleling the plot of *Season*, which likewise gestures towards the myth of Orpheus's journey to the underworld in order to recover his dead wife, Eurydice.

Soyinka uses his retelling of the Orpheus myth in *Season* to parallel historical events in 1960s Nigeria. In *Season*, the Aiyéro, as the antithesis of corrupt greed that the cartel stands for, represent a popular and stereotypical idea in Nigeria of the Igbo as an egalitarian, a resourceful, and a progressive people.³¹ *Season* shows the genocide as propelled by a confluence of corrupt capitalist greed and fascist power-mongering aiming to eliminate the challenge to the status quo represented by the egalitarian and progressive values of the Aiyéro. Accordingly, Soyinka represents victims of genocide in *Season* as embodying an ontological cultural trait of egalitarian and communitarian values. This ontologized cultural trait poses a threat to the cartel's fascist regime, and the seriousness of this threat may be correlated to the level of violence perpetrated against the Aiyéro. It is worth noting that this way of representing genocide victims appears to reinforce the ideology of cultural and identity essentialism that lies at the heart of violent conflict in Nigeria through to the present day. According to the logic of such essentialist thinking, Igbo people embody modernity, resourcefulness, and progress, and are conceived of in stark contrast to an image of Northern Nigeria as conservative and backward.³²

Soyinka's depiction of the Aiyéro as victims of genocide reveals a rather stereotypical way of thinking about groups as possessing certain indelible cultural traits. As the genocidal impulse, as genocide scholars such as Paul Boghossian have noted, targets not just the individual members of a group but also the things (beliefs, practices, rituals, and so on) that make a group what it is, culture is often a core target of genocide.³³ As James Waller explains, group racialization in the context of genocide usually coincides with the inability or refusal of perpetrators to imagine victims distinctly as humans outside of the ontologies of the latter's biological and cultural characteristics.³⁴ Such imagined ontologies often become the premise in which group

31 Anthony, "Resourceful and Progressive Blackmen".

32 Anthony, "Resourceful and Progressive Blackmen".

33 See Boghossian, "The Concept of Genocide," p. 74.

34 Waller, *Becoming Evil*, pp. 196–220.

elimination finds validation. In *Season*, Soyinka conceives Igbo victims of genocide as carriers and proselytizers of indelible cultural traits, reinforcing the very same ethnic stereotypes of Igboness in Nigeria that many Igbo people, as well as the Biafran military government, believed constituted the reason for the genocide. Through its depiction of the Aiyéro, Soyinka's *Season* appears to endorse rather than challenge this essentialist imagination of Igbo identity for which the Igbo fell prey to mass deaths in the first place. By characterizing victims in terms suggestive of a cultural ontology that is uncorrupted by neocolonial capitalism and fascism, *Season* fails to account for the specific historical context of colonialism that gave vent to such racialized thinking about nativist cultural ideals as emblematic of alternative visions of progress and modernity.

Even more at issue, *Season* suggests that victims had been massacred because they were attempting to proselytize a liberating cultural ethos that could save the country from corruption. Following the January 1966 military coup led by five majors, four of whom were Igbo, aggrieved groups in Nigeria branded the coup as an Igbo attempt to secure their group's hegemony in the country.³⁵ While historians of that past have variously shown this claim to be false,³⁶ it served as a pretext by providing "epistemic conditions"³⁷ for the genocide of Igbo peoples living outside the former Eastern Region. The representation of Igbo victims in *Season* as proselytizers of a liberating cultural ideal fits Nigerian killers' justification for attempting to eliminate the Igbo, whom they considered as bidding to dominate other Nigerian groups and establish the Igbo as the new master race in the country.³⁸ This image of the victim as embodying threatening cultural traits for which the agents of death are seeking to eliminate him or her appears defective because it not only enlists victims as contributors to their own victimization but also aligns implicitly with thinking that blames victims for possessing indelible and dangerous traits that condemn them to elimination. While perpetrators of genocide often imagine their victims as an offending essence to be exterminated, *Season* does

35 Uzoigwe, *Visions of Nationhood*, pp. 65–121.

36 *Visions of Nationhood*, pp. 65–121.

37 Eze, "Epistemic Conditions," pp. 115–29.

38 For more on this point see, for example, Achebe, *There Was a Country*, pp. 74–83; Uzoigwe, *Visions of Nationhood*, pp. 65–121; Wale Adebani, "Confronting the Challenges of Nationhood in Pre-Biafran Texts," *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War*, edited by Toyin Falola and Ogechukwu Ezekwem, James Currey, 2016, pp. 130–65.

not dramatize victims' ontology as deriving from killers' imagination. Rather, in Soyinka's novel, victims do actually possess such an essence.

The essentialist imagination of genocide victims in *Season* is particularly a product of Soyinka's relation of genocide in Nigeria to the Nazis' genocide of Jewish peoples in Europe. In *Season*, Soyinka designates the killing of victims as "the Massacre of the Innocents" and as evocative of "biblical horrors".³⁹ As Waller explains, the discourse on the Nazi genocide of Jews triggered a consideration of genocide as an extraordinary, violent phenomenon signifying pure evil.⁴⁰ The victims of such outbursts of pure evil cannot but be innocents and killers must be embodiments of evil.⁴¹ As pure evil, genocide becomes conceived as an extraordinary phenomenon, one driven by an extremely violent ideology; its perpetrators are "mad", evil, psychopathic aggressors, and its victims are innocent.⁴²

Imagining genocide victims as innocents also intersects with the tragic form's emphasis on and valorization of sacrifice. In certain conventional tragic paradigms, among the Yoruba, for example, the object of sacrifice or the scapegoat has to be innocent to be useful as a means for communal atonement and for mediating social transition. As Carl Jaspers remarks, "Transition is the zone of tragedy."⁴³ As a site of transition, tragedy offers opportunities "for collective pondering of moral questions to arrive at a rational conclusion".⁴⁴ In *Season*, Soyinka portrays what the narrator calls "The Massacre of the Innocents"⁴⁵ as an inevitable ritual sacrifice of Aiyétómò's historical transition. The sacrificial scapegoats (Aiyéro victims) are the atoning objects aiding this transition. They are atoning not for their own sins but for "the crime of existence itself".⁴⁶ Their sacrificial atonement is therefore by implication justified for the sake of their country.

Besides its problematic representation of victims as embodying some kind of a cultural essence, *Season* does not depict genocide as the consequence of some primordial hatred between the Aiyéro and the Aiyétómò. Instead, genocide results from a situation of anomy

39 *Season of Anomy*, p. 48.

40 Waller, *Becoming Evil*, p. 13.

41 *Becoming Evil*, pp. 13–19.

42 See *Becoming Evil*, pp. 33–53; 59–91; 98–127.

43 Quoted in Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic*, Blackwell, 2003, p. 143.

44 Eagleton, *Sweet Violence*, p. 143.

45 *Season of Anomy*, pp. 48, 110.

46 Eagleton, *Sweet Violence*, p. 143.

comprising a suspension of moral and social values instigated by greed and fascism. The consequence of genocide is that it numbs people's moral awareness and recognition of wrongdoing. Rather than just confronting their moral failings, they often resort to denial, thus transforming into steadfast justifiers of impunity. For Soyinka, in the context of *Season*, the winner of this state of anomy and the destruction of collective moral will is the corrupt multinational cartel. The defeat of this violent commercial entity can only be made to happen when society musters enough will and courage to confront its guilt and dedicate itself to transcending its anomy. The artist's task is therefore to help society confront this guilt by witnessing it and showing society what its transcendence looks like and entails. In *Season*, Ofeyi's quest to recover Iriyise from the genocide-induced hell of Temoko becomes a metaphorical dramatization of this artistic task.

From the point of Ofeyi's sojourn to Temoko in the novel, the story takes on the form of a hero's traumatic, hazardous rescue mission into a postcolonial hell-on-earth in search of the regenerative spirit of a beaten and complacent people symbolized by Iriyise. The experience of hell is such that it can strengthen the subject or traumatize him as a result of his infernal encounters. Ofeyi succeeds in this rescue mission by not only recovering Iriyise's comatose body but also winning over the guardians of hell as new converts to the Aiyéro revolution. The circumstances informing his successful quest underscore Soyinka's overall reparative tragic vision. Hell in *Season* is the site wherein the horrors of genocide may be witnessed. Soyinka's tragic vision of genocide develops along Ofeyi's heroic adventure into hell—that is, into the site of genocide—in search of Iriyise. This quest revolves around a narrative of regeneration symbolized throughout the story by images of seasonal cycles of birth, death, and regeneration.

Importantly, the naturalist aesthetics deployed by Soyinka in his portrayal of the environment and of Iriyise as a symbol of regeneration aligns with the sexual and vegetal imagery underpinning the novel's plot. *Season* contains five sections entitled as follows: "Seminal", "Buds", "Tentacles", "Harvest", and "Spores". The vegetal and seasonal imagery of these titles underscores the theme of a regenerative cycle that is central to Soyinka's tragic vision. Each of these sections dramatizes the stages in a society's cycle presented in terms suggestive both of a farming cycle and of a woman's sexual (and menstrual) cycle. In *Season*, Soyinka depicts Ofeyi as resembling a farmer and a husband in the struggle to plant and cultivate his "seed". At once, Iriyise's body becomes a metaphor for the nation/land that goes terribly bad in a season of anomy, one that

the artist (in Ofeyi) must repair. “Seminal” is the time of sowing, when Ofeyi encounters the values of Aiyéro and, like a farmer, sows these values into his “land”. This is also the time that Iriyise’s figure transforms in the story into a mystical, radiant embodiment of social renewal.⁴⁷ The Aiyéro values Ofeyi sows represent progressive ideals whose budding in the larger society present symbolically in Iriyise’s transformation into a goddess of choreography.⁴⁸

As Ofeyi’s seeds begin to develop into ideological tentacles in society, the corrupt neocolonial, capitalist, and fascistic postcolonial government fights back. Ofeyi finds that, as he spreads his adopted Aiyéro values in society, the cartel also spreads its own corrupt seeds. Where Ofeyi’s seeds grow as a challenge to the cartel’s corruption, the cartel’s corrupt seeds, like weeds, develop into genocide-driven ideological tentacles, killing off Ofeyi’s good seeds, ostensibly leading to “the Massacre of the Innocents”.⁴⁹ The cartel’s abduction and “rape” of Iriyise underscores its corrupting work against Ofeyi’s. Ofeyi recognizes that his failures as an artist–farmer to confront the cartel’s atrocious genocidal seeds early on inexorably lead to catastrophe. As a result, he throws himself into ensuring that he redresses his earlier failings by witnessing this catastrophe for society. The time of “harvest” is, therefore, necessary to ensure that Ofeyi rescues the surviving Aiyéro seed from rotting in the soil. Harvest time is when Ofeyi confronts the atrocities wrought by the cartel. Besides rescuing those of his Aiyéro seeds that have survived (that is, retrieving Iriyise from hell), Ofeyi has to “harvest” and bury properly the corpses that have been sown in mass graves and massacre sites. He “harvests” these corpses by artistically witnessing them, by courageously confronting the trauma they instigate, and by refusing to succumb to defeat. Inscribing meaning and purpose for these deaths becomes, metaphorically speaking, a means of providing a proper burial. Like resilient spores, the artist’s regenerative voice must be strong in order to succeed when confronting the atrocious consequences of genocide. Soyinka uses Ofeyi’s successful heroic quest to retrieve Iriyise (society’s regenerative spirit) to dramatize this cycle of resilient regeneration following a genocide.

Yet this tragic vision of regeneration presents some challenges on several scores, beginning with the writer’s representation of Iriyise. In her influential 1990 essay “Periodic Embodiments: A Ubiquitous

47 *Season of Anomy*, p. 16.

48 *Season of Anomy*, pp. 32–83.

49 *Season of Anomy*, p. 48.

Trope in African Men's Writing", Florence Stratton observes that several postcolonial African male writers often appropriate the figure of the "African" woman as all that is ideal in Africa's past (as seen in many Negritude writings) or as a mark of rape and plundering by colonial and postcolonial powers. For Stratton, the undercurrent in these male, seemingly emancipatory dispositions to the condition of African experience, represented through symbolized womanhood, is such that the African male writer sets himself up as the creative, active agent against a passive and romanticized female object. In these men's writing, often in response to critical historical interfaces in national history, the woman is reified as the figure of innocent or disfigured nationhood. In this way of imagining womanhood, women's creativity and active participation in history remain excluded from national discourse. As *Season* depicts them, women are symbols of a kind of national coma that the male writer-activist must work to dispel.

Stratton goes further to show how in *Season* Soyinka appropriates the woman's body in Iriyise as the national soil on which the visionary male writer must inseminate his redemptive vision. There is a vexed link in Soyinka's story, according to Stratton, between male creativity and the woman's body. At one point in the story, after gazing upon Iriyise's dancing body, Ofeyi muses about the result that comes from a union between a man's creative vision and a woman's body: "Vision is eternally of man's own creating. The woman's acceptance, her collaboration in man's vision of life results time and time again in just such periodic embodiments of earth and ideal."⁵⁰ Noting the implications for women of the "African" male writer's vision of the woman's body, Stratton remarks of Soyinka's representation of womanhood in *Season* that

"Man's vision" in this text is of national re-vision, of the redemption of the nation from the prevailing "season of anomy" by a transformation in the construction of nationhood from an ideology predicated on tyranny and exploitation to one engendering freedom. Woman's collaborative role is to embody that vision. As one of "such periodic embodiments," Iriyise is "earth and ideal," prostitute and virgin [...]. She is thus an embodiment of the nation both as it has been degraded, tainted, corrupted,

50 *Season of Anomy*, p. 83.

prostituted—down through the ages, and as it is re-envisioned by man (Soyinka-Ofeyi)—a kind of virgin land.⁵¹

I agree with Stratton's analysis, and note that themes of fertility and impotence, virginity and prostitution, honour and cowardice pervade the world of *Season* in ways that reduce specific conditions of violence to gendered (as well as sexist) metaphors and symbols. In its symbolic use of the woman as the figuration of the nation, the corpus of the (male) writer must inseminate the woman's body with visions of post-traumatic healing and recovery. In this way, the male writer figures as a hero in a struggle to rescue his land (woman), an honourable quest for which he is ready to make the ultimate sacrifice. *Season*, through its hell mythemes (described in more detail in the next section), presents Ofeyi's rescue narrative of his woman as the struggle of man striving to regain his honour. Ofeyi's quest to rescue Iriyise is also a hero's refusal to succumb to shame and dishonour resulting from the kidnap and possible rape of his woman. The hell myths on which the narrative of Ofeyi's quest is based in the novel derive from masculinist traditions that represent men as heroes and women as objects of men's will, or, as is sometimes dramatized in *Season*, as the instigators of male rebellion.⁵² For example, Demakin—one of Ofeyi's companions in the course of his quest—describes Iriyise as “a Chantal, a Deborah, torch and standard-bearer, super-mistress of universal insurgency”;⁵³ that is, for Demakin, Iriyise is the instigator of Ofeyi's resilient and revolutionary mission.

This way of using women's condition (as well as, I should add, the disfigured victims of genocide) as a metaphor for what has been battered in the postcolonial state raises questions about whether Soyinka's primary interest “really [lies] in exposing the injustices done to women” and victim groups, or else in the convenience of artistic symbolization.⁵⁴ The masculinist tropes undergirding *Season*'s narrative serve the male interests to the detriment of women in part because, according to Stratton, they signal “a gendered theory of nationhood and of writing, one that excludes women from the creative

51 Florence Stratton, “Periodic Embodiments: A Ubiquitous Trope in African Men's Writing,” *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1990, p. 111.

52 *Season of Anomy*, p. 219.

53 *Season of Anomy*, p. 219.

54 Stratton, “Periodic Embodiments”, p. 124.

production of the national polity, of identity, and of literary texts".⁵⁵ It is perhaps no wonder, then, that a node of tension in representations of the genocide of the Igbo in Nigeria continues to generate significant conversation along gendered lines.⁵⁶

Genocide as Hell

The literary critic Stanley Macebuh has identified the mythic imagination as a central thread in Soyinka's writing. The mythic, according to Macebuh, embodies Soyinka's way of rethinking modern experience by rewriting mythical models of the past. While acknowledging the centrality of myth in his writings, several of Soyinka's critics have dismissed his use of myths as overly romantic and nativist because, for them, his mythical approach emphasizes "imagination and emotion tending to irrationalism",⁵⁷ "valorises myth over the demands of language",⁵⁸ and generally offers a glib view of "individual regeneration through the enactment of ancient ritual".⁵⁹ Some other critics, such as Annie Gagiano, see Soyinka's use of myth in his writing as offering acute insight and philosophical depth to African socio-political realities.⁶⁰ While I agree with the former critics that Soyinka's valorization of myth is often problematic, I, like Gagiano, do not agree that Soyinka's use of myth is escapist and non-viable. I find the deployment of myths in *Season* to be motivated by Soyinka's articulation of political radicalism as a weapon against fascism and repression.

Soyinka deploys mythologies from diverse cultures including Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian, and Yoruba traditions. These myths constitute some of the essential components of the narration in *Season*. The myths Soyinka uses in *Season* reveal his preoccupation with themes addressing the role of art following catastrophe and in particular genocide. It is therefore important to identify the myths

55 "Periodic Embodiments, p. 124.

56 On this topic, see this book's chapter on Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

57 Geoffrey Hunt, "Two African Aesthetics: Soyinka vs Cabral," *Marxism and African Literature*, edited by George Gugelberger, James Currey, 1985, p. 67.

58 Abdulrazak Gurnah, "The Fiction of Wole Soyinka," *Wole Soyinka: An Appraisal*, edited by Adewale Maja-Pearce, Heinemann, 1994, p. 79.

59 Brenda Cooper, "The Two-Faced Ogun: Postcolonial Intellectuals and the Positioning of Wole Soyinka," *English in Africa*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1995, p. 22.

60 Annie Gagiano, "Anomy and Agony in a Nation in Crisis: Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*," *English in Africa*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1999, p. 130.

central in Soyinka's imagination of the genocide of Igbo people in Nigeria. There are at least three dominant mythemes underlying the narrative of *Season*: a confluence of the Orpheus myth and Dante's myth of the Inferno, and the Yoruba Ogun myth. These three myths are descent narratives, showing that the artistic project of *Season* is based on the katabatic imagination. As observed earlier in this chapter, the hell iconography in Soyinka's imagining of genocide is influenced by Holocaust discourse of the 1950s and 1960s that significantly uses the idea of hell or a descent into hell to explain modern Western experience and the evils of Nazism.

In her study *Hell in Contemporary Literature*, Rachel Falconer shows how the descent narrative or the katabatic trope prevails in post-1945 Western literature. Although the katabatic narrative has fascinated ancient poets in different parts of the world, Falconer observes that the descent into hell trope found a new relevance when deployed as a response to the experiences of war and atrocity following World War II.⁶¹ Even prior to 1945, according to Falconer, Western modernist writers such as Joseph Conrad and T. S. Eliot found the katabatic narrative to be a useful paradigm for meditating upon the conditions of modern existence.⁶² The trope, however, occupied a central place in post-1945 writing regarding military and Nazi atrocities. For example, in Primo Levi's 1947 Auschwitz memoir *Survival in Auschwitz* (or *If This Is a Man*), the Auschwitz camp is described explicitly as a kind of hell: "This is hell. Today, in our times, hell must be like this", Levi writes.⁶³

Similarly, in lectures given by the critic George Steiner in the 1960s, which were later incorporated into his book *In Bluebeard's Castle* (1971), Steiner attributes the cause of the Holocaust and Western totalitarian violence to the loss of belief in heaven and hell in the Western mind. Steiner writes, "the mutation of Hell into metaphor left a formidable gap in the co-ordinates of location, of psychological recognition in the Western mind."⁶⁴ This "formidable gap", according to Steiner, is what the Western totalitarian state has attempted to

61 Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature*, pp. 4, 25–31. Chapters 3 and 4 of *Hell in Contemporary Literature* are devoted to discussing representations of the Holocaust as a journey through Hell.

62 Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature*, pp. 27–28.

63 Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz: The Nazi Assault on Humanity*, translated by Stuart Woolf, Touchstone, 1996, p. 22.

64 George Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes towards the Redefinition of Culture*, rev. ed., Yale UP, 1974, p. 48.

bridge, by recreating these metaphysical realms on earth. However, of the two metaphysical realms, “Hell proved the easier to recreate.”⁶⁵ Steiner links the Nazi death camps and ancient Western conceptions of hell, noting thus: “the concentration and death camps of the twentieth century, wherever they exist, under whatever regime, are *Hell made immanent*. They are the transference of Hell from below the earth to its surface.”⁶⁶ Steiner’s claim about hell’s immanence in modern Western history was not unpopular, at least among Holocaust survivors, as several Holocaust memoirs reveal.⁶⁷

That Western iconographies of hell found a crucial place in Soyinka’s artistic responses to genocide in Nigeria is not particularly a coincidence. Soyinka uses this trope not only as a fitting artistic response to the demands of witnessing genocidal atrocities in Nigeria but also in order to respond to Western sentiments, such as Steiner’s, that have described modern history as the dawn of hell.⁶⁸ In *Season*, Soyinka

65 Steiner, *In Bluebeard’s Castle*, p. 48.

66 *In Bluebeard’s Castle*, p. 47; original emphasis. Steiner has advanced a similar argument in an earlier book, *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman*, 1967, Yale UP, 1998.

67 Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature*, pp. 16–17.

68 In *Myth*, Soyinka dismisses Steiner’s cynical view in *The Death of Tragedy* (1961; Yale UP, 1996) regarding the irrelevance and inadequacy of tragedy (in its conventional form) to represent modern experience (*Myth*, pp. 48–49). For Soyinka, Steiner’s claims about the death of tragedy come from a deep sense of self-defeat and cynicism, such as are alien to the African mind. Soyinka advocates the consideration of his own “African” version of tragedy, which he views as containing the elements of regeneration (see Chapter 2 of *Myth*, pp. 37–60). To be sure, Soyinka is not entirely correct in his assumption that the element of regeneration is absent in Western tragedy, at least that of the mid-twentieth century. The call in Soyinka’s thought for recovering the regenerative element of tragedy echoes a similar and even earlier call in Arthur Miller’s plays, even though Soyinka does not acknowledge Miller in his own reflections on tragedy. For example, even before Steiner’s verdict that tragedy is dead, the critic Rollo May in his 1953 book *Man’s Search for Himself* (Delta Book, 1953) characterized the modern Western age as an “age of emptiness”, quintessentially expressed in “the loss of the sense of tragedy” (pp. 75–76). He describes post-1945 dramas—for example, Eugene O’Neill’s *The Iceman Cometh*—as dramatizations of emptiness devoid of Western humanity’s existential struggles to assert a belief in “the worth and dignity of the person” (p. 75). However, May finds in works by Miller, particularly *Death of a Salesman* (1949), an indication of the playwright’s attempt not to mourn the loss of tragedy but to assert, quoting Miller, “the ‘indestructible will of man to achieve his humanity’” (p. 78), thereby recovering “the sources of [man’s] inner strength” (p. 80). Raymond Williams’ 1966 study *Modern Tragedy* (Broadview Press, 2006) makes a similar argument for the nature and importance of the tragic, considered from a materialist viewpoint that emphasizes social transformation as one of the primary goals of “modern” tragedy. Equally, the 1946 work by psychiatrist and Auschwitz survivor

rewrites the hell myth by staging it in an African postcolony and creating an “African” Orpheus to witness it. He absorbs this narrative encounter with hell into his own tragic visions of regeneration.

According to Anne Whitehead, Virgil’s version of the Orpheus myth is popular in Western descent narratives and appears to be the version Soyinka draws on for *Season*,⁶⁹ even though the contours of hell in *Season* also evoke the hell of Dante’s *Inferno*. In Virgil’s story, Orpheus loses his wife Eurydice to death and an afterlife in Hades through a snakebite. Grief-stricken, he embarks on an impossible journey to the underworld to try and bring Eurydice back to life. Orpheus wins over the guardians of the underworld with his songs and they agree to return Eurydice to life under one condition: that Orpheus never looks back as he exits the Underworld. Orpheus fails this test and loses Eurydice a second time. Because of his failure, Orpheus himself is killed and claimed by the underworld, wherein he finally reunites with Eurydice.

It is not clear from Virgil’s version of the myth whether Orpheus looks back in order to ensure that it is Eurydice who is behind him, or whether he does so out of curiosity, to know what in the exit scene of the underworld warrants the demand that he not look back. His backward glance may suggest a number of interpretive possibilities: the superiority of artistic curiosity over love;⁷⁰ the artist as an ignorer of rules and disrupter of order;⁷¹ and the potential of art to recover or symbolize what has been rendered lost and irrecoverable.⁷² The last point, as articulated by the French philosopher Maurice Blanchot, has over the years found increasing acceptance among scholars.⁷³ Blanchot celebrates Orpheus’s looking back as the beginning of the writing process that is initiated in the wake of catastrophe. For Blanchot, Orpheus’s failure signifies the futile attempt to restore and make present an irrecoverable

Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Beacon Press, 2006), emphasizes healing and survival over trauma. To a great extent, Soyinka’s tragic metanarrative, which valorizes the healing power of words and art, seems to echo Frankl’s notion of *logotherapy*—a psychotherapeutic form that is based on finding meaning for one’s life.

69 Anne Whitehead, “Journeying through Hell: Wole Soyinka, Trauma, and Postcolonial Nigeria,” *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 40, nos 1–2, 2008, p. 16.

70 See, for example, Mark Linder, “Time for Lacan: Looking after the Mirror Stage,” (*Re:assemblage*), *Assemblage*, no. 21, 1993, pp. 82–83.

71 See, for example, Geoffrey Sirc, “The Composition’s Eye/Orpheus’s Gaze/Cobain’s Journals,” *Composition Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2005, pp. 11–30.

72 Maurice Blanchot, “Orpheus’s Gaze,” *The Space of Literature*, translated by Ann Smock, University of Nebraska Press, 1982, pp. 171–76.

73 Whitehead, “Journeying through Hell,” pp. 17–18.

loss. In this way, writing may be considered as a compensation for what has been rendered irrecoverable by catastrophe.

However, for Soyinka, it is the celebration of Orpheus's backward glance that encapsulates the problem that catastrophe presents to the artistic imagination.⁷⁴ The artist must transcend the lure of this backward gaze in order to escape its hold on the imagination. The captivating backward gaze is not a mark of artistic heroism, according to Soyinka.⁷⁵ It is rather a symptom of the failure of the artistic will experienced during the artist's encounter with traumatic atrocity. This backward gaze, according to Soyinka, is a mark of selfishness, symptomatic of individualism and submission to death. Soyinka identifies the celebration of the backward gaze as symptomatic of Western individualism. This Western individualism contrasts with Soyinka's vision of African communitarianism, which his hero in *Season* apparently embodies. The communitarian artist-hero, for Soyinka, deploys his art to the service of community. The individualistic artist renders his on behalf of self and not community.⁷⁶

Soyinka's particular use of the Orpheus myth in *Season* can also be seen as an extension of his rewriting or updating of the myth, which he re-engineers to make it fit for confronting the reality of genocide in Nigeria.⁷⁷ Onto the Orpheus myth he inscribes the Yoruba Ogun

74 Soyinka, *The Man Died*, p. 88.

75 *The Man Died*, p. 88.

76 It is noteworthy that some critics have faltered not only when contending with Soyinka's work but also when addressing work by other African writers by assuming that Western writing has been predicated on an individualistic hero, as opposed to an African communalistic hero. One consequence of this binary is critics' tendency to engage with African writing in anthropological terms instead of as art. For discussions of these scholarly tendencies and their implications for African literary criticisms, see, for example, Ato Quayson, *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing: Orality and History in the Work of Rev. Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri*, James Currey, 1997. See also J. Z. Kronenfeld, "The 'Communalistic' African and the 'Individualistic' Westerner: Some Comments on Misleading Generalizations in Western Criticism of Soyinka and Achebe," *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1975, pp. 199–225.

77 Soyinka's rewriting of the Orpheus myth can also be considered, in part, as a response to Jean-Paul Sartre's "Black Orpheus" essay, which was published as the preface to an anthology of Negritude poetry by Francophone African poets ("Orphée noir," *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, 5th ed., edited by Léopold Sédar Senghor, Quadrigé, 1985, pp. ix–xliv). Senegalese Leopold Sedar Senghor's poems dominate Sartre's thinking about Negritude poetry. "Black Orpheus" offers a romanticized image of a primitive black consciousness and a primitive black ontology as the basis for Negritude poets' attempts to reinvent blackness using poetry.

myth, thus reshaping both the context of the Nigerian state's 1966 mass atrocities against the Igbo and Nigeria's liminal postcolonial situation. Ogun is the Yoruba God of Iron and the patron God of soldiers and hunters. He also symbolizes the creative and destructive forces in the cosmic world. In *Myth*, Soyinka reveals his fascination with a version of the Ogun myth, a revelation that some critics believe sheds light on the inner workings of his writings.⁷⁸ In this myth, a deep gulf separates the chthonic realm of Yoruba Gods and the human world. To bridge it, Ogun sacrifices himself on behalf of others by plunging into the abyss and creating a road for other Gods to cross over and into the human realm. Re-emerging on the other side of this realm, Ogun becomes stronger and more revered by the other Gods for his sacrifice and bravery. His sacrifice signifies a gift to the community, which expresses devotion and gratitude as a result.⁷⁹

What Soyinka faults in modern Western attitude to catastrophe is what he sees as the "gradual erosion of Earth in European metaphysic scope [...] probably due to the growth and influence of the Platonic-Christian tradition".⁸⁰ In other words, according to Soyinka, the fascination with the "chthonic realm"⁸¹ in Western metaphysics reflects Westerners' fixation on the traumatic zone of horror and reluctance to transcend the psychological domain when responding to horrifying experiences. Soyinka attempts to reimagine modern experience with an apprehension of a cosmic totality that, while not excluding the "chthonic realm"⁸² of the psyche, restores the important social place of the Gaianic/Earth realm in artistic responses to disaster. This vision emphasizes the role of the writer/artist as witness, mediator, gulf-mender, and healer. Seen thus, Ofeyi in *Season* is an Ogunian Orpheus

This reinvention of blackness from a sense of an idyllic primitive past is partly what Soyinka rejects in Senghorian Negritude (see Soyinka, *The Burden of Memory; the Muse of Forgiveness*, Oxford UP, 2000, pp. 71–170). Yet, even though Soyinka, unlike Senghor and Sartre, must have intended his Orpheus in *Season* not to be a romantic entranced by visions of lost innocence or burdened by traumatic memory, the Orpheus figure (Ofeyi) in *Season* is nevertheless romantic and appears not exactly as the revolutionary Orpheus continuing the "combative imperatives of the dialectics of human history" (Soyinka, *Burden*, p. 169).

78 Quayson, *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing*, pp. 66–78. Soyinka has also provided his visions and meditations on Ogun in relation to the Yoruba creation myths in his long poem "Idanre". See his *Idanre and Other Poems*, pp. 61–85.

79 Soyinka, *Myth*, p. 3.

80 *Myth*, p. 3.

81 *Myth*, p. 2.

82 *Myth*, p. 2.

voyaging into hell in search of Eurydice/Iriyise. Ofeyi's quest can be useful only if he succeeds in his mission of rescuing Iriyise. He is only secondarily concerned with undertaking a testamentary mission documenting the traumas of hell or in becoming a mere symptom of the artistic curiosity that hell inspires.

Like Orpheus, Ofeyi understands and clutches on to the power of his art in order to survive hell. However, unlike Orpheus, Ofeyi leaves the traumatic sites of hell without looking back. He leaves with new converts, including the fierce Suberu. He leaves bearing Iriyise's unconscious body (symbolizing the nation's comatose spirit following the genocide), which, notwithstanding the trauma it has suffered, exudes signs of life and regeneration. Like Ogun, Ofeyi succeeds in sacrificing himself for the sake of social harmony. He sacrifices his own sanity witnessing the horrors in the abyss of transition and emerges on the other side of the abyss wiser and better predisposed to confront social anomy. He is not the only one who emerges on the other side with changed consciousness: Demakin the revolutionary, Zaccheus the fainthearted, Suberu the brute mute, the Lebanese doctor as the outsider-insider—all transit to the other side of the abyss changed. Therefore, Soyinka uses Ofeyi's undertaking to dramatize atrocity witnessing as a transformative process.

To be sure, genocide, understood as hell in Soyinka's novel, is profoundly marked by horror. In this hell, pregnant women are torn open and their fetuses splayed before their dying eyes;⁸³ biblical Herod's infanticide is re-enacted as a daily occurrence;⁸⁴ killers consider their victims to be animal prey and turn their corpses into conspicuous sites of cruelty;⁸⁵ graveyards overflow with corpses and morgue keepers refuse to accept more;⁸⁶ a mother attempting to save her child from the inevitable flings the baby over the wall, misses, and ends up spiking her baby on "the metal barbs" on top of the wall;⁸⁷ and "raping is no longer a crime".⁸⁸ This hell is the result of anomy.

Even so, in this hell, this catacomb of wasted lives, Ofeyi the artist finds the signs of resilient life and of regeneration. He finds this life in survivors hiding in a crypt and compares them to dwellers in

83 *Season*, p. 201.

84 *Season*, p. 221.

85 *Season*, pp. 164–65.

86 *Season*, pp. 220–21.

87 *Season*, p. 290.

88 *Season*, p. 300.

ancient Jewish “Massada” [sic],⁸⁹ a reference to the Zealot fortress that withstood a Roman siege in 73–74 CE.⁹⁰ Soyinka’s comparison of Igbo resilience and sacrifice to that of the Zealots of Masada is not the only such comparison of Igbo experience in Nigeria to Jewish history. It is also an artistic insertion of Igbo experience into the debate about the moral, psychological, and phenomenological nature of human struggle, resilience, and resistance. The Roman siege of Masada led to the mass suicide of the defenders, which has remained a controversial subject among Jewish people because on the one hand it commemorates the extent of the Jews’ heroic struggle against external oppression, while on the other it serves as a cautionary tale warning against refusing to compromise when all is lost.⁹¹ In the Nigerian context, the Igbo/Biafran struggle was similarly described on the one hand as suicidal struggle (the Biafran leadership were blamed for their refusal to compromise) and on the other as heroic.⁹² In *Season*, Soyinka appears to endorse the latter sentiment, even though his depiction of victims’ struggles as sacrificial, and in some cases as self-destructive, presents additional challenges for thinking about genocide in Nigeria and about justice for the victims of mass killing. The Igbo/Biafran experience in Nigeria does not parallel the Jewish Masada not only because everyone in Biafra does not commit suicide but also, importantly, because the Biafran struggle against exterminationist mass killing does not aggregate to a mass suicide. In fact, to describe the murder of Igbo peoples by Nigerian state perpetrators as suicide appears to give credence to the propaganda of the Nigerian military that labelled Biafran struggle and resistance as wilfully suicidal.

Witnessing Hell

A central drama in Ofeyi’s quest to retrieve Iriyise from her abductors involves him playing witness to atrocity. His friend and fellow musician, Zaccheus, who serves both as his guide and as disciple, accompanies Ofeyi in his quest to hell. Zaccheus is present when a group of soldiers

89 *Season*, p. 271.

90 See, for example, “Archaeology in Israel: Masada Desert Fortress,” *Jewish Virtual Library: A Project of AICE*. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/masada-desert-fortress>, accessed 18 March 2018.

91 See “Archaeology in Israel: Masada Desert Fortress”.

92 See, for example, Achebe, *There Was a Country*, pp. 209–39.

kidnaps Iriyise. Both Zaccheus and Iriyise have driven to a place called Cross-river (representative in *Season* of Northern Nigeria, where most of the massacres of Igbo people took place) for a performance. They are “blissfully unaware” that they are heading “into a holocaust that had already commenced”.⁹³ Knowing the prison where the soldiers have locked up Iriyise, Zaccheus, like a Virgil guiding Dante through hell, becomes Ofeyi’s guide and takes the artist through the different traumatic zones of a postcolonial hell. Unlike Virgil, though, Zaccheus often appears overwhelmed and traumatized by the experience of hell and intermittently dissuades Ofeyi from continuing his quest.

The bridge leading into Cross-river bears a sign, “TO DAMN”.⁹⁴ This bridge leads first to a dam site called the Shage Dam, which has been constructed by Aiyéro men. The dam supplies electricity to the whole nation. The conflation of light and electricity (which makes light) with the Aiyéro further shows how Soyinka’s symbolism associates the genocide’s victims with the progressive ideals serving as the basis for their elimination. The Shage Dam project is a possible reference to Kainji Dam in present-day Niger State in Northern Nigeria. This dam began to supply electricity to the whole country in 1964, and the project was eventually completed in 1968. Many Igbo and other labourers from the southern part of the country comprised a significant part of the workforce on the Kainji Dam project. It is significant in this context that in 1966 many of the Igbo workers were lured to the project site by their fellow workers and massacred.

In *Season*, Soyinka turns this troubled and troubling history of the Kainji Dam electricity project into a metaphor for the dreadful attempt to extinguish the light that Aiyéro men have tried to spread throughout the rest of the country. Zaccheus describes the dam site to Ofeyi as “a dead place”.⁹⁵ The deeper Ofeyi crawls into this hell the more Dantesque the reality around him becomes. He observes that, like a plague, genocidal atrocities have contaminated everything, including the killers’ own natural means of subsistence. One evocative scene that expresses the depths of the horror Ofeyi witnesses is a massacre at what is referred to in the novel as “the formal doorway to the territory of hell”.⁹⁶ Once through this doorway, Ofeyi voyages into the heart of the theatre of blood, where “the plague had been welcomed into the

93 *Season*, p. 89.

94 *Season*, p. 169; original emphasis.

95 *Season*, p. 172.

96 *Season*, p. 192.

bloodstream of some who shared neither land nor cause with the Cross-river clans, but who, anxious not to be outdone in the predator game, preyed upon [Aiyéro] victims as they passed.”⁹⁷

While still standing at this doorway, a horrifying scene plays out immediately before the poet–hero. Ofeyi witnesses a train bearing refugee–survivors stop over a bridge. A wagon filled with corpses is emptied into the river, and the sight holds the artist spellbound:

When the bolts were first removed the bodies simply fell out, tumbled towards the thin ribbon of water far below the narrow bridge. Then sanitation men in their uniforms, handkerchiefs tied to their lower faces began to haul out others one by one, prodding through the metal gaps to push into the void those which were caught between the girdles of the bridge. Faces of survivors crowded the windows on that side, set faces followed the motions of this parody of acrobats through space and sunshine, the distant thuds of bodies bouncing from crag to crag of the bottomless gully. A child corpse flew right over the steel arch and plummeted down like a plump wild duck. The distant, barely recognizable splashes grew even more beggarly as the bodies dammed the trickle. Then the wagon door was raised, the bolts rammed into place and the train moved on.⁹⁸

The imagery of genocide as disposal or “sanitation” or “cleansing” in the scenario described above resonates in the context of Ofeyi’s observations concerning killers’ polluting their communities’ water supply. Soyinka thereby stresses the irony of a genocide that is justified by its perpetrators using the logic of “sanitation”, but that is, in fact, destructively polluting. In *Season*, the Zaki, who is the local ruler of Cross-river, coerces his subjects into mobilizing against the Aiyéro, remarking thus through his clerk, “I want a clean sweep of Cross-river.”⁹⁹ He calls the Aiyéro “non-natives” of Cross-river who “must be swept out to the last man”.¹⁰⁰ The designation of citizens as non-natives in their own country reverberates alongside what Mahmood Mamdani has described as the crisis of postcolonial citizenship in the context of Rwanda.¹⁰¹ This

97 *Season*, pp. 192–93.

98 *Season*, pp. 193–94.

99 *Season*, p. 126.

100 *Season*, p. 126.

101 Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, pp. 3–39.

crisis derives from “race branding”,¹⁰² a process familiar to students of the Nazi Holocaust, whereby a group is racialized and set socially and politically apart, having been reconceived of as an enemy alien.¹⁰³ However, as I have argued earlier in this chapter, while on the one hand *Season* shows the genocide of the Igbo in Nigeria to derive from such race branding, on the other it also portrays this branding as an essence, not as a social construct.

On the faces of the survivors in the train Ofeyi notices a seething emotion of revenge as they gaze upon the disposal of their dead relatives: “[Ofeyi] felt that with most, with the few who stuck it till the end there was an element of compulsion, a resolve to brand the scene on their minds for ever, ready for disinterment whenever the time should come.”¹⁰⁴ For Ofeyi, genocide presents a test of will on all fronts: it is a test of the survivors’ will to resist the violent impulse to seek vengeance, as well as of the killers’ courage to acknowledge their guilt and make amends. Soyinka also presents this scene of the corpses’ disposal as a test of the artist’s resolve, in the wake of having witnessed such horrors, to continue his search for Iriyise. At the same time it is also a test of the artist’s unwillingness to accept that violence has any value, even as an instrument of revenge.

The question of violence remains of central concern to Ofeyi throughout his quest. He keeps asking himself whether there is a need for or value to violence. In *Season*, Soyinka uses the character of Demakin as Ofeyi’s foil to dramatize the pitfalls of violence as a response to genocide. Demakin is a revolutionary who considers Ofeyi’s idealism naïve and unrealistic. He appears at significant moments in the story to shake Ofeyi out of his resolve not to use violence to confront the cartel. Only twice during his quest does Ofeyi resort to violence. In both cases he claims that he does so for self-defence and in order to save others. He convinces himself that only at such moments of self-preservation or emergency rescue may the artist resort to physical violence in order to challenge the exercise of brutal power. Yet this logic of self-preservation echoes the logic of survival that genocide perpetrators in the story use in validating their violence.

The concern with the artist’s response to violence in *Season* is perhaps a possible reference to Soyinka’s friend, the famous poet Christopher Okigbo, who, upon seeing the atrocities perpetrated against the Igbo,

102 *When Victims Become Killers*, p. 13; original emphasis.

103 *When Victims Become Killers*, p. 13.

104 *Season*, p. 194.

resorted to violent resistance against the Nigerian state. Okigbo was one of the most influential poets in the 1960s Nigeria. An Igbo himself, he managed to escape to the East during the massacres and then joined the Biafran army to fight for Biafran sovereignty. He died in active combat in 1967. Following his death, his story became a point of controversy among several African writers and critics for thinking about the role of the artist in moments of genocide and war. Notably, Kenyan writer and critic Ali Mazrui saw Okigbo's transformation into a soldier as a betrayal of his artistic practice. In 1971 Mazrui published a controversial novel titled *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo* wherein he puts Okigbo on trial for abandoning the pen in favour of the gun. Unlike Mazrui, who bifurcates writing and soldiering, considering them mutually exclusive practices, in Soyinka's *Season* no such binary is immediately obvious. What is more at stake for Soyinka is whether violence can ever serve as a useful counter to violence. Throughout, Ofeyi thinks that the artist's resort to violence can potentially transform him into the same kind of killer he is fighting against. He responds with apprehension to Demakin's ideology of violent resistance. Yet Ofeyi never resolves this question of when, if at all, the artist can defend the use of physical violence in response to a genocide, even though he himself resorts to violence for self-protection and for saving a life in danger.

However, besides Ofeyi's meditations on the revolutionary, regenerative, or vindictive potential of violence, Soyinka's purpose in *Season* seems to be more to dramatize the artist's struggles against nihilism. For Ofeyi, the encounter with hell is ultimately a contest of will: the will to use violence, or not, against the forces of hell; the will to continue his quest, or not; and the will to succumb to silence or instead to speak out against the cartel's atrocities.

When confronted by the fear of dying in Cross-river, Ofeyi finds himself jarred into a recognition of the futility of mortality. He shakes off this fear, as "it was not a watery death he feared, only a death from error".¹⁰⁵ To die by "error", as Ofeyi fears, is to die lost and forgotten in a mass of irrecoverable corpses; hence, a futile, meaningless death. The reference to the fourth section of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, "Death by Water", underlines Ofeyi's struggles against a sense of futility regarding his artistic quest to find a purpose in genocide and to assert the value of representations. In "Death by Water" the speaker advocates against the sentiments of renewal and regeneration by telling of the death of Phlebas at sea. Phlebas's corpse brings about no regeneration, other

105 *Season*, p. 105.

than to serve as food to sea creatures picking it apart. Ofeyi rejects this vision of a pointless death. How can he just accept that the corpses he has witnessed dumped into the river are no more than food for water creatures and nothing more? He remembers what Pa Ahime, the guardian of Aiyéro, has said to him regarding the death of the Aiyéro men: “If it is given for the men of Aiyéro to be the sacrifice ... it was a good cause.”¹⁰⁶ At first, Ofeyi refuses to consider the deaths of the Aiyéro men as a sacrifice leading to good things, noting that they are “Not sacrifice [...] only more scapegoats to lay a false trail of blood away from the altar of the unholy god, Mammon. No, not sacrifice.”¹⁰⁷ Later, as his quest progresses, Ofeyi comes to accept his journey as one intended to give purpose to the otherwise futile deaths of victims. Hence he accepts the victims’ death as required for the country’s social harmony.¹⁰⁸ Soyinka’s tragic vision of regeneration and reparation resides within Ofeyi’s attempts to find meaning in the deaths of so many victims. In Ofeyi’s world, victims’ death should serve as a moral instrument to cause a genocidal society to rethink its failings and make amends.

A major issue with this regenerative vision in *Season* is the novel’s depiction of victims as scapegoats whose deaths are required for their killers’ moral rejuvenation.¹⁰⁹ For example, a gripping representation of genocide victims as sacrificial objects is the horrifying incident at the Kuntua church in Cross-river—possibly a reference to a similar incident that happened at a church in Kaduna, the then capital of the Northern Region of Nigeria. At the church, Ofeyi and his guide Zaccheus witness the burning of worshippers. It is a Sunday and the worshippers have defied all dangers, choosing instead to pay homage to the divine. The church bell sounds like a death call, and the worshippers fatalistically head to the church in obedience to its solemn call. Once the worshipper-victims congregate within the church building, assailants surround the church. Soyinka narrates the scenario using the imagery of a ritual sacrifice. The assailants outside seal up the church doors and windows to prevent any escape. Like holy men preparing a sacrifice, they begin to pour petrol on the church building: soon, “[t]he deadly libation [is] over, the priests withdrew [...] only the sudden inferno that leapt up where

106 *Season*, p. 105.

107 *Season*, p. 105.

108 *Season*, pp. 175–76.

109 On the subject of scapegoating as communal ritual sacrifice, see René Girard’s *The Scapegoat*, translated by Yvonne Freccero, Hopkins Fulfillment Service, 1989.

the church had been, and the ring of watchers around it stepping further back as the heat raged fiercer and black smoke began to obscure their vision".¹¹⁰ This horrifying scene and the imagery of burnt offering that Ofeyi witnesses evokes in him and his guide Zaccheus a strong sense of ritual sacrifice. Ofeyi watches this ritual and observes its dreadful atmosphere. He hears victims' agonizing cries as "from a long long way below the earth"¹¹¹ while he searches for life and healing in the inferno. The fire is a catastrophic conflagration created from the sacrifice of "the Innocents".

The image of sacrifice in this scene parallels the sacrifice of bulls Ofeyi has witnessed performed by the guardian of Aiyéro earlier in the novel during a farming festival ritual for the regeneration of life forces.¹¹² Once Ofeyi accepts that victims are being killed for a higher purpose, the slaughter begins to take the shape of a ritual sacrifice in his mind. It is only as ritual sacrifice that the artist in *Season* can make sense of and give meaning to the massacres he witnesses. He understands his assigning of this meaning to be the one thing he can do to prevent all these deaths from being in vain. For Ofeyi, the massacres constitute a ritual sacrifice required in order to achieve a social transition. As an artist inclined towards an integrated community, he decides to play the role of bridge-builder, like the god Ogun. His quest to rescue Iriyise from hell becomes a metaphor for the artist's attempt to inscribe meaning and recover remnants of morality from society's genocidal inferno. Iriyise in *Season* symbolizes society's regenerative spirit. During the ritual sacrifice that Pa Ahime performs at the beginning of the novel, Soyinka portrays Iriyise as a willing sacrificial object whose fate has become tied to that of the bull at the altar. He writes that "[Iriyise's] ivory neckpiece had merged with the hidden rapids in the bull's convulsive throats. Caryatid and timeless, [...] a willing presence at the altar".¹¹³

In *Season*, willpower manifests in Ofeyi's determination to overcome all discouragement and his refusal to give up on his quest to rescue Iriyise. His companion Zaccheus, the Lebanese doctor who guides him through a morgue in his search for Iriyise, and the doctor's sister Taaila, who falls in love with Ofeyi, all try at different times to discourage him from continuing on his journey. Ofeyi refuses. The episode at the

110 *Season*, p. 199.

111 *Season*, p. 199.

112 *Season*, pp. 15–16, 176.

113 *Season*, p. 16.

morgue is an example of Ofeyi's resolute will. Inside the cold morgue, as Ofeyi searches piles of mutilated corpses for Iriyise, Zaccheus's will fails him. He faints and remains unconscious throughout Ofeyi's slow search for Iriyise among the dead. The cynical doctor is the only one able to help Ofeyi through the experience, but his guidance only inspires hopelessness and discourages Ofeyi further. The pull of cynicism becomes so strong inside the cold room that Ofeyi continually has to work to fight off the hopelessness that the corpses inspire. He does this by despising and forcefully rejecting them:

The feeling grew on him that Iriyise could not be here, that her living essence could not be summed up in one of these wax parodies of the human condition. Not one of these counterfeiting forms could desecrate her image by laying claim to a similarity in fate, so, why seek ye the living among the dead ... still he continued ... last row, last pallet. Out. In.¹¹⁴

Iriyise's fate here is contrasted with that of the Aiyéro dead generally. Hers is of the life force, the undying essence of her troubled nation, and, most broadly, of a battered humanity. To appreciate the resilience of this essential vitality, Ofeyi has to get as close as possible to the horrors of death, to those whose deaths bring illumination to "the human condition".¹¹⁵ His ability to surmount the challenges of bearing witness to such horrors as those in the morgue requires an exercise of will of the sort that is central to Soyinka's tragic vision. According to this vision, willpower first and foremost distinguishes the hero from other people.

In *Season*, a cogent dramatization of the artist's ability to exercise his will arrives in the final section of the novel when Ofeyi insists on the power of words (and art) to confront and make sense of appalling horror. This occurs deep inside Temoko prison, where Iriyise is being kept sectioned in a lunatic wing by the cartel. Inside the prison walls, Ofeyi's encounter with horror takes a surreal turn. Events in this final episode of the novel appear to take place inside Ofeyi's head, as though he were in a state of delirium. His real-world quest transforms into a journey to the deeper recesses of his traumatized mind, and so into lunacy. This lunacy is not only the artist's own mental instability; it is also the lunatic condition of his society. Ofeyi has to probe deeply into this social chaos in order to find a shred of sanity that can be used to

114 *Season*, p. 226.

115 *Season*, p. 226.

rebuild community. His successful rescue of Iriyise from the lunatic dungeon of Temoko signals the victory of artistic will over the trauma instigated by a genocidal hell. Ofeyi's ability to use words to tame Suberu, the brute prison guard, and guarantee Iriyise's rescue further attests to Soyinka's vision of the power of art to deal with genocidal horror.

In *Season*, Suberu is a probable reference to the monstrous dog-beast Cerberus in Virgil's Orpheus myth, who guards the Underworld in order to prevent the dead from leaving. Although Ofeyi requires help from accomplices such as Demakin and Zaccheus in order to rescue Iriyise from Temoko, he is also able to tame Suberu with words. Not only does he tame him, he wins him over to his cause. By converting Suberu Ofeyi reveals his quest to have been, additionally, to free the monstrous energy and force necessary for the maintenance of the prison. Ofeyi recognizes that the cartel can succeed only when it has the likes of Suberu at its service. He therefore widens his understanding of his role as an artist to include the reformation of social self-consciousness and the re-education of people such as Suberu, who are improperly used by those in power to perpetrate profound evil.

In *Season*, readers are not encouraged to sympathize with or pity the victims of genocide. The cathartic emotional response to tragedy does not find expression in Soyinka's representation of genocide. An exemplary demonstration of the author's inclination to force the reader to witness horror without succumbing to it pitifully may be found in the novel's final episode, in which Ofeyi wanders through a leper's ward in Temoko prison. The narrator warns the reader following Ofeyi to "abandon hope".¹¹⁶ The director of the prison cautions Ofeyi not to show sympathy to the lepers because they hate such displays and would readily attack anyone showing such sympathy for their situation. The leper's ward episode reveals a surreal drama of abjection, deformity, and famine resulting from genocidal atrocities. Some critics have read this scene as a metaphor for the reality of starvation that took hold in Biafra, in which victims transformed into cannibals, squabbling over rotten foodstuffs and devouring one another.¹¹⁷

As Ofeyi wanders through the ward the prison director invites him to witness a game of fighting among the starving lepers. The guards stage this gruesome spectacle after depriving famished lepers with different deformities of food. The struggle to feed turns into a

¹¹⁶ *Season*, p. 282.

¹¹⁷ See Coundouriotis, *The People's Right to the Novel*, p. 127.

chaotic fight among the lepers. Ofeyi watches this spectacle in silent horror. He hears one of the lepers call the others, “Beast of no nation”.¹¹⁸ Eleni Coundouriotis’s observation regarding the leper’s use of this phrase is instructive: “The leper’s accusation that his fellow inmates are ‘beasts of no nation’ (barbarians?) suggests his own struggle to hold onto a sense of belonging against their unbelonging. Nation is the humanizing reference here, and belonging to the nation must be claimed against the anomie of war.”¹¹⁹ As a signifier of wretchedness, the phrase “beasts of no nation” suggests total abjection and dehumanization. The phrase evokes the punishing exilic conditions being suffered by those hounded out of their homeland and continuing to face existential threats.¹²⁰

Soyinka’s Tragic Vision

By the end of Soyinka’s *Season*, cynicism disappears. Ofeyi journeys through hell, rescues Iriyise, and looks ahead to a future that he must now confront with more optimism and preparedness. Thus, the novel dramatizes the victory of will over the horrors of genocidal hell, the victory of awakened consciousness over trauma. As Ofeyi leads the victorious throng out of the hell that is Temoko prison, the narrator declares a verdict that includes a vision of the victory of the Aiyéro’s communitarian ethos. This is signified by his use of imagery of the forest’s victory over street culture and capitalist greed. He observes that “Temoko was sealed against the world till dawn. The street emptied at

118 *Season*, pp. 296–97.

119 Coundouriotis, *The People’s Right to the Novel*, p. 127.

120 The notion of exile signalled in the phrase “beast of no nation” also appeared in Achebe’s 1960 novel *No Longer at Ease* (Heinemann, 1969), where it found its first use in describing social reality in Nigeria. In *No Longer at Ease* “beast of no nation” is used to describe Nigerians who have been to Europe to receive education and returned to their communities afterwards only to find themselves alienated from the realities at home. The feeling of double exile and the crises of identity resulting from their double displacement (in Europe and in Africa) make them beasts of no nation. The phrase “beasts of no nation” became widely popular following famous Nigerian musician Fela Anikulapo-Kuti’s 1989 release of an album with the same title. Uzodinma Iweala’s 2005 novel of the same title and its film adaptation in 2015 used the phrase to describe the experiences of child soldiers, who are used like animals and left with no root, no home, and no national allegiance as they wage wars and wreak havoc in Africa. Their deaths remain unmourned, uncounted, and generally undocumented.

last as the walls and borders shed their last hidden fruit. In the forests, life began to stir.”¹²¹

Yet there remains something unsettling in this idea of an immediate post-genocidal renewal, especially given the reality of Biafran defeat and the double anguish suffered by the Igbo as a result of both genocide and the failure to be separated from Nigeria. Partly, this discomfort is a consequence of the aforementioned (and importantly, if not exclusively, the perpetrators’) view of the victims as sacrificially redemptive. The alignment of perpetrator and post-genocidal morality in Soyinka’s tragic vision should give us pause. This pause is sustained by the novel’s refusal to consider seriously the place of justice in a genocide’s aftermath. No part in *Season*, except for a brief dismissal of vengeance as a fitting response to genocide or instances of nemesis catching up with some killers in the form of a disease, interrogates what justice might mean for a genocide’s victims and survivors. Instead, the idea of justice in the novel emerges from readers’ confrontation by the traumatic events and atrocities it depicts. *Season* does not envision clearly how transitional justice might properly and reasonably unfold. The novel seems to suggest that only by witnessing atrocity does it become possible to undertake a broad and collective reassessment of shared standards and values. What form this reassessment should take, exactly, and the specific uses to which it should be put remain unspecified. It is safe to conclude, therefore, that Soyinka’s tragic vision of genocide raises questions about the integrity and utility of the writer’s artistic vision as a response to genocide in Nigeria.

Sacrifice in Soyinka’s *Season* denies the material and ideological reality, and therefore the deep contingency, of the historical circumstances leading to a genocide. This denial may be understood as potentially offensive, particularly to members of victim groups. For victims, redeeming the mass extermination of co-citizens by linking these deaths to the ritual performance of national becoming might seem downright blasphemous. Perhaps the failure of Soyinka’s tragic vision of genocide in *Season* is that it does not trouble the easy alignment of the artist’s and the perpetrator’s gazes. We might therefore want to think of Soyinka’s artistic response to genocide as a species of what the French writer Alain Robbe-Grillet termed a “systematic *tragification* of the universe”.¹²² Such tragification turns the experience of genocide into an

121 *Season*, p. 320.

122 Adrian Poole, *Tragedy: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford UP, 2005, p. 63; original emphasis.

occasion for a process of social and political interrogation that becomes a kind of justice in and of itself.

Even victims of the failed attempt to establish a Biafran nation cannot be considered “sacrificial”, especially those who were murdered in 1966. For they neither died for nor offered their lives to the realization of Biafra. Many Igbo authors writing in response to the genocide preferred to treat Biafra as a by-product of trauma rather than sacrifice. They use “sacrifice” only in relation to the cost of the war for volunteers who died fighting for the Biafran cause, as one finds, for instance, in Chinua Achebe’s short story “Girls at War” or in Cyprian Ekwensi’s novel *Survive the Peace*. The theme of betrayal that predominates in a number of stories by Igbo writers focuses more on the dismal condition of double betrayal resulting from unwanted ordinary citizens (that is, beasts of no nation) being spurned by Nigerian and Biafran elites alike. Sacrifice in these works manifests in the form of people wilfully committing themselves to the Biafran cause, even when it means losing everything. The vision of sacrifice in these works is remarkably different from that of Soyinka.¹²³

The attempt in *Season of Anomy* to find a higher purpose for genocide is on a par with popular political and cultural responses to mass atrocities in other parts of the world. Similar attempts to find a purpose for genocide played out in responses to the Holocaust and several other genocides.¹²⁴ The tendency is usually to ascribe a purpose to genocide in order to find cultural and political use for it. I intend my discussion of Soyinka’s *Season* in this chapter to serve as a springboard for thinking more broadly about the impulses behind and the implications for Africa of appropriating the experience of genocide for such purposes as nation building, agitating for freedom, and numerous other human rights advocacies. As my critique of *Season* suggests, the urge following exterminatory forms of violence is often to find answers to what Elie Wiesel has called “the metaphysical *why*”.¹²⁵ To be clear, this quest for post-genocidal understanding has often resulted in such notable social and political changes as the formation of new nations and UN conventions and declarations concerning genocide and human

123 Noteworthy, however, are works such as Flora Nwapa’s *Never Again* and I.N.C. Aniebo’s *Anonymity of Sacrifice* that align with artistic impulses similar to those found in Soyinka’s *Season*, seeking to inscribe a moral purpose to suffering and the mass deaths of victims.

124 See, for example, John K. Roth, *The Failures of Ethics: Confronting the Holocaust, Genocide, and Other Mass Atrocities*, Oxford UP, 2015, pp. 192–93.

125 Elie Wiesel, *Legends of Our Time*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968, p. 162.

rights. However, the reality of genocide more often than not resists meaningfulness, just as it resists representation and so the assignment of any kind of redemptive purpose. As I describe here with reference to Soyinka's *Season*, the dramatization of the quest to find meaning in and following a genocide may, after all, reveal the futility, challenges, and tensions of any such mission, as well as the struggles among African writers to resist the cynicism spurred by genocide.

4

Writing the “African” Holocaust

The Rwandan Genocide as a Gospel of African Decolonization in Diop’s *Murambi, The Book of Bones*

In the previous chapter I argued in part that Soyinka’s *Season of Anomy* is a katabatic narrative that dramatizes an artist’s attempts to reverse through his handiwork the infernal conditions of genocide by witnessing atrocities in response to a moral imperative. In *Season*, the quest into hell signals Soyinka’s acknowledgement of genocide’s inversion of the universe. The hero’s descent into and successful ascent from hell metaphorize a kind of inversion and then reversion or restoration of the order of things. The artist’s traumatic encounters at the bottom of hell function mainly to strengthen his resolve and will regarding the purpose of his artistic mission. His encounters do not change him or alter fundamentally his awareness of himself. The hero’s artistic vision remains intact and hell functions in the novel as a space to test this vision and for him to dramatize its importance. Unlike in Soyinka’s novel, the hell of genocide in Senegalese Boubacar Boris Diop’s novel *Murambi, the Book of Bones* (*Murambi*, subsequently) constitutes a space conducive to the conversion of the artist. Within Diop’s conception of genocide, the artist may be seen as coming into a new awareness of both himself as an artist and the purpose of his art.

In this chapter I discuss Diop’s *Murambi* as a katabatic narrative of the 1994 Rwandan genocide that relies heavily on the biblical story of the Gentile’s conversion to Christianity. By portraying Rwanda’s genocide as analogous to the Gentile’s conversion story, Diop encourages an affinity between the Holocaust and Rwanda’s genocide. I have noted earlier

in the book that one consequence of comparing African genocides to the Holocaust is that literary representations become less attuned to addressing the political preconditions of genocide in the traumatic contexts of their origin. This is because such comparison often draws on cultural memories of the Holocaust as a moral instrument of individual and social reform. Accordingly, the African genocide novel of such an ideological persuasion tends to moralize about genocidal catastrophe and ignore or repress the phenomenon's central political foundations. In such situations, as we shall see in Diop's *Murambi*, writing genocide serves less to offer imaginative possibilities for political justice and redress than to act as a narrative seeking to transform "the personal and historical into just such a mythical absolute"¹ as one finds in the case of Soyinka's *Season*.

The biblical story of Cornelius's conversion and meeting with the apostle Simon Peter (Acts 15) is central to understanding Diop's thematic concerns in *Murambi*, at least in so far as genocide and its representation are concerned. I argue that Diop's deployment of the Cornelius trope in *Murambi* attempts to envision a decolonizing agenda for postcolonial Africa using the experience of genocide in Rwanda as a primary reference point. Decolonization is at the centre of Diop's artistic vision in *Murambi* because, as the writer has suggested, self-hatred of the racist kind exemplified by Rwanda's (broadly Africa's) colonial history is a major motivator of the cruelty witnessed during the genocide.² Hence the Cornelius trope as it is "emplotted" in *Murambi* is meant to do two things: first, to dramatize the process of emergence of a decolonized African subject based on his or her encounter with Rwanda's genocide; and, second, to turn the genocide into a moral weapon with which to confront the remnants of racism and colonialism in Africa. Yet, as I will also contend throughout the rest of this chapter, Diop's intertextual engagement with the biblical story of Cornelius underlines some challenges in its decolonizing vision because it offers a theological/mythical account of decolonization that has constrained relevance given the actual historical and political conditions (and preconditions) of genocide in Rwanda.

In what follows, I briefly describe the historical context and considerations informing Diop's writing of *Murambi*. Afterwards, my discussion of the novel is divided into two parts. The first (focusing on the novel's first and third sections) discusses the nature of hatred and self-hate

1 Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature*, p. 50.

2 Tadjó, "Interview with Boubacar Boris Diop," p. 426.

as it is portrayed in *Murambi*, namely as propelling the genocide and consequently resulting in an inverted moral universe and psychological fragmentation. The second part (based on the second and final sections of the novel) discusses Diop's portrayal of Cornelius's quest into the nightmarish world of post-genocide Rwanda in order to find psychic redemption and give purpose to writing about genocidal atrocity.

Context

As already highlighted elsewhere in this book, Diop was among a group of ten African artists sponsored to go Rwanda in 1998 to provide artist responses to the genocide of 1994. The "*Rwanda: Ecrire par devoir de mémoire*" (*Rwanda: Writing as Duty to Memory*) project came at a time when artistic representations of the genocide were nearly absent. According to Alexandre Dauge-Roth, the project helped to provide an African perspective on an experience of genocide that was then almost exclusively represented by Western journalists and humanitarian activists.³ Diop's *Murambi* is arguably one of the most successful publications to emerge from the project, not least for its moving story of genocide but also for its vision of writing genocide as a moral duty. In 2002 the Zimbabwe International Book Fair included the novel in its list of Africa's 100 best books of the twentieth century for its impact related to popularizing the Rwandan genocide through art. As a further testament to its significance, since its publication in French as *Murambi, le livre des ossements* in 2000 the novel has been translated into several languages, including an English translation in 2006, even though it is yet to be translated into Kinyarwanda, the main language used in Rwanda.

Diop published his first novel, *Le Temps de Tamango*, in 1981 and has since emerged as one of the dominant voices writing from Senegal. In *Murambi* critics have been quick to observe what they see as a remarkable difference from Diop's other novels before and also after it. As Diop himself puts it, *Murambi* is aesthetically bare and shows "a total disregard for novelistic conventions".⁴ In his previous books, he builds intrigue and suspense so as to mislead his readers and take them through a kind of discovery quest: "I invited [the reader] to join me in a kind of treasure hunt [...] and with a certain amount of arrogance I say to the reader: 'Come, we will lose ourselves together, but it will be worth

3 Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming*, pp. 89–98.

4 Tadjó, "Interview with Boubacar Boris Diop," p. 426.

it.”⁵ In the case of *Murambi* there was an urgent need, Diop claims, to discard aesthetic conventions because the genocide defied any conventional modes of representation. “What was more important,” according to Diop, “was to make use of the fictional form to pass on information and produce a text that was simple and direct.”⁶ In another sense, he wanted *Murambi* to serve as “a funerary stele”, a kind of mourning ritual for victims, because the perpetrators had deliberately humiliated them in order “to convince themselves and especially their victims that they were not really human and that nature had erred by putting them on this earth”.⁷

Yet I disagree slightly with Diop’s claim that *Murambi* is “simple and direct” and unlike his previous writings not based on a discovery quest. As I will go on to explain, central to *Murambi* is a quest in which confronting genocide in its aftermath leads to a kind of self-emancipatory revelation. Whereas in Soyinka’s *Season of Anomy* the quest narrative arises as a consequence of the artist–protagonist’s search to recover the regenerative spirit of a people, and thereby to give purpose to art in a genocide’s aftermath, in Diop’s *Murambi* the quest unfolds in relation to the artist–protagonist’s conversion from an old self to a new one, which Diop construes as a self-emancipatory discovery process.

Diop’s vision of decolonization in *Murambi* and, as he further explains, in his book *Africa Beyond the Mirror* is expressive of what the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o has described as a “decolonization of the mind”.⁸ This vision of decolonization emphasizes an act of reclaiming one’s own perception of oneself and one’s place in the world. Diop confessed that witnessing the Rwandan genocide four years after the massacres affected him beyond merely his stylistic choices for

5 Tadjó, “Interview with Boubacar Boris Diop,” p. 426.

6 Tadjó, “Interview with Boubacar Boris Diop,” pp. 426–27.

7 Diop, *Africa Beyond the Mirror*, p. 12.

8 In his book *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Heinemann, 1986), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o argues that language has been a central weapon of imperialism and colonization. The violence of European colonization in Africa, according to Ngũgĩ, is that it is not only content with stealing the colonized people’s land and resources but also perpetrates violence on the colonized people’s language by imposing the colonizer’s language on the colonized, thereby destroying colonized people’s cultures and ability of autonomous self-perception. Hence African decolonization, according to Ngũgĩ, must aim to jettison the colonizer’s language. This is because language carries a people’s culture and forms the basis upon which a people makes sense of themselves and their place in the world. To decolonize the mind (through language), therefore, suggests an epistemic, political, and cultural project of reclaiming one’s own autonomous perception of oneself and one’s place in the world.

writing about the genocide. For the first time, Diop began to show a hesitation to write in French. In Rwanda, the writer believed himself to be witnessing one of the great calamities of colonialism, which led him to question his artistic commitment to Africa as an African writer and the language of his art. After *Murambi* he wrote his novel *Doomi Golo* (*The Hidden Notebooks*) in the Senegalese language of Wolof, making it the first Wolof novel to be translated into French and English. Although Diop has since returned to writing in both French and Wolof, he believes that his encounter in Rwanda radically altered his vision and commitments as a writer. The change of the language of his writing—at once political, aesthetic, and personal—symptomizes the disruptive effects of his encounter with the Rwanda catastrophe.⁹ When asked to explain the link between his choice to write in Wolof and his visit to Rwanda in 1998, Diop remarks,

I have often said this and I am always being asked to explain the link. However, I haven't been able to do so because there is no direct link between going to Rwanda and writing in Wolof. I am well aware of this, but I also know that if I had not gone to Rwanda, I would never have written in my mother tongue. What I mean is that the encounter between Rwanda and the West was a deeply violent one and it is impossible to understand what happened in 1994 if this is not taken into account. I have reflected on the foreign intervention in Rwanda and see many parallels with my own country. It is not difficult for an external power to apply pressure on the sensitive areas of a dominated country and cause it to explode. Moreover, we cannot overlook the cultural and psychological dimension of genocide. Rwanda is always being cited as an example of hatred for the other: "I destroy the other because when I look at him, I see my own image which I cannot tolerate." Where does this hatred of the self come from, this scorn for one's culture, one's language, of everything which in sum identifies us in relation to the others? It comes from colonisation. Before going to Rwanda, I was strongly influenced by the works of [Frantz] Fanon, Cheikh Anta Diop, and [Amilcar] Cabral, but in the end I had argued to myself that they came from another time. The genocide of the Tutsis nonetheless quickly brought me back to them.¹⁰

9 Qader, *Narratives of Catastrophe*, pp. 16–17.

10 Tadjó, "Interview with Boubacar Boris Diop," p. 427.

I have quoted Diop at length here because in his response he encapsulates his own perception of his motivations for writing *Murambi*, as well as his assessment of the novel's purpose. Diop's recognition of the linkages between self-hatred and genocide in Africa's postcolony, between racism and identity, between violence and language, leads him to a way of answering some of the questions that earlier thinkers of African decolonization have grappled with. He has realized, in other words, that the colonial past has refused to remain past. Hence witnessing Rwanda's genocide must for the writer involve a decolonizing agenda. Only through the concerted effort to decolonize his writing would the author become able to witness genocide properly by assigning it a use or a kind of purpose. Diop's commitment in *Murambi*, therefore, must be understood in the more general context of his unique vision of decolonization as a reclamation of how one sees oneself, one's world, and one's place in the world.

While I contend that Diop's primary thematic preoccupation in *Murambi* is African decolonization, I also call attention to how the trope of conversion underpinning its story creates challenges for the potential of the novel's decolonizing agenda. The theme of decolonization in *Murambi* is most clearly manifested in what Elisabeth Arnould-Bloomfield identifies in the novel as the influence of Jean-Paul Sartre's writing on Diop: that is, *Murambi* is an example of what Sartre describes as "committed" literature. This kind of literature displaces "the traditional aesthetic duality of European genocide literature" by turning words into active vectors of freedom.¹¹

My reading of the main character of *Murambi*, Cornelius, reveals the novel's quest for a decolonized African consciousness. Some critics read the novel as searching for representational truth or questing for an adequate representational vocabulary for the Rwandan tragedy.¹² Such readings describe Diop's characterization of Cornelius's journey

11 Elisabeth Arnould-Bloomfield, "Commitment and Genocide Literature: Boubacar Diop's *Murambi, the Book of Bones*," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, vol. 14, no. 5, 2010, p. 506.

12 See, for example, Fiona Mc Laughlin, "Introduction: 'To Call a Monster by Its Name,'" *Murambi, the Book of Bones*, translated by Fiona Mc Laughlin, Indiana UP, 2006; Mc Laughlin, "Writing the Rwandan Genocide: Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi, le livre des ossements*," *Palavers of African Literature: Essays in Honor of Bernth Lindfors*, vol. 1, edited by Toyin Falola and Barbara Harlow, Africa World Press, 2002, pp. 203–20; Nimu Njoya, "Review of Diop's Book, *Murambi, The Book of Bones*," *LOGOS*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2007, http://www.logosjournal.com/issue_6.1-2/njoya.htm, accessed 12 April 2017; Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming*.

to the town of Murambi as an expression of the writer's search for an ethically useful representation of the genocide. Artistic realism, according to these critics, is what Diop through Cornelius's quest aimed to depict in *Murambi* as an adequate representational mode for writing the Rwandan genocide. While not disagreeing entirely with these important claims, I argue that central to an understanding of Diop's characterization of Cornelius in his novel is the requirement for us to read the character's quest alongside *Murambi's* thematic of biblical conversion. Tracing Diop's characterization of Cornelius back to the story of the Gentile's reception of Christianity not only reveals Diop's preoccupation with portraying the Rwandan genocide as a kind of "gospel" for African decolonization but also has important implications for his theological vision of genocide.

One way to begin considering some of these implications is to place them within the broader context of "thinking" Rwanda through the experience of the Holocaust. According to this view, the Cornelius myth in *Murambi* suggests that Diop may have been advocating in his novel for the use of Rwanda's experience of genocide in ways resonant with the cultural and political uses of the Jewish experience of the Holocaust. Mamdani articulates my point when he states that

if the Nazi Holocaust breathed life into the Zionist demand that Jews too must have a political home, a nation-state of their own, few have argued that the Rwandan genocide calls for the building of a Tutsi-land in the region. While Europe 'solved' its political crisis by exporting it to the Middle East, Africa has no place to export its political crisis.¹³

In the case of Rwanda, there is no Israel to which to export Rwanda's Tutsis or to consider as a horizon for imagining political justice based on separation. Even though Paul Kagame's RPF won the war and consequently established a Tutsi government in Rwanda, the question should still be asked about how to deal with the political conditions that caused the genocide in the first place. Diop's *Murambi* appears uninterested in questions of political justice and control in its articulation of a vision of decolonization. Side-stepping this subject (as we also see in the case of Nigeria), *Murambi* encourages the use of genocide memory in ways more conducive to moral and personal reform. The conversion story lying at the heart of *Murambi* signals what Diop presents as the

13 Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, p. 39.

process of individual self-reformation resulting from an encounter with genocidal horrors in a genocide's aftermath.

Murambi chronicles multiple violent encounters during and after the 1994 genocide. Diop's choice of different narrative viewpoints, identified by some critics as characteristic of his love of polyphonic narratives,¹⁴ interweaves fictionalized accounts of individual testimonies with history. The multiperspectival technique underscores Diop's attempt to represent the genocide as a tissue of fragments that resists any totalizing single picture of the catastrophe. These fragments bearing witness to genocide reveal a chronicle marked by competing testimonial voices that resonate cacophonously in the genocide's aftermath.

That said, we could also read this narrative fragmentation as Diop's attempt to show genocide's damaging effects on the structure of storytelling itself. *Murambi's* narrative shifts through juxtapositions of multiple "I"s and a singular and limited "he" highlight the fragmentation of subjectivity, thereby implying the focal indeterminacy inherent in any telling of a genocide. As Nasrin Qader explains, this indeterminacy marks the haunted nature of genocide representations: "The direct testimonial mode is unbearable for the narration, as if the project of giving testimony cannot bear the weight of this task and shatters under its exigency. Only when testimony becomes haunted, in the sense that it becomes the voice of another, can it allow for narration"; yet this narration in the third person "does not occupy the position of the unimplicated observer [...] but is the mark of ghostly space".¹⁵ In other words, genocide representation is necessarily haunted by the multiple and competing voices of its victims, survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders. If this is so, then we can begin to understand that the multiple viewpoints in *Murambi* are a recognition of this haunting.

Critical responses to *Murambi's* style have largely linked Diop's narrative choices to some of the conventions deriving from writings about the Holocaust. Described either as a docu-novel style¹⁶ or as a quest for an adequate aesthetic project for writing African genocidal

14 See Charles J. Sugnet, "Dances with Wolofs: A Conversation with Boubacar Boris Diop," *Transition*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2001, pp. 138–39; Qader, *Narratives of Catastrophe*, pp. 19–20; Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming*, pp. 152–65; Karin Samuel, "Bearing Witness to Trauma: Narrative Structure and Perspective in *Murambi, the Book of Bones*," *African Identities*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2010, pp. 365–77; Arnould-Bloomfield, "Commitment and Genocide Literature"; Catherine Kroll, "Rwanda's Speaking Subjects: The Inescapable Affiliations of Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi*," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2007, pp. 655–63.

15 Qader, *Narratives of Catastrophe*, p. 20.

16 See Njoya, "Review".

suffering,¹⁷ the broad claim is that *Murambi* brings to the fore the problems of representation regarding Africa's encounter with exterminatory violence. The emphasis in criticisms of Diop's novel on binaries between symbolic and factual representations, between abstractionism and realism, characterizes some of the important discursive contexts within which *Murambi* has been discussed. In part, these kinds of critical response to *Murambi* come from Diop's own remarks concerning his experience of writing the novel. He has stated that, during his visit to Rwanda as part of the "Rwanda: *Ecrire par devoir de mémoire*" project, survivors pressed him not to write fiction about the genocide. He observes:

It is worth mentioning, by the way, the desperate pleas made by some of the survivors, from the moment they understood the purpose of our visit to Rwanda: "We implore you not to write things in your novel which didn't actually happen to us; you must repeat faithfully what we have told you. The entire world has to find out exactly what went on here."¹⁸

Diop understands the survivors' anxieties as an expression of their desire to be believed by those hearing their stories. The violence they encountered already seemed unbelievable even in its factual representations. For survivors, the idea of someone fictionalizing an experience that seemed more unreal than fiction might easily appear to be a kind of double tragedy. For fiction so-conceived risked trivializing their experience of extreme brutality and suffering by reducing it to the status of a work of the imagination.

However, by refusing to heed survivors' "pleas" to write "facts" instead of fiction, Diop explains that he was able to unite facts, feelings, attitudes, and impressions regarding the genocide.¹⁹ According to Diop, the compromise he reached with the haunted survivors in his head was to produce a work strategically and selectively deprived of its aesthetic resources. However, as I noted above, the claim that *Murambi* is under-aestheticized is arguable given its complex narrative focalizations and also, as I will show, given the writer's incorporation

17 See Mimi Mortimer, "The Literature of Engagement: Boubacar Boris Diop, *Murambi, The Book of Bones*," The Legacy of the Tutsi Genocide in Rwanda Conference, University of Colorado, 2007.

18 Diop, *Africa Beyond the Mirror*, p. 8.

19 See Tadjó, "Interview with Boubacar Boris Diop," pp. 426–27.

of a biblical legend into the novel's major plot. Nonetheless, Diop's desire not to sensationalize atrocity resonates in the context of similar anxieties expressed by Holocaust writers and thinkers such as Theodor Adorno. Unlike Gil Courtemanche's rather more pornographic and sensationalist approach to representing the Rwandan genocide in *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*,²⁰ which licenses graphic depictions of genocidal atrocity in order to expose and mock the mentality giving impetus to genocide, Diop's representation shows more sensitivity to the potential harms done, especially to survivors, by stylized representations of other people's suffering and pain.

The genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda connects to the Holocaust in both its historical articulation and its artistic representation.²¹ For example, references to Nazi antisemitic ideology were dominant in Rwandan political discourse before and during the genocide in 1994. Some European colonial literatures linked the Tutsi to Jews and, partly in response to this distorting colonial literature, the Pamehutu extremist movement alluded to Nazi antisemitic ideology in their own racist quest to annihilate the Tutsi.²² Additionally, post-genocidal political discourse in Rwanda has in significant respects relied upon the Holocaust when constituting the terms of the genocide's post-hoc literary and commemorative representation. Memorial practices such as the erection of museums to honour victims of the 1994 genocide imitate in several ways the didactic ambitions of and techniques used by popular Holocaust museums as found elsewhere in the world. In fact, in some of the genocide museums in Rwanda photographs of Nazi atrocities against Jews are displayed prominently, presumably in order to further legitimate the Rwandan atrocities as a genocide. To a significant extent, as some critics have noted in other African and non-African genocidal contexts, these resonances between the Rwandan genocide and the Holocaust serve to blur the cultural, political, and historical specificity of the former.²³

20 See Chapter 6 of this book for a discussion of this novel.

21 See, for example, Robert Stockhammer, "Conditions of Identity in Writing or: about a Genocide," *Arcadia—International Journal for Literary Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2008, pp. 114–23; Kopf, "The Ethics of Fiction," pp. 65–82.

22 Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, pp. 79–102.

23 See Noah Shenker, "Through the Lens of the Shoah: The Holocaust as a Paradigm for Documenting Genocide Testimonies," *History & Memory*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2016, pp. 141–75; Jean-Damascène Gasanabo, Freddy Mutanguha, and Aimable Mpayimana, "Teaching about the Holocaust and Genocide in Rwanda," *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2016, pp. 329–45.

Narrating Genocide: On the Fragmentation of Language

Murambi is divided into four sections. The first and third sections ("Fear and Anger" and "Genocide", respectively) contain first-person testimonial accounts of genocide by victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and survivors. The stories in these sections are loosely related testaments that provide the reader with insights into different characters' experiences, motivations, and responses to the atrocious events of 1994. Apart from the witness accounts by a character, Jessica, the rest of the testaments do not connect to one another. The stories comprising these sections stand alone and only within the context of the genocide are they meaningfully linked. The reader has to piece them together as testimonies of mass atrocity, and to understand these testimonies as the multiple eyes through which the reality of a genocide is seen.

Murambi's first section, "Fear and Anger", contains three witness accounts by a Tutsi, Michel Serumundo, a Hutu, Faustin Gasana, and an RPF spy, Jessica, a Tutsi who can pass for Hutu. These three accounts attempt to recapture the atmosphere on the eve of the genocide following the death of the Rwandan president Juvénal Habyarimana. Michel Serumundo's story stresses the indifference characterizing the global response to the suffering of distant others. His recognition that he too has been guilty of this indifference makes him realize that, in the moment of his own doom, the world was entirely unconcerned about what happens to him. At best, his suffering might just offer some entertainment to a world fixated on its own petty pleasures.

The story by Faustin Gasana identifies the toxic residue from the past that provides strong impetus for the genocide. Faustin goes to see his father just before the killing spree begins. His father personifies a diseased past that is strong enough still to fuel hatred against the Tutsi. He embodies the ideology of genocide from colonial times that gained its first expression in the late 1950s and early 1960s under the government of Rwanda's first president, Grégoire Kayibanda. The photographs hanging on the ailing old man's wall include an official portrait of President Habyarimana and another image of Kayibanda shaking hands with King Baudouin of Belgium. These photographs serve to connect the ideology fuelling the genocide of 1994 to Rwanda's colonial and deeply ethnicized past, a time during which the old man, then young, participated in the murderous purging of Rwandan Tutsi. The old man is full of wrath and spite, and he admonishes his son to carry out his "duty" with an attitude of discipline and in a spirit of justice so that he may contribute to finally resolving the Tutsi "problem"

that he and his cohort have themselves been unable to eradicate. With this support from his family's patriarch, Faustin Gasana goes on to organize his murderous team. He acknowledges the difficulty of the task ahead, but he considers it his duty to persist in his efforts out of respect and love for his homeland.

The third account in this first section involves a character who is present throughout the novel. Jessica Kamanzi appears as different personas. In the first section she is an RPF spy disguising as a Hutu. She finds that her duty as a rebel soldier ties her closely to the killers. For Jessica, the victims of genocide are "guilty" for "just being themselves: they're barred from innocence for all eternity."²⁴ Jessica finds herself enmeshed and overtaken by genocidal circumstances that strip victims of their innocence by virtue of who they are or what they are identified as being. She finds herself complicit in this subversion of victims' innocence. In one dramatization of this subversion, her friend, Theresa Mukandori, seeks refuge at the Catholic church in Nyamata. In order not to blow her cover as an RPF spy, Jessica cannot tell Theresa that the church is a key target of the killers. Theresa is eventually brutally murdered in the church. By the end of her account in the first section of the novel, Jessica is stopped at a checkpoint and asked to provide her identity card. She hands over her fake identity card to one of the killers, who looks suspiciously at her. Just then she says:

A woman they've wounded but are waiting to finish off a bit later comes towards me, the right part of her jaw and chest covered with blood. She swears that she's not a Tutsi and begs me to explain it to the man in charge of the barrier. I move away from her very quickly. She insists. I tell her dryly to leave me alone. Seeing this, the Interahamwe militiaman is convinced that I'm on his side. He blurts out in a joyful peal of laughter: "Ah! You're hardhearted my sister, so you are! Come on, you should take pity on her!" Then he brutally pushes the woman back toward the throat slitters.²⁵

Here, an Interahamwe member experiences solidarity with Jessica's attitude towards the wounded woman. The cruel irony of the situation is that the man who apparently lacks sympathy for the wounded woman beckons to Jessica to show some. Jessica must show no pity in order to

24 *Murambi*, p. 28.

25 *Murambi*, p. 32.

win the killers' approval and evade their suspicion. Her performance identifies her with the killers and helps form the basis of the killer's celebration of cruelty. As a result, Jessica witnesses a murder and identifies with the murderers in order to act against them. Her military duty places her on the same side—at least in terms of her performance of cruelty and disdain towards genocide victims—as the killers.

Even more troubling in this scene is the victim's expression of hate for Tutsi-ness. The wounded woman has asked Jessica to explain to the killers that she is not Tutsi. Like Jessica, she too is expressing hatred and a lack of sympathy for the Tutsi-ness from which she wishes to be freed. Her pleas to be spared are based not on her identification with being Tutsi, but on a denial of membership of this identity category. The woman's denial of Tutsi identity also reveals her implicit acceptance of her killers' argument for eliminating the Tutsi. By denouncing Tutsi-ness as a basis for pleading to be spared she accepts a fault in being Tutsi, an assumed fault lying behind the atrocities perpetrated against the Tutsi. This expression of hatred for Tutsi-ness found in victims and survivors alike, as well as in perpetrators, is in the most part what *Murambi* articulates powerfully from multiple viewpoints.

Like the first section, the novel's third section "Genocide" contains first-person accounts of different actors during the genocide. The stories in the third section highlight even more strongly the hatred against Tutsi-ness and Rwandan self-hatred in general leading to genocide. In particular, narrative accounts of the genocide given by Jessica and Dr Joseph Karekezi touch on this point. Of the eight chronicles comprising this section of the novel, three belong to Jessica. Each account provides a limited personal witness statement concerning atrocity given by Rwandan victims, perpetrators, and a French foreign agent, Colonel Étienne Perrin. Like the testimonies in the first section that underscore the nature of the social fragmentation fuelling genocide, the testimonies in the novel's third section further stress this fragmentation, particularly as regards the matter of how genocide destroys language and its signifying power.

Jessica testifies to the frenzy of killing around her. She witnesses how the killers go about ensuring that every Hutu participates in killing, thereby ensuring collective responsibility for the atrocities. This exercise in the creation of a shared guilt requires that every Hutu must kill at least one Tutsi. Killers compelled other Hutu to kill or be killed themselves in turn. Such a situation, for Jessica, demonstrates the destruction of society's common soul and the establishment of Hutu collective guilt and responsibility. The genocidaires' hatred for the

Tutsi is so maddening and so thoroughly insisted upon as a collective duty that Jessica has difficulty making sense of the killers' motivation to kill. Having witnessed the explosion and proliferation of hate-driven murders, she sums up the killers' defence of their acts: "I'm not killing the Other in order to seize his possessions, no, I'm not so small-minded, I don't even hate him, I'm killing the Other because I'm completely mad, and the proof, it's that the torture I inflict upon him is unique in the history of human suffering."²⁶ She believes that the killers' monstrosity and madness may explain the frenzy of their butchery.

However, Jessica resists identifying all Hutu people as monsters. She calls attention to the difficulties involved in categorizing all Hutu as psychopaths. Among many other exceptions, she tells of a Hutu nun, Félicite, who helps the Tutsi escape to Zaire and is killed by her own Hutu kinsmen as punishment. For Jessica, Félicite's show of humanity and her heroic acts are important for recognizing that ethnic identities do not make people good or evil. While they may influence human actions, ethnic identities are constructs and not essential determinants of human action. Félicite's heroism highlights the sacrifices of those who refuse to act solely out of loyalty to some idea of group identity. Yet, at the same time, according to Jessica, the sacrifices of those like Félicite cannot simplify understandings of genocide. If anything, such sacrifices can only create more complexities, especially in a genocide's aftermath, when questions of justice and forgiveness arise. In fact, forgiveness does not appear to Jessica as an adequate request to make from those who have experienced extreme suffering and survived the genocide. She remarks:

Could Félicite's gestures make us forget, tomorrow, the ignoble behaviour of so many others? After the victory, inevitably, the question will be asked: what is forgiveness worth without justice?

[...] It will be difficult for those who suffered so much to make allowances for things, to forget the worst to remember only the best. It's easy to calculate the distress of the person who says, "You want me to forgive, but do you know that on Nyanza Hill my seven children were thrown live into a toilet pit?" If he adds: "Think of the few seconds when those children were suffocated by masses of excrement before dying, think just of those few seconds and nothing else."²⁷

26 *Murambi*, p. 112.

27 *Murambi*, p. 111.

The difficulties Jessica mentions here result not only from the traumatic conditions of survival and the demand for justice but also from the difficulties of transcending the identity politics at whose behest the genocide took place. Félicite is Hutu, but the fact of her being Hutu cannot temper the burden of responsibility for the genocide, and its attendant guilt. Félicite remains Hutu, and her sacrifices cannot readily transcend the ethnic binaries in which her actions and death are implicated. The experience of genocide renders survivors unable to consider life outside of the flawed identity politics leading to their victimization. Like perpetrators who insistently base the rationale for their actions in the past, survivors too become scavengers of the past in order to make sense of their present and future. But such retrospection, rather than being clarifying, instead contributes to the mysteriousness and indeterminacy of the present. The survivor finds himself or herself inhabiting an *aporia*, or a constant state of undecidability and unknowability. Aware of this, Jessica concludes by noting that "All that [i.e. the genocide] is absolutely unbelievable. Even words aren't enough. Even words don't know any more what to say."²⁸

Ironically in *Murambi*, as Nasrin Qader also observes,²⁹ only victims—most especially, those who die—speak about the future with hope. They project themselves into a future that they cannot experience as living people. They prophesy their own ghostly presences in the future, a future already threatened by the burdensome memory of a bloody present. Rosa Karemera is one such victim. A partially crippled granny, Rosa hopes to survive the genocide if only "to see the look on Valérie Rumiya's face when she runs in to me in the neighbourhood".³⁰ Valérie is the old cripple's neighbour. She has gone about searching for Rosa's corpse and urges the Interahamwe to find and kill her neighbour. Her beef with Rosa is that she claims the old cripple "looks down on everyone".³¹ The absurdity of Valérie's rationale for wanting Rosa dead—Rosa's condescension—is not the most terrifying thing about her heinous outlook and intentions for her poor neighbour. Even more disturbing is how the representatives or guardians of communal spirit contribute to fuelling the genocide. These are grandmothers

28 *Murambi*, p. 96.

29 Qader's particular analysis of ghostliness and hauntings in Diop's novel is insightful. Her analysis of the novel is based on the relationships of catastrophe to imaginative narration (story). See *Narratives of Catastrophe*, pp. 16–50.

30 *Murambi*, p. 99.

31 *Murambi*, p. 97.

in the twilight of their lives. Like Faustin Gasana's decrepit and ailing father, these elderly people direct the energy of youths towards entirely catastrophic outcomes. *Murambi* shows that genocide is made possible when such old representatives of tradition and community spirit authorize or support the extermination of their neighbours. The novel does not reveal whether or not Rosa Karemera survives, and her absence haunts its narrative.

The unknown beautiful woman who approaches Jessica to recount the atrocities of a Catholic priest presents an even more strikingly ghostly appearance. Unlike Rosa, the unknown woman does not hope to survive the genocide. She declares to Jessica, "I'm too beautiful to survive. I'm as beautiful as the sun, and like the sun there's nowhere for me to hide."³² She already accepts what lies ahead of her. Her physical attractiveness has already sealed her fate as a rape victim. She recounts her ordeal with the Catholic priest, whom she considers deranged. She knows that it is only a matter of time before the inevitable happens. She believes Jessica is destined to survive and serve as the vocal witness of her suffering, and so she reveals the details of her experience so that Jessica can take inventory and remember.

The unnamed woman's vision of the future derives in part from the myth of Rwandan unity, a myth that the genocide is already dismantling. The future that the perpetrators imagine rests on a different idea of unity, one that is based on pure Hutu-ness. The unnamed woman's glimpse of the future predicts the failure of this extreme Hutu vision. In her vision of the future she sees a united Rwanda, one that is comprised of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa: "I will be the sun. From up there I'll have my eyes on you, you the Rwandans. Join together. Aren't you ashamed, children of Rwanda? Whether someone is Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa, what is it to you?"³³ In her admonitory prophecy for the future, the unknown woman adds the element of shame to the myth of Rwanda's future unity. This shame comes from what she calls "this awful business" of genocide. This shame resulting from genocide is what the unknown woman suggests should serve as the basis for a new Rwandan unity.

Jessica must be the bearer of this ghostly message. She is a different kind of survivor: a strong one who bestrides Rwandan identities, a Tutsi who can pass for Hutu, and one who survives precisely because of this ambivalence. She works against the genocide by becoming complicit in it. During her visit to the Ntarama Catholic church site four years

32 *Murambi*, p. 91.

33 *Murambi*, p. 95.

after the genocide, Jessica encounters the body of her friend Theresa Mukandori, whom she allows to take refuge at the church even though she knows it will be attacked. Like another ghostly presence, Theresa's "preserved body almost intact" refuses to be dead. A signifier of extreme violence, rape, and humiliation, her body "had her head pushed back and the scream extracted from her by the pain had been frozen on her still grimacing face. Her magnificent tresses were disheveled, and her legs wide apart. A stake—of wood or of iron—had remained lodged in her vagina."³⁴ This broken and abused body, ghostly and present, continues in dialogue with her friend, Jessica:

"Jessie, they'll never be able to do anything, [Jessica hears her friend say this as she enters the church] knowing that God can see them." The dreadful dialogue with her friend was still going on, four years down the road. [Jessica] thought, with sudden violence: "In those days, Theresa, God was looking elsewhere"³⁵

Jessica's retort signals the need to be pragmatic and real. God cannot save people from genocide. God too, in this view, is prone to distractions, indifference, and helplessness. Jessica has no illusions about absolutes and transcendent knowledge; that is perhaps why the unknown woman sees in her Rwanda's future. The ambivalence Jessica personifies speaks for the possibility of transcending the self-hatred upstream of the genocide. Jessica acknowledges and accepts weakness, and refuses to succumb to mystical thinking when confronted by extreme difficulty. Yet she represents only a possible, and so an uncertain, future in the novel, as Diop's (like Soyinka's) visions and commitments in *Murambi* do not repose with Jessica. Instead, this female character functions largely to provide context for the bigger drama of the male protagonist of the novel.

No character in the novel exemplifies the self-hate lying behind the Rwandan genocide more than Dr Joseph Karekezi. Karekezi is married to a Tutsi, a reality he considers the consequence of a youthful mistake that he believes has made him disreputable and insignificant in Rwanda. In the past, he has advocated for Tutsi rights and freedoms. However, in 1994 he suddenly transforms into the prosecutor of one of the largest massacres committed during the genocide. Given his

34 *Murambi*, p. 73.

35 *Murambi*, p. 73.

earlier respectability, many victims have followed his counsel and taken refuge within the grounds of the Murambi Technical School. To further reassure them of his “good” intentions, Karekezi sends his wife and two children to take up residence within the polytechnic. With about 50,000 refugees seeking refuge at the school, he invites soldiers and Hutu Interahamwe to slaughter them. He justifies his actions as a consequence of his sense of duty: “Come what may, I’ll have done my duty. Duty. A simple word that I’m fond of.”³⁶ The duty that Dr Karekezi references here, as with Faustin Gasana’s ailing father in the first section of *Murambi*, is what he has come to believe is the duty of justice. He claims that the murder of the Tutsi does justice to the land, and so serves as a cleansing ritual that must be performed in order to secure a just and better future for Rwanda:

I will feel neither sadness nor remorse. There will be atrocious pain, of course, but only the weak-hearted confuse crime with punishment. Among those vulgar cries, the pure heart of truth will beat. I am not the kind of person who fears the shadows in his own soul. My sole faith is truth. I have no other God. The moaning of the victims is only the devil’s ruse to block the breath of justice and prevent its will to be carried out.³⁷

Dr Karekezi here presents an ideological rationale that justifies the genocide in the name of history and justice. For those thinking this way, the genocide seems to be a consequence of the duty to truth and justice, necessary to reconcile a troubled past with the present in order to ensure a just and moral future. According to this view, the performance of one’s duty necessitates grave sacrifice, particularly on the part of those who must carry it out. Accordingly his wife Nathalie and two of his children, Julienne and François, eventually must also die: “It’s no one’s fault. At the last minute [Nathalie will] curse me, thinking that I never loved her. That isn’t true. It’s just history that wants blood. And why would I only spill other people’s? Theirs is just as rotten”;³⁸ for Karekezi, “The sadistic way that things sometimes happen is just a detail. The ends justify the means. Nothing else counts.”³⁹ He believes that if he succeeds in eliminating all the Tutsi in Rwanda the future will

36 *Murambi*, p. 100.

37 *Murambi*, p. 108.

38 *Murambi*, p. 107.

39 *Murambi*, p. 102.

judge him differently. If he fails, however, the post-genocidal era will judge him differently as well.

Joseph Karekezi seems modelled after the notorious Nazi doctor Josef Mengele. In *Murambi*, this doctor is reconfigured and manifests as a cynic, a humanist transformed into a sadistic, psychopathic killer. Medical doctors, humanists, and priests who transform into perpetrators of genocide challenge conventional ideas on many fronts, thereby shaking the moral and psychological foundations upon which traditional stories have been based. What does such a figure tell us about character motivation? This character dismantles any stable and easy understanding of human actions and motivations. As Karekezi says of himself, he is "neither a monster nor an idiot".⁴⁰ He is, rather, an intelligent and rational person, an ambiguous figure, resisting easy subsumption under such fixed categories as mad, monstrous, or power-mad. His indeterminacy is precisely what makes him significant for thinking about the difficulties of understanding human action in genocidal contexts.

The unnerving exchanges between the French colonel Étienne Perrin and Karekezi make these difficulties even more stark. When Colonel Perrin tries to excuse French complicity in the genocide by declaring that "Not a single Frenchman shed any Rwandan blood" Karekezi sniggers and retorts "And me, Colonel Perrin? Look at my hands. Do you think I've ever held a machete? I'm a poor little surgeon. I save lives! I've never spilled a drop of blood either."⁴¹ Both men—soldier and doctor—are professionals saddled with the duty of saving lives. What the genocide exposes is not simply how professionals become killers. Nor does it just show how an act of life-saving can easily become entangled with the project of genocide. The genocide exposes all of these things in intimately crude ways, but even more so it exposes the destruction of society's ability to make meaning.

The problem is that the same vocabulary is used by cynical perpetrators to rationalize their atrocities and by victims and survivors in their attempts to make sense of what has happened to them. Truth and justice, the same concepts that Dr Karekezi appeals to when attempting to justify his actions, transform into meaningless signifiers when bystanders and survivors such as Jessica speak about genocide in similar terms. Qader observes this paradox of language in her description of how the Rwandan genocide destroys language and makes

40 *Murambi*, p. 102.

41 *Murambi*, p. 126.

every act of justice in post-conflict Rwanda in some way resemble the genocide:

How profoundly terrifying when the project of national reconciliation [in post-genocide Rwanda] shares its vocabulary with the project of the genocide. Even transcendental concepts of “truth” and “justice,” like that of “pity,” witness contamination. Nothing is left untouched. In order not to pass by one’s truth, the ethical demand is to remain vigilant toward language. What the genocide has revealed is that language has lost all essential relationship with truth in the sense of foundational concepts. This loss opens an abyss before the subject. What happens when words such as “justice” and “truth” can provide no ground upon which one can stand in conceptual certainty? The conceptual contamination dispossesses language of its authority and power to posit.⁴²

Qader’s argument goes some way to explaining why I think Diop portrays in *Murambi* the contamination of language’s meaning-making capacity. The *aporias* resulting from genocide, which challenge how we conceptualize reality and make sense of things in an atrocity’s aftermath, account for why *Murambi*, understood as a response to the “duty” to remember genocide, performs the task of attempting to reclaim language’s meaning-making potential from what the novel depicts as the hell of genocide. Like Soyinka’s *Season of Anomy*, *Murambi* reveals itself to be an attempt to recover meaning and find a moral purpose for the deaths resulting from the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. This quest for purposefulness is necessary because genocide, even when it fails to realize its ultimate objective, succeeds not only in destroying people but also in disrupting our ability to talk clearly about that destruction. It reverses the meanings of things. Hence the artist’s duty to try to reverse this reversal. The search for meaning—dramatized in *Murambi* as a descent into genocidal hell—is central to Diop’s decolonizing agenda.

42 Qader, *Narratives of Catastrophe*, p. 35.

Genocide as Gospel: Cornelius's Conversion and Quest for the Word

The first and third sections of the novel provide the context and background for the main story of *Murambi*. This concerns Cornelius Uvimana, a Rwandan exile returning from Djibouti, a small and little-known African country in some ways much like pre-1994 Rwanda. Cornelius, like Diop, arrives in Rwanda four years after the genocide to witness what he believes to be the extermination of all members of his own family and to write a play about the genocide. The second and fourth sections of the novel, told from a third-person narrative viewpoint, focus on Cornelius's journey and his evolving consciousness as he encounters the aftermaths of genocide while visiting mass grave sites spread across post-genocide Rwanda. His journey to his hometown of Murambi is presented as a descent narrative that Diop emplots katabatically. Murambi figures in the story as the heart of hell within which Cornelius must confront the revelations won during his quest. Murambi is represented by Diop as the bottom of a Dantesque hell. Within it, Cornelius's guide is his uncle Siméon Habineza, who, like the biblical Simon Peter, "baptizes" Cornelius into ideas and helps him find new insights into human cruelty.

Cornelius has returned to his homeland both as a Rwandan believing that all members of his family perished during the genocide and as an outsider ignorant of the macro- and micro-dynamics of the genocide and its wake. A history teacher attempting to write about the catastrophe of a country that is both close and far away at the same time, Cornelius embarks on a soul-searching journey that brings him into deep reflection on the nature of the self-hate lying at the genocide's core. His quest forces him to confront dilemmas inherent in myths about Rwanda and within himself.

The multiple significations of the character's name highlight Diop's investment in dramatizing Cornelius's relation to these dilemmas. As some critics have observed, the choice of the name "Cornelius"⁴³ for this character suggests an allusion "both to the sharp 'horns' of a dilemma and to the cornelian quandaries such dilemmas create".⁴⁴ Cornelius's link to the French "corne" reinforces some kind of a connection to the tradition of the French tragedian Pierre Corneille (1606–1684),

43 Etymologically, the name derives from the French "corne", itself a descendent of the Latin "cornū".

44 Arnould-Bloomfield, "Commitment and Genocide Literature," p. 508.

one of the three great French dramatists of the seventeenth century.⁴⁵ Corneille's tragic heroes are often described in French as *héros cornélien* (the Cornelian hero), and, unlike the *héros racinien* (the Racinien hero) created by Corneille's great rival Jean Racine (1639–1699), they are orientated to duty and sacrifice more than to love.⁴⁶ The resemblance of Diop's Cornelius to the Cornelian hero suggests that through this characterization *Murambi* highlights some of the quandaries and difficulties that encounters with genocide inevitably entail.

A peculiar feature of Corneille's tragedies, particularly evident in the four plays that comprise what scholars term his "Classical Tetralogy", due to his works' strict adherence to ancient Greco-Roman dramatic conventions, is the elevation of certain considerations of "virtue" over crime or above complicity in atrocity.⁴⁷ For example, in Corneille's *Horace* the eponymous hero is pardoned for brutally murdering his own sister because of the benefits arising from his brutality on behalf of Rome. His sister denounces the latter and is struck down in her turn. Horace, however, receives a pardon in consideration of the very same acts that his sister condemns. Declaring him pardoned, the king notes that Horace's recourse to violent force, which he describes as a "Virtue", has saved Rome from its enemies and so sets the perpetrator above his crimes: "*Ta vertu met ta gloire au-dessus de ton crime*" ["Your 'virtue' puts your 'renown' above your crime"].⁴⁸ The king's definition of "Virtue" here is not what matters so much as his privileging service on behalf of the kingdom over the moral and legal demands of fratricide. In *Cinna*, another play from the Classical Tetralogy, the Emperor Augustus has to pardon the traitorous Cinna in order to ensure the future security of the Roman Empire. Just like the pardoning of loyal Horace, Auguste's pardoning of Cinna also places political duty above personal integrity. In both plays, the sovereign's pardon wins the allegiance of the masses.⁴⁹ The affinity between Diop's Cornelius and the Cornelian hero touches on the character's situation of dilemma

45 The other two dramatists are the comedian Jean-Baptiste Poqueline Moliere and the tragedian Jean Racine.

46 For a detailed analysis of the cornelian hero see Robert J. Nelson, *Corneille: His Heroes and their Worlds*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963; see also Nina Ekstein, *Corneille's Irony*, Rockwood Press, 2007.

47 See John Edmund, ed. and trans., *Four French Plays: Cinna, The Misanthrope, Andromache, Phaedra*, Penguin, 2013.

48 V. iii. 1760.

49 In yet another play from the Classical Tetralogy, *Polyeucte*, the eponymous hero, offers himself for what he believes to be a more important duty than allegiance to empire

and also his inclination to the "virtues" of duty following a genocide. Cornelius's resemblance to the Cornelian hero provides a context for explaining the quandary surrounding his quest in *Murambi*. In the novel, Cornelius has to confront the dilemma of writing as an ethical duty to a memory of genocide in which his own father (acting upon the notion of duty) organizes the murder of his own mother and siblings. Cornelius's characterization in *Murambi* hinges on identifying his duty to the memory of genocide and the way to render such a duty.

However, while the allusions to Corneille are helpful in explaining his dilemma in *Murambi*, a more central trope in the novel relates to the biblical story of the Gentiles' conversion to Christianity. Cornelius's journey to Murambi and his encounter with his uncle Siméon Habineza echoes the biblical Cornelius's encounter with Apostle Simon Peter. In the biblical account Cornelius is a Roman centurion and the first Gentile convert to Christianity. He is in search of truth and personal redemption, just like *Murambi's* Cornelius, who arrives in Rwanda an outsider, a non-initiate, in search of the truth about the destruction of his family.

The biblical Cornelius is on a journey of self-discovery and his meeting with Simon Peter results in his baptism. This baptism serves as a gateway through which the traumatic gospel of Jesus's death and resurrection spreads to other parts of the world. In Christian theology, Cornelius's conversion signifies the freeing of the Christian gospel from a Jewish-centric, Zionist mission.⁵⁰ Likewise, we can consider the biblical Cornelius's story as a metaphor in *Murambi* that implicitly challenges and displaces the narrative supremacy of the Jewish Holocaust and ideas about this genocide's uniqueness. In other words, Diop indirectly advocates against patterns of exceptionalist thinking in post-genocidal African contexts and proposes instead that we turn memories of genocidal atrocities into a kind of moral creed suited to the needs and demands of African and other decolonizations.

Diop invests heavily in the redemptive message of Christianity. This redemptive message, centring on death and resurrection, emphasizes an introspective quest towards truth. As suggested in the Bible⁵¹ and dramatized in *Murambi*, truth holds the key to self-emancipation.

and family. His ultimate sacrifice for Christianity instigates revolution against the pagan Roman Empire.

50 Terence L. Donaldson, "'Gentile Christianity' as a Category in the Study of Christian Origins," *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 106, no. 4, 2013, p. 450.

51 "Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8: 32).

Cornelius's journey to his hometown of Murambi presents in the story as a search for such a kind of self-emancipatory truth. At first, Cornelius sees his return to Rwanda as an attempt to reconnect with his past and reckon with a history of violence that resulted in the annihilation of his family:

To come back to one's country—to be happy there or to suffer—was a rebirth, but he didn't want to become someone without a past. He was the sum of everything he had experienced. His faults. His cowardliness. His hopes. He wanted to know, down to the very last detail, how his family had been massacred. In Murambi, Siméon Habineza would tell him everything. He had to.⁵²

What is revealed here is a man attempting to recover his family's story from the troubled narrative of his country. The recovery of this story is at one and the same time Cornelius' search for his own place in Rwanda, and so a search for a subject-position entitled to speak on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves. In the initial stages of his quest Cornelius hopes to write a play about the genocide. He plots it to resemble a historical play, which he hopes to stage in acknowledgement of his own duty to his country. He thinks of his play as dramatizing the colonial origins of Rwanda's problems, and as something that could be used to help him commune with the country he has been estranged from since the age of twelve.⁵³

One evening, after consuming lots of alcohol, Cornelius recounts his thoughts about the play to a man named Roger, who is suspected "of having behaved badly during the events",⁵⁴ even though he claims to have saved the lives of twenty people at the time. Cornelius's plot pivots on a French commander, General Perrichon, whose cat suddenly goes missing in the midst of the genocide. The general suspects his Ethiopian gardener is responsible, but he is unable to interrogate the suspect because the gardener has also disappeared. The cat is important to the general because it is the bearer of classified information. General Perrichon enlists the services of two Rwandans—Pierre Intera and Jacques Hamwe—to find his cat. Pierre Intera and Jacques Hamwe

52 *Murambi*, p. 44.

53 Siméon Habineza smuggled him out of Rwanda in order to protect him and his friends, Jessica and Stanley, from attacks against the Tutsi.

54 *Murambi*, p. 54.

represent the Hutu extremist militia, *Interahamwe*. In Cornelius's imagined play, these two go about with their machetes searching for the general's missing gardener in order to retrieve the general's cat.

Alarmed by the idea behind Cornelius's play, Roger asks how things will end and whether or not the general will find his missing cat. Cornelius replies,

"Oh no! You don't know me very well, I'm not going to let that half-wit of a General Perrichon have his way. Oh yes, I forgot to tell you, all that time his wife hasn't stopped blubbering. She's going to leave him, because she won't have anything to do with a general who's incapable of protecting a cat from an Ethiopian gardener in times of war. He's going to go crazy with sorrow and at the end he's going to wander on to the stage going 'meow ... meow ...'"⁵⁵

Cornelius's overly abstract and conceptual play reveals the returnee's misapprehension of the realities of the Rwandan genocide. First, its satirical purpose notwithstanding, the play is built around a conceit that imagines the Tutsi as Ethiopian migrants to Rwanda. Troublingly, this might seem to give credence to the Cushitic myth evoked during the genocide (that is, that the Tutsi were interlopers originating in Ethiopia) in the name of which Rwandan Tutsi were systematically massacred. Secondly, Cornelius's play presents an instance of reductionist thinking in so far as it represents the genocide as essentially the by-product of trivial pastimes of the French in connivance with Hutu extremists. The history of violence in Rwanda, as Cornelius understands it at this early stage in the story, is specifically the result of earlier European colonization. In his view, Rwandans were one people living in harmony until the Europeans arrived. This mythical Rwandan past is what Cornelius talks about in Djibouti: the myth of Rwandan unity, of a people living as one people until Europeans arrived with their divisive ideas and practices. This myth is not particularly Rwandan, of course. It is, however, one frequently cited by anticolonial activists, who view black Africans as brothers and sisters, as a people split apart by ignorant and unsympathetic European invaders and colonizers.

In his book *Silences in African History* the Congolese historian Jacques Depelchin denounces work by African and non-African scholars that restricts the view of history on the continent to just the activities of

55 *Murambi*, pp. 58–9.

European colonization. In response to studies such as V. Y. Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa* that imply that European colonization was the most active period in Africa's history, Depelchin asks, "in a colonizing process which started with Atlantic slavery, what criteria would define which period was the most active?"⁵⁶ Depelchin dismisses novels such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* for giving a misleading impression that African societies began falling apart with the institutionalization of European colonialism in the nineteenth century. According to Depelchin, long before the nineteenth century the slave trade implicated several African communities in the conquest and destruction of others, causing immense harm to many societies on the continent. Curiously, anticolonial narratives muffled the broader and more distant histories of diversities and differences on the continent in favour of a mythology of black African unity given political expression in the anticolonial discourse of pan-Africanism. This invidious mythology, for Depelchin, offers both "physical and psychic comfort" to those seeking to galvanize efforts to confront a common foe.⁵⁷ In order to do so effectively, important aspects of the past must be discarded and forgotten in favour of an emphasis on shared suffering caused by a single, alien foe. The failures of African anticolonial struggles and activism, according to Depelchin, lie in their perpetuation of thinking similar to that of European colonial practice that imagined Africans as belonging to a racialized community of siblings, endorsing a mythology of a united black African race and hence failing to take seriously the important differences and divisions within its ranks that European colonists exploited.

Cornelius is vigorously committed to this myth of unity, and is therefore recognizable as an African historian of the ken that Depelchin denounces. A major problem with crusaders on behalf of this myth is that they often make the case for African unity by silencing any acknowledgement of the very real violence and dissensions among and between Africans. Each time this mythology is confronted and challenged by brutal events such as the 1994 Rwanda genocide it assigns the primary blame for the violence to Europeans. When this view is challenged, those who espouse it frequently point out that their

56 Depelchin, *Silences in African History*, p. 15. Yet Depelchin's emphasis on the Atlantic slave trade that centres the beginnings of Congolese experience of European violence is equally narrow and not addressed to broader historical realities on the African continent, including the activities of Arabs and histories of African empires.

57 Depelchin, *Silences in African History*, p. 153.

interlocutors are insufficiently morally and politically well-informed. This is the attitude Cornelius evinces when his fiancée in Djibouti, Zakya, challenges him about his claims about Rwandan oneness:

Zakya was not easy to convince. One day when he found her a little reticent, he explained to her that there had never been any ethnic groups in Rwanda and that nothing distinguished the Twa, the Hutu, and the Tutsi. Straightaway a flash ran across Zakya's face. Worried that that meant she might be taking him for a liar, he threw himself into some rather chaotic explanations. "We have the same language, the same God, Imana, the same beliefs. Nothing divides us."—"Yes, it does," replied Zakya spitefully: "between you there's this river of blood. After all, that's not nothing. Stop making things up." Then she added, "I'm not an idiot, and you've got to tackle the problems of your country in some other way if you want to solve them."⁵⁸

Zakya challenges the basis of Cornelius's claim that there exists some kind of an indelible Rwandan unity. She is aware that the lived reality of the categories of Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa cannot mean nothing for those assigned to them. Some version of these categories existed even before colonial times and became the basis upon which colonizers politicized ethnic identities in Rwanda.⁵⁹ In the context of the genocide, this myth of a prelapsarian Rwandan unity was laid bare and destroyed. For those who lived through these events there had to be a new and usable mythology created that was capable of addressing and offering ways through the problems of the present. Zakya's spiteful reply is an admonishment to the school of thinking that Cornelius represents, at least at this stage in the novel. In reacting to his reductive and simplistic utopianism Zakya challenges Cornelius to confront realities of violence by not forgetting the "materiality [of the river of blood separating people], not [effacing] it in favor of some mythical symbolic ideal of unity".⁶⁰

Part of the problem with Cornelius's play is that it opts for a symbolization of material reality, thereby reducing the reality of Rwanda's genocide to the convenient mythology of African suffering as it was caused by European colonialism. As a Rwandan exile returning to his homeland with the belief that his whole family has been murdered,

58 Murambi, p. 66.

59 Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, pp. 13–14.

60 Qader, *Narratives of Catastrophe*, p. 26.

Cornelius's play exposes the ironies of his self-righteous anger against colonization. He fails to apprehend his own involvement in Rwanda's history of genocide. This attitude of righteous and ignorant self-denial is what Cornelius's journey to Murambi redresses. A Gentile in search of the Holy Grail, Cornelius's conversion has to begin with deeper soul-searching. His initial encounters at different massacre sites before reaching Murambi prepare him to confront what he comes to recognize as his own complicity in a genocide he would rather wish was caused essentially by Europeans. By the time he realizes that the massacre of about 50,000 victims at the polytechnic in Murambi is the handiwork of his own father, Dr Joseph Karekezi, Cornelius's conversion journey reaches its crux. The story of the genocide from this point onwards suddenly transforms for Cornelius into a personal story, the story of his coming to grips with the knowledge that he is the son of a "monster".⁶¹ He now understands why survivors have looked upon him with curiosity, and why one Murambi survivor, Gérard, has been so angry that he has even considered killing him.

In Murambi Cornelius meets his uncle Siméon Habineza. Unlike all his other guardians at different mass grave sites—Jessica, Stan, Roger, Gérard—Siméon is the guardian not of a location of mass atrocity but of Dr Karekezi's house, Cornelius's childhood home. Cornelius's return to Murambi thus becomes a return to home, to a past, to a flawed childhood and to the need to reckon with what it means to be complicit in a genocide. In his return, Siméon encourages Cornelius to be like

the solitary traveler [...] If he gets lost, he looks up at the sky and the trees, he looks all around him. But the traveler could have said to himself, bending down toward the ground: "I'm going to ask the path, who has been here for such a long time, he'll surely be able to help me." Now, the path will never show him the way to go. The path does not know the way.⁶²

Siméon's words invite Cornelius to undertake a process of self-examination. Mythology and tradition cannot provide answers to the riddles of his existence. Cornelius must find his own answers within himself. So too must everyone else attempting to come to terms with the genocide in Rwanda. When Cornelius confides in Siméon his frustrations and inabilities as a writer to articulate the genocide in his

61 *Murambi*, p. 179.

62 *Murambi*, p. 167.

writing, the old guardian replies that "There are no words to speak to the dead [...] They won't get up to answer you. What you'll learn there [at the Murambi massacre site] is that everything is quite over for the dead of Murambi. And maybe then you'll respect human life more."⁶³ Siméon's retort is not a denouncement of the power of words to render the experience of genocide. Rather, he cautions against the temptation to approach massacre sites hoping to find divine inspiration. In Siméon's caution lies the essence of Diop's attempt to modify the terms of the biblical conversion story. Encountering victims' mutilated corpses cannot inspire lofty visions of existence. Instead, in *Murambi* Cornelius's encounter with his own family's complicity and victimhood prompts a new awareness of things that requires further introspection and self-reform.

Siméon's attitude towards genocide in its aftermath contrasts with Gérard's. The latter denounces the power of words (fiction) to serve as a useful response to genocide. Gérard describes to Cornelius how he survived the Murambi massacre by taking refuge under a heap of corpses whose blood he swallows to stay alive.⁶⁴ This experience leaves him guilty and despondent, and results in his declaration to Cornelius that the words used to represent genocide are useless: "And all the beautiful words of the poets, Cornelius, can say nothing, I swear to you, of the fifty thousand ways to die like a dog, within a few hours."⁶⁵ For Gérard, words hold conceits and sell misleading impressions that grant their speakers and hearers a kind of ease. Words are also, of course, complicit in the Rwandan atrocities and so must not be regarded as innocent instruments useful for appeasing the dead. "It's important that you believe me", Gérard says, "I'm not making it up, for once that's not necessary. If you prefer to think that I imagined these horrors your mind will be at peace and that's not good. This pain will get lost on opaque words and everything will be forgotten until the

63 *Murambi*, pp. 167–68.

64 As Luise White has called attention to in her book, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (University of California Press, 2000), the vampire trope is prevalent in the everyday meaning-making process of colonial and postcolonial violence in several African contexts. The vampire imagery evoked in the manner of Gérard's survival underlines the survivor's self-perception as a zombified subject. In this sense, one understands the underlying nature of the genocide as vampiric—for one, it unfolds on the logic of killing the Othered Tutsi in order to save or give life to the Hutu; the vampiric order of the violence further works to transform even its surviving victims into zombies whose post-genocide lives depend on the blood of the dead.

65 *Murambi*, p. 175.

next massacre.”⁶⁶ Gérard’s anxiety echoes that of the survivors who encouraged Diop not to fictionalize the genocide in the first place. At the same time, however, it is only via words that Gérard can hope to share his experience and encourage Cornelius to believe him.

Like Diop, Cornelius refuses to accept that words fail to animate the experience of genocide. As with Ofeyi in Soyinka’s *Season of Anomy*, Cornelius sees in words the potential for a different kind of use. In part, Cornelius’s insistence on the potential of words to serve as some kind of a valuable response to genocide results from his encounter with Siméon. Like the biblical Simon Peter, whose baptism of the Roman centurion causes the convert to epiphanically speak in tongues, Siméon’s guidance prompts his nephew to a new awareness of himself. Siméon is not some ancient sage like Pa Ahime, the guardian of Aiyéro in Soyinka’s *Season of Anomy*, who advocates for a nativist return to an ideal tradition. Nor does he speak about self-discovery in abstract terms. His vision of self-awareness is strongly political and it does not excuse colonization as a major instigator of violence in Rwanda. However, Siméon also does not hold colonization solely responsible for the failures in Rwanda. According to Siméon, the journey of arresting a troubled history must begin with a new awareness of the self, a knowledge of the self-hatred that impelled atrocity in the first place: “I know the damage foreigners did to us, four years ago and well before. But that damage was only possible because we were not free people. Have we ever been bothered by our chains? Sometimes I think not. We can’t hold our own lack of pride against anybody else.”⁶⁷

That said, interpreting Cornelius’s quest as ultimately one about finding his own artistic voice reduces *Murambi*’s significance, as it takes the novel to be primarily about representation. This creates the impression that Diop understands writing to serve as an expression of duty to a genocide’s memory. In addition, *Murambi* does not dramatize aesthetic realism and conspicuously draw attention to style as the main goal of Cornelius’s quest, since the novel opens with testimonials and chronicles—that is, with realist modes of narration. In fact, as Elisabeth Arnould-Bloomfield suggests, the novel’s organization can plausibly be read as a rejection of testamentary approaches to writing genocide because it opens with chronicles and closes by privileging a third-person fictional narration. While the challenges of representation are prevalent in *Murambi*, the pivot of the story revolves instead

66 *Murambi*, p. 176.

67 *Murambi*, p. 171.

around a moral vision that is less concerned with style than it is with content.

What seems most consistent in Cornelius's journey to Murambi is not the dramatization of the trip's representational challenges but the novel's emphasis on the nature and uses of speech. The topos of the biblical story of the Roman centurion in *Murambi* supports Arnould-Bloomfield's argument about the overarching goal of Diop's novel: "its power does not consist simply in looking but in speaking, and the critical context in which the writer's task must be read is not that of the events' true representation but of writing's commitment to freedom and change."⁶⁸ Diop, like Soyinka, advocates against cynicism, supporting the notion that writing about genocide should have a positive purpose. As Cornelius demonstrates in *Murambi*, writing about genocide must serve as an instrument of mental decolonization. Cornelius's vision of decolonization is one that begins with an acknowledgement of his own complicity by virtue of his father's roles in the historical "sin" of genocide. This acknowledgement requires the creation of a new consciousness, a new self-awareness that confronts Africa's history pragmatically, accepts responsibility for African failures, and constructs practical bases for African decolonization and dignity. Through Siméon Habineza, Cornelius comes to understand the Rwandan genocide as an expression of African self-hatred in which the dead contribute to "the resurrection of the living."⁶⁹ To resurrect the living echoes the redemptive message of Christianity and means in this context the moral use of genocide for decolonizing purposes—that is, for reorientating the African mind.

However, Cornelius's conversion journey in *Murambi* raises questions about the nature of the "sin" for which he seeks redemption. In the novel, Cornelius's sin—in the fashion of biblical original sin—is given as one that is based on his "blood" ties to a father who has perpetrated great evil. His sin is not his per se. Rather it is his sin by biological association. Curiously, this conception of Cornelius's moral burden in *Murambi* is not too different from the rationale inherent in the biological racism fuelling the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi. Both rationales place moral responsibility on individuals owing to their perceived or actual biological connections to others. This is the rationale that feeds Cornelius's acceptance of his own complicity and victimization in the genocide. His redemption follows his recognition

68 Arnould-Bloomfield, "Commitment and Genocide Literature," p. 509.

69 *Murambi*, p. 181.

and acknowledgement of this complicity, which in turn leads him to conclude that his writing must be directed towards atoning for his father's crimes. This atonement, as he envisions it, involves collecting traumatic stories about genocide to use as a kind of gospel intended to cause similar self-reflection in others.

This vision of redemption and atonement can be read as a quasi-theological response to genocide in its aftermath. Following from this theological vision, the image of African decolonization that emerges from *Murambi* is that of the African individual coming to terms with the complexity of his selfhood and his complicity in the violence to which he has been subjected. The political preconditions of genocide—contests over territory, resources, and political control of the country—do not figure in Cornelius's commitment to write genocide. Cornelius would rather put his writing in the service of a kind of preaching (of African self-love and education). He encourages us to think about Rwanda's genocide as a symptom of an identity crisis, and in the process ignores aspects of the tragedy that allow it to be read as the violent expression of a political crisis so severe that it requires a new kind of political solution distinct from those more usually associated with the cessation of war. In short, *Murambi* provides no imaginative horizon for rethinking Rwanda politically or for addressing the continuing and unresolved political tensions in the country.

5

Gendering the Postcolonial African Genocide Novel

Adichie's Feminist Vision of Genocide in *Half of a Yellow Sun*⁷⁰

African genocide novels, particularly those written by men, tend to depict encounters with and experiences of mass atrocities during or after genocide as descent narratives in which male heroes embark on a quest in search of the meaning of their lives and societies. During the course of these quests, female characters are usually excluded or marginalized because they are already in hell, a condition requiring the male hero's rescue, or are serving as the basis for the hero's new awareness of life. As we see in Soyinka's and Diop's novels (as well as in Courtemanche's novel, discussed in the next chapter), women's experiences of atrocity are portrayed in these works as symbolic of the infernal conditions of African genocides. Women's abjection, which is often presented in men's writing as a metaphor for the extreme suffering of victims in general, serves to motivate the male artist's descent into Africa's genocidal hell and his coming to possess some transcendental knowledge based on his encounters with its denizens.

In this chapter, I discuss Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2006 novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (subsequently *Half*) which, I will argue, represents a significant attempt to depart from such masculinist tropes of the

70 Some sections of this chapter have been previously published as "Genocide and Hubristic Masculinity in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*," *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2019, pp. 86–104. They are reprinted here with permission of Indiana University Press's *Research in African Literatures*.

African genocide novel exemplified in the other three novels that I discuss here. Unlike in Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*, in Adichie's novel women are not the comatose subjects of an African postcolonial hell awaiting saving by men. Nor are they naïve romanticists desiring the white man's intellect, as dramatized in Courtemanche's characterization of Gentile in *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*. In Adichie's novel, women as well as men are persons with their own autonomous agency, and all equally strive to make sense of their place in a chaotic world. In its revisionism of the dominant quest trope found in African genocide fiction by men, *Half* deploys what some critics have regarded as a feminist trope.⁷¹ This feminist trope, as it has been conceived in scholarship, uses elements of domestic fiction in order to reimagine the genocide of the Igbo in Nigeria and to offer alternative visions of reform in this genocide's aftermath.

In *The Nation Writ Small*, Susan Andrade argues that the domestic genre has been the preferred narrative form used by several African women writing about national experiences. Andrade argues that, unlike men's writings, which centre on political actions and public life, African women's writings generally focus on experiences within the private space of the family. For Andrade, this notable focus on private experiences in women's writing does not, however, presuppose an absence of a political vision and political commitment in women's writing. Instead, according to Andrade, the domestic genre enables African women writers to animate shared historical experiences as well as highlight the gender dynamics of such encounters. In this way, too, the private aspects of the domestic genre afford female writers the opportunity to explore intimately and with acute detail the more familiar aspects of national struggles.

In light of Andrade's observations, several critics have praised Adichie for how she reinvents in *Half* "the genre of domestic fiction by using it to tell the story of war", and by so doing "feminizes" the war novel in the tradition of women forebears in Nigeria such as Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta.⁷² Jane Bryce argues that Adichie's *Half* belongs to "a wider corpus" of "Nigerian" women's writing on the Biafra–Nigeria War that "fundamentally questions, not only the authority of fathers,

71 See Susan Z. Andrade, "Adichie's Genealogies: National and Feminine Novels," *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2011, pp. 91–101; Coundouriotis, *The People's Right to the Novel*; Earnest N. Emenyonu, ed., *A Companion to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*, James Currey, 2017.

72 Coundouriotis, *The People's Right to the Novel*, p. 225.

but [also] the legitimacy of [patriarchy's] official history by which nationalism is configured".⁷³ Seen thus, *Half's* questioning of official history that is organized around male experience underlines Adichie's feminist vision. This vision has been considered remarkable by critics for its liberal humanist ethics⁷⁴ that derive "genealogically" from a revisionist extension of a masculinist trope present in writing such as Chinua Achebe's.⁷⁵ This liberal humanism suggests an imaginative horizon supplied in the story for understanding gender dynamics in a war context and for tasking characters with responsibility for their actions.

These readings of *Half* focusing on Adichie's feminist vision attempt to show the important contributions of the novel to a feminist reworking of an otherwise masculinist discourse of war in Nigerian writing. According to Eleni Coundouriotis, as a whole the notion of "feminizing" and "domesticating" the war novel suggests the genre's "submission to the moral and political authority of women's points of view".⁷⁶ Coundouriotis contends that this feminist project in Adichie's *Half* is revisionist in so far as it explores the political implications of "the claim that [such an approach] strengthens women's political identity by demonstrating how they reform men".⁷⁷

In this chapter, I relocate Adichie's feminist vision in *Half* within the context of an analysis of genocide writing by examining the novel's representation of some major male characters, in particular the novel's representative Igbo and non-Igbo men. In contrast to sentiments expressed by some of the critics cited above, I contend that the feminist vision in *Half* presents some challenges for thinking about the genocide of the Igbo in Nigeria, notwithstanding how the novel clearly sets out to expose this genocide. These challenges relate to how Adichie portrays men, in particular Igbo men. The image of the "Igbo man" in *Half* presents what I will go on to describe in a subsequent section of this chapter as hubristic masculinity, a type of male being-in-the world that has remained central in several works of Biafran fiction, one that

73 Jane Bryce, "What is the Country? Reimagining National Space in Women's Writing on the Biafran War," in *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War*, edited by Toyin Falola and Ogechukwu Ezekwem, James Currey, 2016, p. 450.

74 Ruth S. Wenske, "Adichie in Dialogue with Achebe: Balancing Dualities in *Half of a Yellow Sun*," *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2016, pp. 72–74.

75 Susan Z. Andrade, *The Nation Writ Small: African Fictions and Feminisms, 1958–1988*, Duke UP, 2011, p. 93.

76 Coundouriotis, *The People's Right to the Novel*, p. 225.

77 *The People's Right to the Novel*, p. 225.

scholarly accounts focusing on such writings have failed to explore adequately. I trace the source of this hubristic Igbo masculinity in *Half* back to Chinua Achebe's hero Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* (*Things*). I argue that the masculinity of the sort epitomized by Okonkwo has been misappropriated and depicted as an ideal type of Igbo maleness in *Half*, which in turn leads to Adichie misrepresenting the Biafran tragedy by failing to hold perpetrators of the Nigerian genocide accountable for their crimes. I reveal the logic of Adichie's victim/survivor blaming in *Half*, which I trace back to the novel's indebtedness to conventions in Holocaust survivor testimonial writing, as well as to the legacies of Achebe's novel. I will go on to reject the critical reception of this image of the Igbo man, especially in feminist scholarship on Biafran writing, a body of work that stereotypes Igbo masculinity and obscures Igbo men's historical role during the Biafran conflict.

To appreciate the significance of my argument, it is important to recover Adichie's novel from the critical discourse on "war" writing within which it has mostly been read. Instead, I will treat the novel as an example of genocide fiction. The war narrative impelling the bulk of critical responses to *Half* has not only distracted attention from the novel's main historical and thematic pivot (that is, genocide), but also encouraged contentious or disputed interpretations of Adichie's text. It is therefore my aim in this chapter to: (1) read *Half* as a novel of postcolonial African genocide; and (2) underline (and at the same time problematize) its feminist vision of the genocide of the Igbo in Nigeria. Understood as a genocide novel, *Half*, like the other African genocide fiction discussed in this book, invokes the memory of the Holocaust in order to present atrocities against the Igbo in Nigeria as a genocide. By so doing, *Half* portrays Igbo genocide in Nigeria as manifest in what the philosopher Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze has called the "epistemic conditions of genocide".⁷⁸ These epistemic conditions, according to Eze, are constituted from the racism and exterminationist ideologies that lie at the heart of genocides in postcolonial Africa. On the one hand, as I will go on to show shortly, Adichie's vision of genocide in *Half* imagines the crisis of Biafra as propelled by racist ideologies against Igbo peoples in Nigeria. On the other, the feminist vision in *Half* seeks to challenge masculinist representations of that past in order to imagine a unique historical sphere for considering women's experiences at the time. In doing so, as I will show, the novel problematically reinforces the racism that it exposes. For, as I will further contend, *Half* racializes

78 Eze, "Epistemic Conditions," p. 115.

masculinity in its portrayal of men and in the process generates a narrative that knottily and perhaps inadvertently blames “Igbo” men and holds them responsible for the genocide.

Half of a Yellow Sun as a Genocide Novel

Notwithstanding the fact that several scholarly engagements with *Half* regard the novel as an example of war fiction, and therefore ignore the story’s significant concern with narrating genocide, Adichie’s novel is unequivocal in its identification of the massacres of Igbo peoples, especially before the war, as a genocide. *Half* chronicles from multiple perspectives the stories of mostly Igbo individuals caught up in a time of genocide and genocidal war. A central factor in the novel’s complex plot is a family’s struggle to survive the conflict around them, a cogent dramatization that involves the destruction of Odenigbo and Olanna’s home. Prior to the genocide, Odenigbo’s parlour is a salon of sorts, an intellectual hub of open debates and flourishing intellectual exchanges. The Biafran crisis sweeps away the vibrancy of this home, which I take to represent civil society. As revealed in *Half*, genocide and war usually emerge from and consequently lead to the loss of civil society. By the end of the fighting, even though the family survives it has lost nearly everything: its library, its democratic spirit, intellectuals, poets such as Okeoma, colleagues, and relatives who have all contributed to its vibrancy and “ongoingness”.

The novel’s narrative rests on the specifics of Olanna’s relationship with Odenigbo, both of them middle-class Igbo academics. In its inception, their relationship suffers a nearly catastrophic blow—at about the same time as Nigeria degenerates into ethnic crisis—when Odenigbo succumbs to pressures from his mother and impregnates a peasant woman, Amala. In an awkward act of retaliation, Olanna involves herself in a sexual affair with Richard, a white British writer visiting the country who is Kainene’s (Olanna’s twin sister’s) lover. The affair estranges Olanna further from Kainene. Amid the complicated web of these illicit affairs and betrayals is a peasant boy, Ugwu, Odenigbo’s houseboy, who participates from the margins as a servant taking inventory of these complex and evolving encounters. The context of affairs and betrayals in Olanna’s and Odenigbo’s circles parallels a political context of national crisis taking shape in 1960s Nigeria. The post-Independence Nigerian government has colossally failed to realize the promises of earlier independence struggles. In a sense, the

betrayals and tensions found in Olanna's and Odenigbo's relationship metaphorize the political situation in Nigeria, which ultimately led to a military coup.

However, following the coup, Igbo peoples found themselves treated as scapegoats for Nigeria's political problems. In *Half*, the ensuing genocide of the Igbo across the country provides an opportunity for mending the cracks in the relationships of these Igbo characters, who have to strive to survive a genocidal war in their newly declared nation, Biafra. In representing this genocide, Adichie compares it to the Nazis' attempted genocide of European Jews. In comparisons of Igbo suffering to that of Jews in the Holocaust, *Half* identifies racism as lying at the heart of the Igbo massacres. For example, in the novel the English woman Susan expresses her disgust for the Igbo and her tacit support for a genocide against them:

There are lots and lots of Igbo people here—well, they are everywhere really, aren't they? Not that they didn't have it coming to them, when you think about it, with their being clannish and uppity and controlling the markets. Very Jewish, really. And to think they are relatively uncivilized; one couldn't compare them to the Yoruba, for example, who have had contact with Europeans on the coast for years. I remember somebody telling me when I first came to be careful about hiring an Igbo houseboy because, before I knew it, he would own my house and the land it was built on.⁷⁹

Besides the racist-colonialist notions of civilization resulting from contact with Europe, Susan's view reflects a more general and prejudicial representation in *Half* of the Igbo in stereotypical terms linked to supposedly essential Jewish traits — that is, the distorted and offensive idea of Jews as ontologically greedy, domineering money-grubbers, commercialists, overambitious, and arrogant.⁸⁰ *Half* narrativizes a culture of xenophobia and ethnic labelling in which the Igbo find themselves scapegoated as a problem population and blamed for the political crisis in Nigeria.⁸¹ As dramatized in *Half*, the rhetoric on the lips of some killers as they butcher and deport their Igbo victims back to their Eastern homeland is equally telling: "Go, Igbo, go, so that *garri*

79 Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 194.

80 *Half of a Yellow Sun*, pp. 194–95.

81 *Half of a Yellow Sun*, pp. 197–98.

will be cheaper! Go, and stop trying to own every house and every shop!”⁸²

Through such comparison to the Holocaust, *Half* hints at racism—especially the kind of racist practices that accompanied European colonialism—as providing the epistemic preconditions for the genocide of Igbo peoples in Nigeria. This racism hinges on what Mahmood Mamdani in *When Victims Become Killers* has described in the context of Rwanda as the crisis of postcolonial citizenship in Africa, a crisis resulting from the classification of citizens into indigenous/native and non-native citizens.⁸³ The ascription of non-native status to citizens in their own country is part of a colonial history in which, according to Mamdani, segments of a nation’s population are racialized, discriminated against, and ultimately, as with the Rwandan case, nearly exterminated.⁸⁴

Half suggests that Igbo identity was racialized in Nigeria as a political and economic threat—as ontologically commercialist, domineering, and arrogant. Accordingly, in *Half* to be Igbo is to be seen as an existential threat to others, and so something in need of elimination in the name of national self-defence. *Half* portrays this genocidal aspect of the 1960s crisis as the factor that provides the impetus for Igbo nationalism at the time. In other words, the originary trauma of the genocide, at least for the Igbo, served to feed many Igbo peoples’ sense of themselves as members of a distinct (and oppressed) community. For example, it is not the political explanations (such as military coups) adduced as reasons for the mass murder of the Igbo that matter to the servant boy, Ugwu, who transforms in the story as a result of his encounters with the horrors of the Biafran conflict into the anointed writer of his people’s traumatic history. For Ugwu, “What mattered was that the massacres frightened and united the Igbo. What mattered was that the massacres made fervent Biafrans of former Nigerians.”⁸⁵

However, *Half* also faults the “fervent” Biafran nationalism that emerges in response to the genocide, showing how the construction of this nationalism in terms saturated with “Igbo” patriarchal rape and

82 *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 198.

83 Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, pp. 13–14.

84 *When Victims Become Killers*, p. 13.

85 *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 257. As one observes, for example, in the case of the relationship between Olanna and Kainene, the massacres bring the two sisters closer and the fractures in their relationship prior to the crisis take marginal place.

masculine arrogance condemns it to self-destruction. In an interview published on her website, Adichie has stated that part of her motivation for writing *Half* was because she was enraged by “the thought of the egos and indifference of men leading to the unnecessary deaths of men and women and children”.⁸⁶ This fury at men’s ego, which Adichie holds responsible for the unnecessary deaths of people, is directed precisely at Igbo men and Biafran leadership, at least as depicted in *Half*, and fails to properly hold the Nigerian military government responsible for genocide. A reason for this failure is perhaps that *Half* directs its criticism of patriarchy at qualities of maleness historically stereotyped as well as depicted in the novel as Igbo/Biafran. In this criticism, *Half* attempts to expose the dangers of this exuberant Igbo masculine ego, to condemn its arrogance, and to get it to accept responsibility for its recklessness. So represented, as I will go on to show below, the feminist vision underpinning Adichie’s representation of the genocide of the Igbo invariably participates in a culture of blaming Igbo men for the genocide of the Igbo in Nigeria.

It is ironic that a novel advancing claims that there was an attempted genocide of the Igbo ends up holding Igbo men largely responsible for and complicit in their own victimization, as well as that of others. A closer look at Adichie’s novel reveals the reasons for this contradiction. The representations of hubris undergirding the Igbo masculinity with which Adichie grapples in *Half* derive less from the historical circumstance of her narrative than it does from Achebe’s Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*. By crafting Igbo men in *Half* in the image of Achebe’s Okonkwo, Adichie offers a conflation of the Biafran situation with the colonial context of Okonkwo’s tragedy. Even more problematically, Adichie depicts Igbo and other masculinities in the novel as racially distinct, and portrays male characters’ distinctive ethnic/racial traits as a basis for understanding aspects of their motivations and actions. In *Half*, the Igbo male’s general resemblance to Okonkwo is made to appear distinct from the masculinity of the average Hausa and Englishman.

86 Adichie, “The Story Behind the Book,” *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*, <http://chimamanda.com/books/half-of-a-yellow-sun/the-story-behind-the-book/>, accessed 6 May 2017.

Okonkwo as a Figure of Hubristic Igbo Masculinity

Before examining Adichie's representation of male characters in *Half*, let us briefly consider what the term "hubristic masculinity" means for representations of Igbo masculinity in literature. By hubristic masculinity, I am designating a constellation of proclivities and attributes that characterize maleness as excessively arrogant in ways leading to tragic consequences. Simply put, the hubristic man is a man blinded by arrogant pride. He is the stuff of the heroic genre, which "traditionally" across several societies was precisely a male genre. At once this figure embodies the qualities of courage we admire and the stubborn inflexibility we condemn. The important point to note here is that the hubristic man emblemizes two key features: He is a *tragic hero* responding to a *tragic situation*. In depictions of historical epochs and moments of transition, this tragic heroic figure has been the privileged enabler for thinking about human struggles and social/political changes.

In the context of the mass atrocities against the Igbo in Nigeria and its artistic representations, the hubristic man occupies an important place in writers' and critics' discourses on that past. We find traces of such hubristic figures in Ofeyi, the hero of Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*; in James Odugo, the journalist, and the courageous Samson Ukoha in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Survive the Peace*; Dr Amilo Kanu in Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn*, and several representative male characters in Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra*, such as Chijioke Abosi, John Nwokolo, and Saka Momoh. Taken together, each of these male characters figures in the narratives either in order to dramatize tragic heroic qualities associated with the hubristic man or as an egotistically blinded figure used to challenge the heroic assumptions associated with the hubristic man. For example, in *Season of Anomy* Soyinka insists on a heroic vision of the hubristic man by creating a narrative drama that sees Ofeyi conquer his hubris and successfully rescue his woman, Iriyise, from a postcolonial hell. In *Survive the Peace*, Ekwensi offers two variations of the man of hubris in the journalist James and the soldier Samsom, both of whom meet their tragic ends in what is supposed to be a dramatization of the depth to the tragic loss of important qualities of manliness as a result of Nigeria's genocidal onslaught against the Igbo. Similarly, Ike in *Sunset at Dawn* portrays Dr Kanu as a man of hubris whose death is meant to underpin the lamentable sacrifices that Biafra suffers in its struggles to survive a genocidal war. In Adichie's *Half*, as I will discuss shortly, this hubristic man is shorn of his heroism in order to dramatize

his foibles and the hollowness of his dangerous ego, as well as to envision his reformation.

A major source of this hubristic man is Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things*, perhaps not so strange a trend considering the popularity and importance of *Things* as the prototypical "African" novel portraying a tragic transition from one epoch to another.⁸⁷ Arguably no fictional character in modern "Nigerian" literature has successfully seduced and continues to influence Nigerian writing more than Okonkwo. He has become a kind of mythical figure, possessing an otherworldly life as if he once lived in the real world and actually died.⁸⁸ Forged from the crucible of a collapsing indigenous socio-political system and an emerging British colonial system, Okonkwo embodies the qualities of the traditional male tragic hero. He is the personification of courage and fearlessness, as well as of the excess of masculine hubris.

Two broad views have emerged around the interpretation of Okonkwo. One regards Okonkwo as representative of his community, and as such his downfall signals the demise of community and tradition. The other reads Okonkwo's fall as emblematic of an individual tragedy. Some earlier readings of *Things* align with the former tendency and find in Okonkwo a profound statement against colonialism. The tragic-hero, rather than being an exception in a society that distances itself from him, becomes the very symbol and representative of that society's seeming collapse. Richard Begam, for example, reads Okonkwo as representing Igbo culture more generally. Even though at almost every turn in the novel Okonkwo appears as someone working against community and holding views contrary to Umuofia's principles, Begam describes his fall as indicating "the collapse of Igbo culture",⁸⁹ thereby linking Okonkwo's fate to the fortune of his people.

Several critics in recent years have rejected this position and find Okonkwo's fall less to do with the ruin of his community than it is about his own ruin. As Biodun Jeyifo puts it, there are those in the story "for whom things did not exactly fall apart".⁹⁰ Simply put, Okonkwo represents an incarnation of the "rigid and inflexible version of society's masculine values and principles".⁹¹ Jeyifo further notes

87 See Elleke Boehmer, "Achebe and his Influence in some Contemporary African Writing," *Interventions*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2009, pp. 141–53.

88 Biodun Jeyifo, *Things Fall Apart; Things Fall Together*, Bookcraft, 2010, p. 19.

89 Richard Begam, "Achebe's Sense of an Ending: History and Tragedy in *Things Fall Apart*," *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 29, no. 3, 1997, p. 398.

90 Jeyifo, *Things Fall Apart*, p. 19.

91 *Things Fall Apart*, p. 19

that Okonkwo is a societal exception, and argues that his fall does not suggest the collapse of Umuofia. Other characters, such as Obierika, Nwoye (Okonkwo's son), and, we should add, the prominent female figures in the novel, such as Ezinma, all represent what Jeyifo sees as characteristically normative versions of Umuofia society that refuse, unlike Okonkwo, to be inflexible in the face of change.

Adélékè Adéèkó has designated as the "Okonkwo topos" the influence of Achebe's hero on Nigerian writing.⁹² The Okonkwo topos, or formula, according to Adéèkó, lies at the heart of literary projects by other Nigerian writers, including Soyinka in *Death and the King's Horseman*, Flora Nwapa in *Efuru*, Ben Okri in *The Famished Road*, Chris Abani in *Graceland*, and Chimamanda Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* and (as I contend in this chapter) *Half of a Yellow Sun*, all of whom in different ways attempt in their works to rewrite Okonkwo as a figure of late colonial and postcolonial historical transition.⁹³ The reason for this writerly fixation on Okonkwo in Nigerian writing, according to Adéèkó, is because many Nigerian writers "find the conclusion of Achebe's [*Things Fall Apart*] unsatisfying and therefore keeps [sic] reimagining it".⁹⁴

The dissatisfaction of these writers with the ending of *Things Fall Apart* is due to the "closure" signalled by Okonkwo's suicide. Indeed, Adéèkó suggests that Okonkwo occupies a central place in Nigerian writing because of the closure implied by his suicide. Significantly, however, Adéèkó's reading of Okonkwo's suicide contradicts his claim that Okonkwo's hubris leads to his own ruin and not his community's destruction. Reading Okonkwo's suicide as inaugurating a kind of closure, Adéèkó interprets him as a representative of an indigenous ruling class who resorts to "annihilating urges" when faced with the reality of losing his familiar (and traditional) hold on power.⁹⁵ He sees texts such as Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* as rewritings of the "closure" suggested by Okonkwo's suicide. As I will go on to contend, interpretations such as Adéèkó's of Okonkwo as a representative of his society's leadership class encourages perceptions of Okonkwo and the masculinity he epitomizes as normatively characteristic of male "Igbo" leadership.

92 Adélékè Adéèkó, "Okonkwo, Textual Closure, Colonial Conquest," *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2011, p. 73.

93 Adéèkó, "Okonkwo, Textual Closure, Colonial Conquest," p. 73; see also Adéèkó, "Great Books Make Their Own History," *Transition*, vol. 100, 2008, pp. 37–40.

94 "Okonkwo, Textual Closure, Colonial Conquest," p. 73.

95 "Okonkwo, Textual Closure, Colonial Conquest," p. 73.

In the Biafran context during and after the genocidal war of independence, the Biafran military leader Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu came to represent a real-life equivalent of Achebe's fictional Okonkwo. For example, the popular 1986 film adaptation of *Things Fall Apart* compares Ojukwu to Okonkwo in ways that transform Okonkwo's story into Biafra's story. In the director's commentary accompanying the last scenes of the film, it becomes clear that the filmmakers were intent on paralleling Biafra's tragedy with Okonkwo's because they considered the latter to represent the aspirations of a quintessential Igbo heroic spirit and Igbo masculinity, both of which have been matched in modern times only by Ojukwu.⁹⁶ Through such links to Biafra, Okonkwo's tragedy finds parallel in Biafra's tragedy. In this way, the film encourages a reductive reading of the complexities of people's lived experiences of genocide and war as a tragic and cautionary story of one man's hubristic downfall. Meanwhile, the propaganda issued by the Nigerian government during and after the war maintained that Ojukwu should be held responsible for the suffering of his own people given his refusal to compromise and surrender much earlier than he did.⁹⁷ Ojukwu's selfishness, arrogant inflexibility, and hubris, as the government's narrative averred, led to and prolonged the war and his people's suffering.

I disagree with Adéèkó's claim that Okonkwo represents the traditional ruling class facing colonial conquest. I instead concur with Hugh Hodges's apt objection to Adéèkó, and contend instead that Okonkwo acts alone and rarely on behalf of community. He embodies a rather totalitarian impulse like the invading colonial system that he positions himself against.⁹⁸ Okonkwo's suicide is thus readable as "anomic and,

96 The director's commentary in the last scene of the film explaining the significance of a praise chant reads thus: "In Igbo language, 'ebube' means 'glory'. 'Dike' means 'the brave.' The chant, in the context it is used, indicates a praise, honour and overjoy glorification of Okonkwo. In Igboland, if you praise a charged-up man in that manner, the man will 'fight and kill a lion' even if he intended to run away. In modern day Igboland, the former Biafran Head of State Lt. Col. Emeka Ojukwu, who led the Igbos during the civil war 1967–1970, remains the only son of Igboland that is held in the same esteem as Okonkwo. This explains the conferment to Ojukwu, by the Igbo community, of the title 'Ikemba', 'the strength of the people'". For an incisive discussion of the adaptation of *Things Fall Apart* into film see, for example, François Ugochukwu, "Things Fall Apart—Achebe's Legacy, from Book to Screen," *Research in African Literature*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2014, pp. 168–83.

97 Achebe, *There Was a Country*, pp. 209–39.

98 Hugh Hodges, "Beasts and Abominations in *Things Fall Apart* and *Omenuko*," *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 43, no. 4, 2013, p. 53.

perhaps more importantly, egoistic”, suggesting his own “final rejection of all social and moral obligations” to his community.⁹⁹ In Okonkwo’s Igbo world of Umuofia, suicide is abominable. Okonkwo’s suicide has to be understood as signalling his final rejection of his community, not the political ritual of resolving difficulty as Adéékó explains it based on his reading of suicide in Soyinka’s Yoruba world of *Death and the King’s Horseman*.

Adéékó is, however, right that Okonkwo has been a key influence on Nigerian writing dealing with epochality, in part because as a man of hubris he embodies some of the major tensions inherent in any historical transition. Yet where he sees other Nigerian intertextual relations to *Things* as based on the urge to rewrite the closure signalled by Okonkwo’s suicide, I see a misappropriation of the Okonkwo figure in artistic responses to the Biafran tragedy, particularly in such contemporary appropriations of this figure as exemplified in Adichie’s *Half*. Adichie’s novel falls within an artistic tradition of Biafran writing that rejects heroic representations of that past, particularly heroic representations of men’s actions. In her rejection of this heroic image of the man of hubris, Adichie characterizes the male Igbo figures in her novel as so full of arrogance that they make bad decisions that bring calamity on themselves and their communities. *Half* dramatizes the dangers posed to society by this hubristic maleness. The challenge with Adichie’s fictionalization of masculinity in the context of the 1960s crisis, however, is that it appropriates the figure of male hubris in Achebe’s *Things* and presumes that Okonkwo and others of his type are figures adequate for thinking about the Biafran tragedy generally.

Hubristic Masculinity in Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*

In *Half*, Igbo men such as Odenigbo and Ugwu figure as hubristic and so are considered distinct from other ethnically representative male characters. Two such male characters are Richard (the English writer and Kainene’s lover), who transforms in the story into a war correspondent on the Biafran side, and Mohammed, the Nigerian Muslim Hausa and Olanna’s ex-lover. One way to understand the overall characterization of these men in the story is to look at the sexualities they exhibit, because, as Zoe Norridge explains, sex serves a synecdochal function when explaining violence and the

99 Hodges, “Beasts and Abominations,” p. 53.

mechanisms of characterization in *Half*.¹⁰⁰ *Half* presents Richard as sexually feeble; Mohammed is exoticized and shown to possess a certain Arab charm and conservative sexuality. The Igbo men in the story, such as Odenigbo, Colonel Madu, and even Ugwu, possess more robust sexualities. Compared with the Igbo men of the novel, both Richard and Mohammed embody enervated masculinities that make their involvement in and closeness to the Biafran tragedy of no serious consequence, as it fails to signify morally.

Richard is represented as an exhausted white European male of the late colonial and early postcolonial period whose place in the emerging postcolonial world is anything but assured. He is a European man of late modernity whose ignorant and sometimes hypocritical apprehension of decolonization leads him to embrace a romanticized and sensualized image of Africa. Like Clarence in Camara Laye's novel *The Radiance of the King*, Richard traverses postcolonial Nigeria in an illusory and frustrating search for manhood, voice, and communion.¹⁰¹ The foster child of Conrad's Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*, Richard straddles the complicated worlds of two women whose towering shadows threaten to nullify him. In *Half*, Richard's "betrothed", Susan, represents the haughtiness of the colonial past that he desires to leave behind. Kainene, on the other hand, figures as his exoticized African mistress with whom he aims, without success, to find communion.

In *Half* Richard shows up as a foil to both Odenigbo and Colonel Madu. Richard's relationship with Kainene is fraught with sexual

100 See Zoe Norridge, "Sex as Synecdoche: Intimate Languages of Violence in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love*," *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2012, pp. 18–39.

101 Clarence is a figure from France. In Camara Laye's *The Radiance of the King* (1971; translated by James Kirkup, NYRB, 2001) this figure sheds his sense of "white" superiority the deeper he reaches into the darkness of Africa. In the context of Biafra, Irish writers presented interesting examples that may be considered models for Adichie's characterization of Richard in *Half*. The European men in these Irish literatures on Biafra usually find themselves occupying a marginal, if not precarious, position in both Europe and the new postcolonial state. Writings and documentaries by Irish writers who witnessed the war in Biafra in different capacities offer images akin to Adichie's Richard. Like Richard, the image of a European journalist witnessing the atrocities of postcolonial Africa is dominant. Examples include Vincent [Lawrence] Banville's *An End to Flight*, Desmond Forristal's *Night Flight to Uli* (documentary) and *Black Man's Country* (a play). For an incisive study of the Irish imaginations of Biafra see Fiona Bateman, "Biafra in the Irish Imagination: War and famine in Banville's *An End to Flight* and Forristal's *Black Man's Country*," *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War*, edited by Toyin Falola and Ogechukwu Ezekwem, James Currey, 2016, pp. 284–313.

incapacities, in contrast to the sexual potency that Colonel Madu appears to personify each time he comes into the circle of the relationship Richard shares with Kainene. Richard's sexual encounters with Kainene underscore his enfeeblement in the story and present an instance of classic gender role-reversal. He is the one who prepares the room in preparation for sex with Kainene. He emerges from sexual intercourse with Kainene feeling more uncertain about himself. The only time in the story that Richard achieves what seems like a satisfactory sexual experience is when Kainene's twin sister, Olanna, uses him to get even with Odenigbo. He is neither fully in charge of what happens nor is he seriously interested in Olanna. In the lives of the twin sisters and other Igbo characters in the story, Richard appears to be merely a pawn in the politics of their relationships, in the context of which he is used mainly to arouse jealousies and sustain fantasies.

To put Richard's character in its symbolic place and judge his significance in the context of the Biafran tragedy, it is important to understand his position as an Englishman, a former colonizer, an aspiring male writer, and a war reporter. As an Englishman coming from a recent, if not continuing, history of colonialism, he finds himself struggling to reconcile his place in that history by attempting to write a book concerning a people he knows little to nothing about. But since, as the novel shows, the structures of such previously racist colonial constructions of superiority have wilted significantly, Richard finds himself wallowing confusedly in the muddle of an emerging postcolonial Nigeria. He rejects what seems in the story to be the sterile and monotonous highlife of a former colonizer, represented by Susan, whom he leaves for Kainene in what appears to be an effort to seek communion with the formerly colonized. His unsuccessful but passionate attempts to find communion in the form of satisfactory sexual union with Kainene symbolize his efforts to establish a definitive union of repossession with the formerly colonized. However, his sexual incapacities and embarrassments with Kainene speak more to the frustrated outcomes of his quest.

When the war suddenly comes, Richard extends his quest for a relationship with Kainene to include helping Biafra. As is the case with his place in the lives of Kainene and Olanna, he finds himself once again used as a pawn by a Biafran leadership that is intent on internationalizing news of the atrocities of Nigerian military. As a war reporter, Richard becomes more uncertain about his place in a Biafran world that continues to reject him even as he learns the Igbo language,

has remained devoted to Kainene, and has done his best to help with the war effort.

His uncertainties about his place in the postcolonial Igbo world make Richard finally realize that Biafra's story is not his to tell. He hands over to Ugwu (a subaltern child-soldier veteran) the fragments of his notes that he has produced from his observations. After he comes to the realization that he will never see Kainene again, following her disappearance near the end of the war, Richard's quest in Biafra leaves him more confounded: "he would see things only in shadow, only in half glimpses".¹⁰² His encounters in Biafra are a Westerner's descent quest. However, unlike Valcourt in Courtemanche's *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, Richard's descent journey does not lead to some transcendental knowledge of the postcolonial world or to an empowering awareness of himself, even though he ends up, like Valcourt, without his African mistress. The genocide of the Igbo, in other words, destroys the prospects of his relationship with Kainene.

Yet Richard's display of frenzied and often puerile passion for Kainene, especially when the latter goes missing, may elicit both the reader's disapproval and sympathy for him. Throughout the novel Richard's agency as an outsider-insider shows him to be a pawn in the postcolonial Nigeria/Biafra world. Accordingly, *Half* encourages us to see him as merely a wager in the politics roiling among the formerly colonized, and so as a not-so-powerful, near passive, and unsure agent in a history of genocide and war that the British government and media of the day helped to inflame and prosecute.¹⁰³

In the case of Mohammed, *Half* presents him as descending from "a lineage of holy warriors" and thus as "the very avatar of pious masculinity".¹⁰⁴ He is a picture of a gentleman, handsome with "caramel complexion",¹⁰⁵ wealthy and materialistic but in a gracefully simple way, in contrast with the wild and raucous affluence of Olanna's parents and the arrogant sophistication of her lover, Odenigbo. Mohammed is the quintessential "Northern" Nigerian Muslim man, resembling the quaintness and erotic exoticism of the charming Arab-Muslim. He

102 *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 537.

103 On the roles played by the British government and the Western media during the 1960s crisis in Nigeria see, for example, Jacobs, *The Brutality of Nations*; Françoise Ugochukwu, "The Nigerian Civil War and Its Media," *Media, War & Conflict*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2010, pp. 182–201; Smith, "The UK and 'Genocide' in Biafra".

104 *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 56.

105 *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 55.

is conservative, caring, religious, and vain, in contrast with the wild, ferocious, liberal, activist impetuosity of Odenigbo.

While Mohammed represents the Northern oligarchy in Nigeria, he is also representative of dissenting voices speaking against—although less publicly—the genocide of Igbo peoples in his region. In the world of the story, he is detached from and less implicated in the atrocities against the Igbo taking place across Northern Nigeria. Not only does he save Olanna from being victimized by perpetrators of genocide in his region, he also remembers her during the war and manages to send her relief items. The overall picture of this only major representative of the Northern elite in Adichie's story is not of someone morally responsible or accountable for any of the atrocities that take place around him. His is rather the picture of an aloof, graceful, and passive participant in that history. This portrayal of Mohammed might not be of any significant consequence except for the fact that he is the principal character of Northern extraction in the novel. His marginal place in the novel, and the lightheartedness with which he graces the world of *Half*, belie a history that has involved witnessing a very active and vibrant Northern elite that is complicit both in the organization and execution of genocidal atrocities and a pernicious war.

Unlike Richard, Mohammed is far removed from the tragedy of Biafra. If Richard's devitalized masculinity and sexuality signify his uncertain place in that tragic conflict, Mohammed's exoticized "pious" masculinity and sexuality create a mystery that cannot be comprehended and apprehended in that history. He is more reminiscent of a figure out of Sudanese novelist Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, Mustapha Sa'eed, an Arab-African and passive Othello who suffers from the disorientation that comes with dual exposure to Arab and Western civilizations.

Richard and Mohammed represent racialized versions of masculinity—the former (white/European) replete with enervated masculinity, and the latter (Hausa/Muslim) exoticized. Their devitalized and exoticized sexualities parallel their diminished place in Adichie's fictional historiography of the Biafran tragedy. The devitalized agency of these characters in a history of genocide and war invites nominal consideration of their moral failings and responsibility for the atrocities of that past. This representation of Richard and Mohammed as diminished and declining contrasts sharply with Adichie's portrayal of Igbo men in the novel.

Half characterizes Odenigbo, a middle-class university professor with strong activist leanings, as opinionated, irascible, and empty

arrogant. He represents an intellectual and civilian version of the Biafran military leader Ojukwu: beard-wearing, radical, revolutionary, aggressive, and full of unwarranted self-regard. In *Half*, Ojukwu, like Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, represents a figure of agency and power. His presence inspires chants of "Power! Power!"¹⁰⁶ After Ojukwu's declaration of Biafran independence, Odenigbo—whose name loosely translates as *the voice of the Igbo*—becomes Ojukwu's mouthpiece when addressing students of the university at Nsukka during a rally. There he declares that "Biafra is born! We will lead Black Africa! We will live in security! Nobody will ever again attack us! Never again!"¹⁰⁷ Odenigbo's speech resonates with the hope of an independent Biafran nation, which, like the Jewish state of Israel, will arise from the ashes of a genocide. Meanwhile, his speech about Biafra's birth coincides with the period of Baby's birth, a child he himself has fathered through rape. The paralleling of Baby's birth in the novel with the circumstances of Biafra's "birth" reveals that the new nation is anything but ideal. Odenigbo here presents as a hypocrite. The new nation that he idealizes as a haven of security bears all of the hallmarks of the violence he is denouncing.

The first instance of rape in *Half* is committed by Odenigbo against Amala, the peasant woman his mother has brought to him from the village. The remarkable thing about the novel's depiction of this rape is that it presents this crime as impelled by a conspiracy of individual and cultural authorities. Odenigbo's mother rejects her son's relationship with Olanna because of what she considers to be Olanna's worldliness. She forces a peasant woman on her son as a replacement for Olanna. Odenigbo succumbs to pressures from his mother in what *Half* dramatizes as a wilful failure to resist the social and cultural impunity that has enabled him to exploit the peasantry that Amala represents. During the rape, Amala remains unresponsive, signifying her non-consent. Although *Half* does criticize Odenigbo for failing to resist the pressure from family and culture, both he (an educated middle-class patriarch) and his mother (guardian of patriarchal culture) are still complicit in Amala's violation. Hence the rape presents in the novel as a crime on the peasantry by the new and old elite class. The product of this dreadful union is Baby. Odenigbo's rape of Amala thus signifies the rape and exploitation of the peasantry by the Igbo elites whom he represents. This elite class exploits flaws in the cultural traditions of their people

106 *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 214.

107 *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 205.

to satisfy their own venal whims and desires, even at the same time as they position themselves as moral/principled champions of modernity.

Amala's rape and the birth of Baby (which coincides with the birth of Biafra) turn out to be the beginning of the family that Odenigbo and Olanna end up managing during the war. Because this family is born from a rape, Adichie can be seen to suggest by extension that the Biafran nation is likewise tainted. Both "families" are not, after all, innocent and morally pure. The violence giving rise to them produces ripples of illicit affairs and betrayals. It is within the context of these affairs, rapes, and betrayals that Adichie inscribes the narrative of the genocide against the Igbo. That this latter family is not innocent in no way provides justification for its attempted elimination.

However, Adichie's novel does not allow the violent beginnings of Odenigbo's and Olanna's family to go blameless. The burden of responsibility for this atrocity basically falls on Odenigbo's arrogant shoulders, even though in actuality it is Olanna who takes full responsibility for Baby. This drama of responsibility for the consequences of Odenigbo's crime between the couples metaphorizes what Adichie perceives as the situation of Biafra at the time: the arrogant acts of Igbo men leading to a difficult situation in which Igbo women had to assume responsibility for their men's destructive excesses. Note that this way of imagining the beginnings of Biafra conveniently excludes any active Nigerian involvement. Responsibility for the problems of this beginning squares up around the consequential acts of men like Odenigbo, who are ruled by their hubris.

Odenigbo's arrogance is evident in his response to genocide and war. As the killing of the Igbo takes place across Nigeria he grows more intemperate and gives his support fully to the Biafran cause. Out of anger, he fails to take full consideration of his society's inability to control and direct the looming catastrophe. His ego prevents him from acknowledging weakness and from reflecting deeply on the difficulties of his people's situation. Odenigbo's character comes almost straight out of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. He may be considered a reincarnation of Okonkwo, save that, this time, he has to confront not a colonial problem but a postcolonial one.

Half refuses to grant Odenigbo heroic qualities. The longer the war lasts, the more degenerate he becomes, particularly when he insistently refuses to concede defeat in the name of a lost cause. Olanna is the one at this moment in the novel who steps up to take on a leadership role in order to save her family from starvation and disintegration. Her actions during the war underline the historical roles of and sacrifices

by many Igbo women who attempted to save their families at the time.¹⁰⁸ Olanna further serves as a moral voice urging restraint in the face of the pressure to make rash decisions. She beseeches other men, such as the poet Okeoma, to serve as one of Biafra's ambassadors instead of as a soldier.¹⁰⁹ But Okeoma refuses and succumbs to his pride, preferring to blindly serve and die while under arms for Biafra. Okeoma is clearly the fictionalized figure of the poet Christopher Okigbo, who died fighting for Biafra.¹¹⁰

Like Odenigbo, the houseboy Ugwu's trajectory in the story revealingly thematizes the moral grey zone within which a hubristic Igbo masculinity is shown to be complicit in the abuse of Igbo society. Ugwu's participation as a child soldier in the rape of a bar girl poignantly highlights this point. By then nicknamed Target Destroyer, owing to his show of bravery on the battlefield, and notwithstanding his forced conscription as a child soldier, Ugwu finds himself in a dilemma when his group gang-rapes a bar girl. He is both unable to stop his fellows from raping the girl and unable to resist the impulse to live up to the general expectations of his manhood that are revealed when one of his cohorts taunts him: "Target Destroyer, aren't you a man? *I bukwa nwoke?*"¹¹¹

Ugwu's rape scene resonates alongside the classic dramatization of hubris in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. This rape scene is strongly reminiscent of the scene in *Things* in which Okonkwo joins in the killing of Ikemefuna. In both scenes, arrogant pride and the fear of being called weak and unmanly motivate the characters' participation in violence. In the case of Okonkwo, he is supposed to be carrying out a divine instruction on behalf of his community, even though finally he acts more to protect his ego than to further the general good. By killing Ikemefuna, Okonkwo seemingly performs a duty for his community, but in doing so he commits a sacrilegious act against the land. In Adichie's *Half*, Ugwu finds himself in a similar circumstance. He is supposed to be acting on behalf of his society, even though his actions have been forced upon him, and even though raping a bar girl is not formally part of this duty. Yet, like Okonkwo,

108 See Egodi Uchendu, *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War*, Africa World Press, 2007, pp. 402–22.

109 *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 407.

110 Like Ali Mazrui, who, in his novel *The Trial of Christopher of Okigbo* (Heinemann, 1971), blames Okigbo for abandoning his artistic mission in favour of the gun, Adichie in *Half* appears to similarly blame the poet for choosing to fight as a soldier.

111 *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 458.

Ugwu is not confronting an impossible situation. He can simply refuse to participate in the rape and risk ridicule. Instead he rapes the girl to keep face, and by so doing he loses the reader's moral sympathy for his plight. He becomes as despicable as the mass of anonymous Nigerian rapist soldiers who have raped his own sister. Ugwu's participation in rape thereby serves to link Biafran and Nigerian atrocities, blurring the line between victims and perpetrators.

Ugwu is subaltern, though he is in the process of rising above his original social status and gaining a "public" voice for himself. In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo too emerges from a similar subaltern background to become an aristocrat. If Odenigbo represents the hubristic middle-class Igbo man, Ugwu is his subaltern avatar, even though as subaltern Ugwu lacks full autonomy in the diegesis and has limited control over the terms of his participation in the war.

The rapes committed by Odenigbo and Ugwu occur at significant moments in the novel: the former occurring before the genocide and the latter near the end of the war. Both are perpetrated by Igbo men—a master and his servant—on ostensibly peasant Igbo women. Both also reveal a confluence of forces propelling (and overdetermining) individual action. In both Odenigbo's and Ugwu's rapes, the individual's failure of will, not pressure from culture or an anomic environment, may be held responsible for the resulting atrocity. Adichie consistently peoples her work with characters tasked with accepting responsibility for their actions and decisions. In her novels, individuals are often required to accept responsibility for actions taken within the context of an environment within which they are not properly free. For instance, characters such as Mama, Kambili, and Jaja (in *Purple Hibiscus*) as well as Ifemelu and Obinze (in *Americanah*) have to grapple in different ways with the choices that they make and so must come to terms with what it meant to accept responsibility for them. In the case of Ugwu's commission of rape, *Half* refuses to portray him as a child soldier or other victim of war, one who lacks agency and so the ability to manage the terms of his own involvement in the crime. Instead, Ugwu comes to acknowledge his own complicity and finds redemption in his acknowledgement of his larger moral failing. In fact, the basis of Ugwu's trauma is not his experience of war and atrocity. Instead, it is his participation in rape. The image of the bar girl staring coldly at him continues to haunt him long after he has abandoned the battlefield. That this image of his crime remains a point of anguish in his mind is perhaps testament to Ugwu's moral consciousness, which acknowledges his complicity in a crime. Unlike his master, Odenigbo, who relinquishes responsibility

for his own rape to Olanna, Ugwu accepts responsibility for his by declaring his commitment to write about the Biafran tragedy, which he views as a manifestation in action of his moral duty to witness atrocity.

The master–servant trope occupies a significant place in *Half* and is reminiscent of Crusoe’s relationship with Friday in Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, a novel in which the master serves as an icon of cultural modernity, in contrast with the supposed primitivism of his servant. It is in accordance with this master–servant trope that Ugwu enters into history in the story, first as a peasant boy serving in the home of educated middle-class university professors and second as a child soldier serving to satisfy the demands of the Biafran military commanders who authorized his abduction and forceful conscription as a soldier. As Odenigbo’s servant, Ugwu encounters all of the foibles of modern middle-class culture. As a child soldier, he is exposed to the traumatic and morally crippling experience of war. In both situations, he serves to witness acts he is complicit in. Even as he witnesses Odenigbo’s rape of Amala, he invents excuses for it.¹¹² Although Ugwu later comes to terms with his own complicity in these atrocities, his dedication to Odenigbo that prefaces the historical account he writes of the Biafran conflict suggests that he identifies with his master. The dedication after all reads: “*For Master, my good man*”.¹¹³

While Ugwu’s use of “Master” in the dedication seems to suggest that he has not outgrown his status as servant by the end of the novel, even though he has managed to write Biafra’s history, by the end of the novel he has become Biafra’s official historian and his dedication to Odenigbo (who is, remember, considered the voice of the Igbo) at once suggests his usurpation of his master’s role as well as his acknowledgement as an apprentice of the high quality of his master’s training. That in *Half* master and servant are complicit in the rape of women whom they are supposed to protect is telling, particularly since Adichie redeems one of these men as a moral witness to a crime he himself has helped to perpetrate.

Jane Bryce has observed that rape in Adichie’s novel and novels by other Nigerian women such as Buchi Emecheta performs an ideological function, one that emphasizes the specificity of women’s private experience as distinct from communally shared historical experience. For example, in Emecheta’s *Destination Biafra* rape is significant because of how the author attempts to construct war as

112 *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 270.

113 *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 541; original emphasis.

essentially a product of masculine hubris of which women remain its most wretched victims. In *Destination Biafra*, Debbie, the protagonist, is raped by both Biafran and Nigerian soldiers, an experience that reduces her to a subject of multiple masculine abuses. Her suffering from gender-based violence assumes great prominence in the world of the novel, leading the critic J. O. J. Nwachukwu-Agbada to ask why Emecheta in *Destination Biafra* “bemoans the rapes [of women] more than the deaths [of people in general]”.¹¹⁴

What Nwachukwu-Agbada gestures towards with this question, perhaps, is the specific politics of rape undergirding Emecheta’s narrative conception of the Biafran tragedy. Bryce views this politics as signalling the feminist ideology underpinning literary responses to Biafra by writers such as Emecheta and Adichie.¹¹⁵ These writers, according to Bryce, attempt to use the representation of rape to locate the particularities and uniqueness of women’s experience in war, a morally and politically urgent task given women’s generally marginal place in that history. Rape in a novel such as *Half*, therefore, is intended to express something about women’s victimization and the gendered experience of war and genocide, as well as to provide a way to work women’s perspectives into more putatively “official” representations of traumatic military and cultural history.¹¹⁶

Notwithstanding Bryce’s insights, however, the subject of rape defies easy explanation, especially in the context of a genocide. As Nicola Henry explains, as a weapon of war and genocide rape often bears significations that transcend its direct, individual victims.¹¹⁷ The act of rape by a genocide perpetrator may serve at once to perform violence and humiliation on its immediate victim as well as on the group the victim represents; hence Nwachukwu-Agbada’s unease with the depictions of rape in Emecheta’s novel, and by extension Adichie’s *Half*. Specifically, Nwachukwu-Agbada expresses anxiety over how

114 J. O. J. Nwachukwu-Agbada, “Buchi Emecheta: Politics, War and Feminism in *Destination Biafra*,” *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*, edited by Marie Umeh, Africa World Press, 1996, p. 388.

115 Bryce, “What is the Country?” p. 447.

116 Curiously, the politics of rape undergirding Adichie’s as well as Emecheta’s narrative uses women in similar ways, as we find also in the masculinist tropes of novels by Soyinka, Diop, and Courtemanche that portray the woman as an iconic figure of extreme suffering and abjection. The difference, however, is that *Half* refuses to portray women’s abjection as requiring men’s saving grace and heroism.

117 See also Chapter 6 in Daniela De Vito, *Rape, Torture and Genocide: Some Theoretical Implications*, Nova Science Publishers, 2014.

sexual violence in Emecheta's novel is dissociated from the contexts enabling its perpetration. Historically, in the Biafran context, women were raped by Nigerian soldiers and militant mobs not only because they were women but also because they were Igbo or Biafran women. But in attempting to mark out the specificity of women's suffering in Biafra's tragedy, Emecheta and Adichie use rape to articulate the unique suffering of women abused by both Biafran and Nigerian men, and in this way they depict men from the two warring sides as united by an unwritten pact to rape Igbo women. By conceiving of rape in this way (that is, in gendered terms as generically male violence directed against women), the rape of Igbo women by Nigerian soldiers ceases to be part of a broader network of genocidal violence directed against Igboness and made possible by the anomic circumstances created by the Biafran war. Any identitarian (and therefore genocidal) motives for these sexual violations are thereby negated, neglected, or obscured.

Through its collapse of the distinction between victim and perpetrator complicity in violence against women, Adichie's *Half* relegates the genocide of the Igbo to the context of a moral grey zone wherein survivors such as Ugwu are also perpetrators and therefore must accept responsibility for their own suffering and that of their community. Ugwu's position as a writer and a moral witness in this way becomes compromised. The judgemental title of his book, *The World Was Silent When We Died*, loses its moral force once we realize that he too has participated in crimes against the "we". Although Ugwu fashions his role as writer to atone for his complicity in atrocity, he cannot claim at the same time to be the voice of a moral witness condemning the wider world for its indifference to and complicity in a crime that he himself has helped to perpetrate.

The World Was Silent When We Died echoes the original Yiddish title of Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel's memoir *Night*, which provides an account of his Auschwitz experience. The Yiddish title of Wiesel's book translates as *And the World Remained Silent*,¹¹⁸ implying the author's

118 Sue Vice notes that the "accusatory polemics" of Wiesel's Yiddish memoir gave way in its shortened French translation and subsequently in the English translation based on the French version. Rather than merely an expression of rage and a polemic against the World, "indeed, in the English translation, it seems that Eliezer, the narrator, is reproaching his own family and friends for not heeding warnings of the fate to come, not the outside world" (*Holocaust Fiction*, Routledge, 2000, p. 14). Both the accusatory polemics in Wiesel's memoir and the victim-blaming in the memoir's life in other languages find expression in Adichie's *Half*. The influence of Holocaust literature on Adichie's own writing has not been adequately acknowledged. In her *New Yorker*

reproach to global indifference and complicity as the Holocaust was going on. Ugwu's account is a similarly accusatory reproach to global indifference during and after the mass murders of the Igbo in Nigeria. Ugwu's first entries in his history recount the story of a woman who escapes massacres of the Igbo in the North while bearing the head of her murdered child in a calabash. Olanna, who has seen the woman in the train they use to escape to the East, is horrified by the woman and what she is carrying. Ugwu connects this woman to German and Rwandan women who have undergone similar experiences:

After [Ugwu] writes this, he mentions the German women who fled Hamburg with the charred bodies of their children stuffed in suitcases, the Rwandan women who pocketed tiny parts of their mauled babies. But he is careful not to draw parallels. For the book cover, though, he draws a map of Nigeria and traces in the Y shape of the rivers Niger and Benue in bright red. He uses the same shape of red to circle the boundaries of where, in the Southeast, Biafra existed for three years.¹¹⁹

This reference to genocide in Rwanda provides a basis for dating Ugwu's writing to after the 1994 Rwandan genocide, a period that coincides with the time of Adichie's own writing on Biafra. The parallel between the Igbo experience of atrocity in Nigeria and atrocities in Germany and Rwanda that Ugwu hopes to avoid invariably results not only in comparisons between the genocide of the Igbo and these other atrocities but also in echoes in the novel of ubiquitous comments and sentiments characteristic of Holocaust survivor testimonies.

One key feature of such testimony is survivors' tendency to understand themselves as inhabiting a grey zone within which they may be understood as complicit in perpetrating or aiding in the perpetration of atrocity. As we see with Ugwu, the survivor's recognition of his or her own complicity in evil gives him or her a moral edge over the perpetrators. In his Auschwitz memoir *Survival in Auschwitz*, as well

profile piece on Adichie, Larissa MacFarquhar reports Adichie as remarking thus about Holocaust writing: "They somehow connect me to something about human beings. I don't know. I just know that I have a connection to the story of the Holocaust. I find that I'm drawn to stories in which life is normal, and then it's not, overnight" (MacFarquhar, "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie Comes to Terms with Global Fame," *The New Yorker*, 4 & 11 June 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/06/04/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-comes-to-terms-with-global-fame>, accessed 4 June 2018).

119 *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 104.

as his reflections in *The Drowned and the Saved*, Primo Levi describes surviving Auschwitz as inducing in him feelings of guilt and shame. He describes this situation in what he refers to as the “grey zone”, a space in which some Jewish prisoners recognize themselves as being in a zone of complicity with the Nazi prison guard. In one instance of this grey zone, Jewish prisoners work as *Sonderkommando*—work units of prisoners used by the Nazi prison guards to run the camps. These *Sonderkommando* units literally ran the gas chambers and ensured that the killing of fellow Jews was carried out effectively. In return, the *Sonderkommando* received what could pass as privileged treatment at the camp and a quick death. For Levi, however, victims and killers inhabit different parts of the Grey Zone. While both are not morally equivalent, they are nonetheless morally flawed. They underscore the complexities of mass atrocities and serve to challenge easy judgements.¹²⁰

In *Half*, Ugwu’s participation in rape evokes a connection to Levi’s grey zone. Within this zone, Ugwu is both a victim of Nigeria’s genocidal atrocities and a perpetrator of rape against defenceless Igbo women. Yet in Adichie’s grey zone the line between Ugwu and Nigerian rapist soldiers is blurred and the commission of atrocity by the Biafran survivor in Ugwu parallels the Nigerian rapists of his own sister, Anulika. The difference between Ugwu and the Nigerian rapist soldiers in *Half* is that Ugwu expresses guilt for his actions and accepts responsibility for them, an expression of which Adichie perhaps uses to grant him some moral reprieve, since he will become the anointed writer of that history. Seen thus, we can understand *Half* as encouraging a view that the guilt of the survivor who, like Ugwu, has been complicit in atrocity distinguishes him from the perpetrator’s supposed lack of conscience. This guilt that we see in Ugwu serves as the ethical basis for his writing about Biafra.

The challenge surrounding the notion of survivor’s guilt in the context of Adichie’s novel is that it not only assigns the Igbo survivor (Ugwu) complicity in the attempted genocide of his own people but also places the enormous burden of moral redress on his shoulders. The novel’s exclusive focus on the experience of Igbo peoples does

120 For an incisive discussion of Levi’s Grey Zone and of surviving in the context of the Holocaust see Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Zone Books, 2002. For broader discussions on the subject of surviving the Holocaust see Bruno Bettelheim, *Surviving and Other Essays*, Vintage Books, 1980; Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps*. Oxford UP, 1976.

not provide any alternative imaginative horizon for considering the Nigerian perpetrator. Ugwu's character, for example, serves to provide a lens through which to view Nigerian soldiers who have committed acts similar to Ugwu's. He cannot judge them because he recognizes himself in them. He becomes morally crippled by becoming a rapist, and thus is unable to imagine a space of justice for victims such as his own sister. His expressions of guilt and shame are merely testimony concerning suffering and moral failures; they offer mainly symbolic redress but no meaningful vision of justice and political or other redress.

In *Half*, Adichie's rebuke of hubristic Igbo masculinity seems to be an attempt to assert women's moral and political authority in the novel in order to reshape male characters' excesses. Hence she portrays women such as Olanna, Kainene, and Eberechi, Ugwu's girlfriend, as moral arbiters holding up men's excesses for condemnation. For example, the thought of confessing his rape of the bar girl to Kainene, Olanna, and Eberechi scares Ugwu, especially after he witnesses how Kainene publically humiliates the two priests who have habitually raped starving refugee girls in their care.¹²¹ In particular, as Eleni Coundouriotis rightly observes, Olanna serves as the novel's primary moral arbiter.¹²² She is the one who steps up and takes responsibility for Odenigbo's rape, taking it upon herself to raise Baby.

Near the end of the novel, in a redramatization of the dangers of masculine hubris, Olanna is also the one who ensures that the excesses of Odenigbo's ego do not spell calamity for everyone else. An incident occurs after Biafra's surrender. A group of Nigerian soldiers stops Odenigbo's car at a checkpoint as he drives his family back to Nsukka. When the soldiers order them all out of the car so that they can be made to carry out a humiliating task, Odenigbo stubbornly refuses. Olanna quickly acts in the face of her husband's arrogance by disembarking from the car and urging the men (Odenigbo and Ugwu) to carry out the soldiers' orders. Her quick intervention saves the family from what seems likely to be a catastrophe.¹²³ This scene speaks trenchantly for what in part we might consider Adichie's feminist vision of the Biafran tragedy. Odenigbo's stubbornness is symbolic of the novel's general conception of the stereotypically masculine Biafran leadership. It was in compliance with the directives of this arrogant leadership that Igbo society risked and almost lost everything. The excessive show of ego

121 *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 499.

122 Coundouriotis, *The People's Right to the Novel*, p. 228.

123 *Half of a Yellow Sun*, pp. 519–21.

led men to make choices that brought catastrophe upon themselves and upon society. Likewise, Odenigbo's ego might have got him and his family killed. He has not learnt how to deal with his pride. His ego blinds him to the risks to which he exposes his family through his stubbornness. It takes Olanna's wise intervention to change the predictable pattern of this event. That Odenigbo continues to plead with the soldier assaulting him to allow "my wife [to] stay with our daughter"¹²⁴ even when Olanna has already begun to carry out the soldiers' punishment speaks of a man more in a battle for his honour. Olanna's refusal to heed her husband suggests her understanding of this masculine excess. She has yet to recover from the horrors of the inflexible stances taken by the overly masculine Biafran leadership, including their refusal to accept defeat when all hope of victory has been lost (thus prolonging the suffering of the embattled populace). This is Adichie advocating for a reconsideration of the terms and limits of hubristic masculinity and charging women not to relinquish control of their lives to inflexible, arrogant, and prideful men.

This feminist vision and gender politics in *Half* are problematic not just because of the novel's racialization of Igbo masculinity as inherently hubristic, nor for its tacit assignment of blame for the Biafran calamity to this masculinity. The novel's feminist politics also distract attention from the ethnic political circumstances of the genocide in favour of providing a gendered vision of the tragedy. Precisely, Olanna's role in the novel as a moral arbiter and icon of feminine empowerment is less revolutionary than it seems. Not only does Adichie overly sexualize Olanna by imbuing her with huge sexual appeal and characterizing her as arousing sexual fantasies in virtually all of the novel's male characters who come into contact with her, including Ugwu, her various interventions likewise show her to be less than progressive. In traditional patriarchal domestic arrangements, women are often depicted in writing and films as correctives to the hubris of the patriarch of the family, whose dirty leavings she has to clean up after and cover up. Despite Olanna's portrayal as an empowered modern woman, her actions expose her as complicit in patriarchal violence, partly because of the way she responds to the flawed application of patriarchal power around her. None of her supposedly corrective actions—for example, accepting responsibility for Baby—has serious consequences in terms of creating conditions more conducive to justice or structural changes for the less privileged victims of misogynistic violence and rape.

124 *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 520.

In addition to this inconsistent feminist vision of genocide in *Half*, Adichie's choice of the genre of romance fiction for writing about genocide cannot escape the criticism that her novel appears to trivialize the historical experience of mass atrocity by turning catastrophe into melodramatic sentiment. Maureen Ikeotuonye has dismissed *Half* as an unsavoury romance, remarking thus about Adichie's choice of the genre:

As an Igbo woman, the genocide of more than 3 million Igbo people during what is often misrepresented as the "Nigerian civil war" was not a "love story" in any conceivable sense. My grandmother lost her husband and seven of her siblings and many other relatives during that war. She will never describe it as a love story, in fact Chinua Achebe (2012) in his book *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* described it as a "nightmare". Why is Adichie then shrouding a horrific event that happened to her own people in the far removed sentimentalism of "Mills and Boon"—an early 20th-century Victorian sadomasochistic "romance" fiction genre? Adichie's take on what is a serial historical trauma for her people is the typical Lugardian functionalist colonial apology, comparable to the "one Nigeria" rhetoric of the colonial elite that seeks to conceal historical abuses and ongoing injustices.¹²⁵

I agree with Ikeotuonye that Adichie's choice of the romance genre¹²⁶ for *Half* diminishes the seriousness of her treatment of genocide and fails to provide a platform for thinking meaningfully about the ethnic political nature of the Biafran conflict and its traumatic legacies. As Ikeotuonye puts it, Adichie's feminist vision in *Half* is cloaked in a problematic representation of the Biafran tragedy, serving "as part of the designs of mass distraction and constitut[ing] an obstacle to

125 Maureen Ikeotuonye, "Mary Amaka' Feminism: Exploring the Underside of Pop-Cultured 'Global Women Empowerment,'" *Current Sociology Monograph*, vol. 64, no. 2, 2016, p. 303.

126 I identify *Half's* conformity to the romance genre in its thematic focus on romantic love relationships. Romantic love in *Half* provides the centre around which the story's multiple plots and major characters pivot. *Half* also conforms to the historical romance or historical fiction genres, particularly—as Susan Z. Andrade observes about the historical romance from Africa and Latin America—for its being "explicitly national-allegorical as to bear as title" the emblem of Biafran nationalism (Andrade, *The Nation Writ Small*, p. 28).

critical public conversation in and about” the genocide of Igbo peoples in Nigeria.¹²⁷

The polarizing vision of gender relations in *Half* not just conceals the extent of the unanimous response to that genocide among many Igbo men and women but also gives the erroneous impression of the Biafran conflict as a “gender war”.¹²⁸ By deploying romantic tropes in order to deconstruct otherwise flawed masculinist tropes in Biafran writing, *Half* inadvertently compromises and obscures one of its primary narrative premises—that a genocide was committed against the Igbo people. The genocidal circumstances that serve as a backdrop to the novel’s action are set aside in favour of a diagnosis of the gender relations of Igbo victims. By so doing, Adichie encourages readers to think about genocide in Nigeria as partly having been brought about by the unchecked hubris of Igbo men. In this way, *Half* remarkably fails to hold the Nigerian military government at the time accountable for genocide. For a novel that hints at how the politicization of ethnic identity in Nigeria under British colonialism led to the forms of xenophobic and genocidal violence witnessed in the 1960s, it is strange to understand the trajectory of *Half*’s recourse to gender and sexual politics, which serves more to hold Igbo men accountable for atrocities committed against their own people than it does to provide an imaginative space within which to hold the Nigerian genocide perpetrator accountable for genocide and to think about justice and redress.

The ending of Adichie’s novel finds Odenigbo still stubbornly holding on to a dead cause in what appears to be a final staging of gendered responses to the recent Biafran trauma. Having survived genocide and war, Odenigbo and Olanna have to confront a post-war assault on their memory of that catastrophic set of events. The victorious Nigerian soldiers have set about confiscating artefacts related to Biafra. Odenigbo and Olanna respond in ways indicative of two post-war attitudes towards Biafran traumatic memory held by many Igbo people. For Odenigbo, traumatic memory is concrete and physical. To destroy the artefacts of suffering, namely the Biafran flag and currency notes, is a gross violation. Hence he chooses to risk grave danger and hold on to the physical traces of his Biafran war experience. Olanna, on the other hand, decides to burn hers. Odenigbo disapproves and challenges her, saying “You’re burning memory.”¹²⁹ Olanna replies: “I am not.’ She

127 Ikeotuonye, “‘Mary Amaka’ Feminism,” p. 305.

128 Pape, “Nigerian War Literature by Women,” pp. 231–41.

129 *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 539.

would not place her memory on things that strangers could barge in and take away. 'My memory is inside me.'¹³⁰ Odenigbo here represents the not-so-changed masculine impulse, seeking to retain a hold on that memory for some future struggle. He wants to use the memory of what has befallen Igbo people to continue and advance their communal struggle. This patriarchal disposition signifies a man still invested in rendering his own experience as communal, or representative, of the experience of all others. For her part, Olanna thinks that her memory of the war and its traumas is personal. She rejects Odenigbo's reprimand, insisting that hers is a more pragmatic approach to memory of this kind.

Although Odenigbo and Olanna disagree on how to keep their memories of suffering alive, they both accept that traumatic memory has some value as a way of looking back or refusing to let the past be. Within the novel, traumatic memory can be seen as a kind of currency. However, the novel provides no clear guidance on how to spend this currency wisely.

130 *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 539.

6

The Rwanda Genocide and the Pornographic Imagination in Courtemanche's *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*

In this chapter I discuss Gil Courtemanche's *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali* (subsequently *Sunday*) as comprised of a pornographic imagination of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda—my language here chosen deliberately to reflect pornography's excessively graphic drama and conflation of sex and violence. The novel's pornographic representation of genocide is most apparent in its depiction of genocide as an orgiastic spectacle of violence. I discuss some of the stakes involved in Courtemanche's pornographic imagining of the 1994 Rwandan genocide that spectacularizes suffering as a way to imagine genocide, condemn it, learn from it, and force one's perception beyond it.

Sunday was first published in French in 2000 as *Dimanche à la piscine à Kigali* and translated into English by Patricia Claxton in 2003. It chronicles the romantic escapades of a middle-aged French-Canadian journalist, Bernard Valcourt, during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Upon publication it became an international bestseller, winning Canada's 2001 Prix des Libraires book of the year and CBC's Canada Reads French Language contest in 2005.¹ In 2006 Lyla Films released a film adaptation of the novel titled *Un Dimanche à Kigali (A Sunday in Kigali)*, in Montreal, Canada. Some reviews of the novel praised it for its "humanist accents which could easily find

1 James Dawes, *That the World May Know: Bearing Witness to Atrocity*, Harvard UP, 2007, p. 29.

a place next to the works of Albert Camus and Graham Greene”,² as well as for its intimate staging of genocide as “a gentle love story”.³ Michael Keren appraises the novel as an “authentic account of the events” of the Rwandan genocide created from a Canadian bystander perspective.⁴

However, other critics of *Sunday* have disapproved of the novel’s representation of genocide. For example, Heike Härting describes Courtemanche’s *Sunday* as a “pornographic narrative”⁵ that sexualizes violence. This sexualization of violence in the novel, for Härting, may have been done “to demonstrate the intersections between Rwanda’s genocide and the spread of HIV/AIDS”⁶ in Rwanda and to highlight Western exploitation of Africa. Härting argues that, notwithstanding the writer’s intentions, the novel’s “gratuitous and pornographic scenes of apocalyptic sexual frenzy clamor for moral affect and perpetuate normative representations of Africa as a site of intimacy and abjection rather than shock readers into political consciousness”.⁷ The charge that *Sunday* is pornographic results from its graphic descriptions of sex and violence. Härting’s criticism echoes a prevailing moral anxiety over representations of mass atrocity and not least Western representations of non-Western Others in popular media, culture, and literature. The claim is often that such “pornographic imagination” of the Other’s suffering participates in further dehumanizing the Other by trivializing the experience of suffering through its representation and transformation into a cultural object of pleasure.

Confronted with criticisms that his novel is senselessly pornographic, and that it represents an old Canadian male journalist’s sexual fantasies of Rwandan women, Courtemanche has responded thus: “They ask, ‘How come a white man can write about the sexual life of a black woman?’ But curiously enough, the black women I met in Rwanda

2 Stanley Péan, “Bye Bye 2000,” *La Presse*, 31 December 2000.

3 Jane Sullivan, “When Truth Is Plainer in Fiction,” *The Age*, 9 August 2003, www.theage.com.au, accessed 6 April 2017.

4 Michael Keren, “The Bystander’s Tale: Gil Courtemanche’s *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali* and the Rwandan Genocide,” *Studies in Canadian Literature*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2009, p. 25.

5 Heike Härting, “Global Humanitarianism, Race, and the Spectacle of the African Corpse in Current Western Representations of the Rwandan Genocide,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2008, p. 69.

6 Härting, “Global Humanitarianism,” p. 70.

7 “Global Humanitarianism,” p. 66.

come back and say, 'Thanks for writing that.' They whisper in my ear because they wouldn't like their husbands to hear."⁸

Both this kind of authorial response and the novel's general depiction of love, sex, and violence make the charges that *Sunday* is racist and pornographic, and that it trivializes the experience of genocide, hard to dislodge. James Dawes's response both to the novel and to Courtemanche's response to his critics sums up this charge most acutely. For Dawes, the Rwandan genocide serves in Courtemanche's novel primarily as "an occasion for whites to fantasize about themselves [...] through the inversion of racist stereotypes: black women whisper secretly in the ears of the white man, who is more desirable, and more free in his desire, than hapless black cuckolds."⁹

While not disagreeing with these criticisms of *Sunday* as racist and pornographic, my intention here is rather to critique the novel for what it offers without presuming that pornography is a morally inappropriate representational form for writing about a genocide. Often, in the context of mass atrocity representation, "pornography" has been used without a clear definition to dismiss literary representations of atrocity as an expression of moral degeneracy and immoral cultural practice. This rather puritan attitude to literary explicitness concerning sex and violence is in part what I hope to separate out from my reading of Courtemanche's *Sunday*. Focusing on representative extracts from *Sunday*, I will argue that Courtemanche's novel is pornographic and that its pornographic imagination of the Rwandan genocide is indicative of the writer's endeavour to show the cultural, moral, and political decadence that instigated genocide. While in my overall analysis I fault Courtemanche's pornographic imagination for its racism, my argument is not based on the moral assumption that pornography (in whatever way it is defined) is inherently immoral and inadequate as a representational approach to genocide. If anything, I contend that the nature of the brutality unleashed in Rwanda inexorably elicits pornographic responses, even if only as plausible witness accounts to atrocities. Lest my discussion of pornography in Courtemanche's *Sunday* be considered vague, it is important to first consider what is meant by pornography and how it came to signify an inadequate representational approach to writing genocidal mass atrocity.

8 Quoted in Dawes, *That the World May Know*, p. 32.

9 Dawes, *That the World May Know*, p. 33.

Pornography and Genocide

As a working definition, I use pornography in the context of literature to suggest the representation of reality through explicit dramatizations of sexual practice. There is still no generally accepted definition of pornography. Etymologically, pornography derives from the Greek word “*pornographos*” suggesting writing or illustration about prostitutes or harlots (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). In this sense, pornography implies writing or illustration meant to titillate or to create sexual sensation in its audience. From the 1950s, an additional meaning of the word emerged referring “to a depiction of sensational material (such as violence) in order to elicit a reaction” (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). Since then, the term has come to be defined in varying ways depending on the ideological perspective adopted. Some of the definitional problems associated with pornography are not so much about the word as about the nature of materials so designated. Ranging from the nature of the sexual and violent content considered pornographic to moral concerns over explicit depictions of sexual practice and violence, “pornography” came to signify certain representations of sexuality and violence that were subject to moral disapproval.

The historian Carolyn J. Dean has noted that, particularly since the 1960s and mostly in response to representations of the Holocaust, there has been a remarkably sustained expression of anxieties over what several critics have described as the pornography of violence and suffering undergirding post-World War II Western visual culture. These anxieties are premised on claims that the culture of humanitarian advocacy that “advertises” the undignified and dehumanized suffering body in supposed attempts to generate empathy and compassion for it end up creating emotional, psychic, and even political distance in those viewing this suffering body. In recent years, the phrase “empathy fatigue” or “compassion fatigue”¹⁰ has come to delineate what scholars, journalists, and humanitarian advocates characterize as a desensitization

10 On discourses highlighting this trend of empathy fatigue based on over-exposure to images of suffering see, for example, Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering*, Polity, 2001; Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, eds, *Hiroshima in America: Fifty Years of Denial*, Putnam, 1995; Clifford Orwin, “Distant Compassion,” *National Interest*, no. 43, 1996, pp. 42–49; Susan Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War, and Death*, Routledge, 1999; Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*, translated by Graham Burchell, Cambridge UP, 1999; and Carolyn J. Dean, “Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering,” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2003, pp. 88–124.

of feeling owing to the proliferation of spectacles of human suffering and abjectness. The reason often adduced for this seemingly moral numbness in society's encounter with the suffering body is what several critics claim is a pornographic representation of violence. The notion of what constitutes pornographic representations of violence generally ranges from claims about the sexualization of suffering and violence to the nature of explicit details of violence and sex in literary and media forms.

In the context of mass atrocity representation, the term pornography came to assume both literal and metaphorical significance in criticisms of "an often eroticized objectification of pain".¹¹ Pornography, in the sense in which it has come to be used in relation to representations of mass atrocity, suggests a tendency to turn the violated body and the indignity of pain into objects of pleasure. As Dean explains, this usage of the term suggests a form of cultural degeneracy because it is believed to encourage the finding of gratification in the suffering and dehumanization of others. This meaning of pornography as cultural degeneracy gained popularity especially in criticisms of Holocaust representations. Critics, notes Dean, "frequently use the term 'pornography' to describe the 'marketing' of the Holocaust, presumably to describe the reduction of human beings to commodities, the exposure of vulnerable people at the moment of their most profound suffering, and thus their victimization all over again".¹²

This view of pornography as a morally offensive representation results from an evolution of cultural perception that is suspicious of "our" responses to "bodily suffering".¹³ The moral sentiment behind this suspicion of how the body is used to depict suffering arose in part after World War I as a response to a widespread belief that the Great War sapped [Western] society of moral character. The term "pornography" came to signify this cultural and moral decay, "the aimless and compulsive pursuit of self-gratifying pleasure and the depletion of will, discipline, and therefore, dignity".¹⁴ Images of war dead began to be described as "pornographic" to imply that "they no longer always revealed the tragically annihilated presence of [human] dignity but [that these

11 Dean, "Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering," p. 91.

12 Dean, "Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering," p. 91. My subsequent reading of the connections of Holocaust representations to the Holocaust is significantly indebted to Dean's essay.

13 Dean, "Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering," p. 91.

14 "Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering," p. 91.

images] reduced men's sacred bodies to objects of excitement, pleasure, or domination and thereby further violated the dead or demeaned".¹⁵ The moral sentiment linking pornography to cultural decadence found even stronger acceptance in criticisms not just of Holocaust representation but also of the social condition of anomie believed by many commentators to be behind the Holocaust.

As far back as 1965, in an essay titled "Night Words: High Pornography and Human Privacy", George Steiner makes a connection between what he calls "the 'total freedom' of the uncensored erotic imagination" since the nineteenth century and "the total freedom of sadists".¹⁶ This uncensored freedom and attitude regarding sexual perversion disguised as art, according to Steiner, characterizes the pornographic mind-set and culture that encouraged Nazi SS guards: "The novels being produced under the new code of total statement shout at their personages: strip, fornicate, perform this or that act of sexual perversion. So did the S.S. guards at rows of living men and women."¹⁷ Although in this essay Steiner does not designate representations of the Holocaust as pornographic, his thoughts partake in what would become a cultural anxiety that holds the proliferation of the pornographic accounts of the Holocaust accountable for the profanation of Holocaust memories.

Writing in her 1977 book *The Jewish Presence*, Lucy Dawidowicz laments the mutual invigoration Nazism and pornography share, or, as Susanne Kappeler puts it, "Nazi sadism is a stock in trade of pornography, and one of the most marketable ones at that."¹⁸ Alvin H. Rosenfeld also finds a shift in Holocaust representation "from places where mass suffering once was, prurience has come to be".¹⁹ Holocaust representations in film and literature have also received scrutiny regarding their depictions of sex and violence. For example, Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List* received different labels as a pornography of suffering.²⁰ Likewise, several reviewers of Jerzy Kosinski's novel *The Painted Bird*

15 "Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering," p. 91.

16 George Steiner, "Night Words: High Pornography and Human Privacy," *Encounter*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1965, p. 18.

17 Steiner, "Night Words," p. 18.

18 Susanne Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation*, Polity, 1986, p. 92.

19 Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *Imagining Hitler*, Indiana UP, 1985, p. 60.

20 See, for example, Armond White, "Toward a Theory of Spielberg History," *Film Comment*, vol. 30, no. 2, 1994, pp. 51–56. See also Maria Bratu Hansen's analysis of critical perspectives on *Schindler's List* in her essay "Schindler's List Is Not Shoah: The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory," *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*, edited by Marcia Landy, Rutgers UP, 2001, pp. 201–17.

and D. M. Thomas's novel *The White Hotel* dismissed them as merely pornographies of violence, serving only the demands of a decadent cultural enterprise.²¹ In a number of these linkages between Holocaust representation and pornography writers and scholars alike invoke the Holocaust "as a fragile body of memory increasingly subject to violation".²² Writing in *Selling the Holocaust*, Tim Cole in like manner expresses guilt during his first trip to Auschwitz. He regards his encounter with concentration camp sites as immoral and pornographic: "We were tourists of guilt and righteousness: guilt at an almost pornographic sense of expectancy of the voyeurism ahead."²³ As a tourist to concentration camp sites, Cole sees himself titillated by the expectancy of what he is about to encounter at the sites. For Cole, secondary witnesses at these sites, especially when tourists or historians, are voyeurs because they are aware of an excitement of a sexual kind that such encounters with concentration camp sites arouse in them.²⁴

Related claims about Holocaust pornography trailed the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1993. The journalist Philip Gourevitch criticized the museum as potentially inducing pleasure and excitement in visitors.²⁵ Michael Sorkin dismisses what he sees as the museum's propensity to provide excessive details concerning victims' suffering in ways that always create "entertainment, even pornography".²⁶ These kinds of response to the museum and other cultural memories and representations of the Holocaust are what make Dean suggest that the use of "pornography" to criticize certain Holocaust and other mass atrocity representations is a product of an association

21 For discussions of some of these criticisms of Kosinski's novel see, for example, Daniel J. Cahill, "Kosinski and His Critics," *North American Review*, vol. 265, no. 1, 1980, pp. 66–68; Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, 2nd ed., Verso, 2015; Vice, *Holocaust Fiction*. Some other popular Holocaust novels received related criticism as pornographic writing. For example, see Michael Rothberg's criticism of Philip Roth's novels in *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation*, University of Minnesota Press, 2000. For a contrary reading of Thomas's novel see, for example, Ronald Granofsky, "The Pornographic Mind and *The White Hotel*," *College Literature*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1993, pp. 44–56.

22 Dean, "Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering," p. 101.

23 Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, p. 97.

24 Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, pp. 113–14.

25 Philip Gourevitch, "Behold Now Behemoth: The Holocaust Memorial Museum: One More American Theme Park," *Harper's*, no. 287, 1993, pp. 55–62.

26 Michael Sorkin, "The Holocaust Museum: Between Beauty and Horror," *Progressive Architecture*, vol. 74, no. 2, 1993, p. 74.

of “visual cognition with human degradation and violation”.²⁷ This association links “pornography” to visual culture in a way that regards pornography as one of the excesses of modern mass media practice. As a kind of excess of degraded and inappropriate sexual behaviour and profanation of the sacred dignity of the body, pornography has come to be seen as a threat to any empathetic connection with the Other’s suffering, a threat intensified by pornography’s capacity to numb our moral feelings.

Regarding representations of African suffering, especially in the West and/or in those works on the topic produced for Western consumption, related notions of a pornography of African suffering is pervasive, and similar expressions of moral outrage in the context of the Holocaust against what some critics see as pornography’s degrading practice echo in African mass atrocity contexts.²⁸ The moral disgust felt at this supposed pornography of suffering similarly derives from assumptions about pornography’s capacity to dehumanize victims over again. Such themes concerning pornographic media representations of the 1994 Rwandan genocide pervade some of the contributions in Allan Thompson’s edited collection *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*. As Steven Livingston observes in the context of Western media representations of Rwanda’s genocide, the assumption behind such often pornographic depictions of distant suffering is that it can influence policy responses. Livingston, like several others, dismisses this form of media coverage and the policies it instigates as irresponsible.²⁹

Similarly, Stanley Cohen, writing in his book *States of Denial*, quotes a human rights activist condemning humanitarian and media representations of African suffering because of the pornographic suggestiveness

27 Dean, “Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering,” p. 93.

28 It is also noteworthy that such links made between Holocaust representations and pornography are similarly found in criticisms of media and especially cultural representations of violence against the Igbo in Nigeria and the Tutsi in Rwanda. As Lasse Heerten observes in the context of Biafra in his book *The Biafran War and Postcolonial Humanitarianism*, such connections of African suffering to sentiments invoked in the context of the Holocaust function as appropriations of a pornographic iconography of the Holocaust in order to render African mass atrocities thinkable as a genocide, and by so doing participate in rendering the Holocaust thinkable as the ur-genocide.

29 See Steven Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the American Media and Government Failed Rwanda,” *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, edited by Allan Thompson, Pluto Press, 2007, pp. 188–97. For more insights on the nature of Western media representations of distant suffering and its implications see Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue*; PiersRobinson, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News Media, Foreign Policy and Intervention*, Routledge, 2002.

of these depictions: “The public display of an African child with bloated kwashiorkor-ridden stomach in advertisements is pornographic, because it exposes something in human life that is as delicate and deeply personal as sexuality, that is, suffering. It puts people’s bodies, their misery, their grief and their fears on display.”³⁰ The moral anxiety in this statement comes from the assumption that the body is sacred and that the body in pain should belong in a sacred and private domain. To display it publicly amounts to its profanation.

Yet we know that suffering has both a private and a public aspect. Corpses from mass atrocity contexts left to decompose, say, by the roadside already reside in a public space. In this sense, we must ask whether it is the journalist’s camera or the writer’s word, or the real violators of these bodies, that is making these bodies public. Put differently, is representing violated bodies in their moment of indignity an immoral act? This question is even more relevant in the context of Rwanda because, following the genocide, the post-genocide Rwandan government, in a bid to affirm the genocide to the world, decided to leave some victims’ bodies at the massacre sites where they were killed by Hutu extremists, a decision that many critics condemned as encouraging dark and genocide tourism.³¹

Two points are worth noting here regarding some of the prevailing claims about the relation of pornography to atrocity representations. These points can be misleading, and so require careful clarification. The first links pornography with inappropriate or pathological sexuality, “forms of sexuality we disapprove of” and therefore do not want represented in real life.³² For some, pornography suggests a form of degraded sexual practice used for depraved titillation. According to this view, pornographic sexual practices are obscene and sadistic.³³ As obscene sexuality, pornography encapsulates the “dirty” qualities of sexual behaviour. As sadistic sexuality, pornography is violent and serves as morbid entertainment. The second point derives from the first and concerns the use of pornography in non-sexual contexts of atrocity to express disapproval over representational approaches. The charges levelled at pornographic sexual practice (obscenity and sadism) are thus

30 Cohen, *States of Denial*, p. 178.

31 See, for example, Sara Guyer, “Rwanda’s Bones,” *Boundary*, vol. 36, no. 2, 1996, pp. 155–75; Richard Sharpley and Philip R. Stone, eds, *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*, Channel View Publications, 2009.

32 Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation*, p. 2.

33 *The Pornography of Representation*, p. 2.

transferred to atrocity representations. In this sense, pornography understood as perverted sexual practice becomes a metaphor for dismissing what some critics see as degraded cultural and representational practices.

For example, in her feminist critique of pornography, *The Pornography of Representation*, Susanne Kappeler contends that critical engagement with pornography has focused on “porn” at the expense of “-graphy”.³⁴ For Kappeler, pornography is not so much about sexuality as it is about representation: “Pornography is not a special case of sexuality; it is a form of representation. Representation, therefore, not ‘real-life sex’, should be the wider context in which we analyze this special case of representation: pornography.”³⁵ As a structure of representation, according to Kappeler, pornography is a patriarchal representational form in which women are objectified for the male subject’s gaze.³⁶ This structure of representation, for the critic, is intrinsically violent because it subjectifies the male gaze and objectifies the woman’s body for the pleasures of this masculine gaze. Given this supposedly inherently hierarchical pornographic structure, Kappeler argues that pornography as representation or pornographic representation is an exercise of patriarchal power over women’s bodies. It is an act of annihilating women as subjects and perpetuating man’s dominion over the woman. This exercise of power, for Kappeler, need not be limited to a literal understanding of man–woman relations as it can be applied to other contexts of power relations.

To illustrate the implicit hierarchical nature of pornography’s objectification of human beings, Kappeler cites the 1983 murder of a black worker, Thomas Kasire, by his white employer, Andries van Rooyen, in Namibia. According to the story, van Rooyen suspected that Kasire belonged to a liberation movement, the South Western African People’s Organization (SWAPO). Based on this suspicion, van Rooyen detained and tortured Kasire for days before gruesomely killing him before friends he invited to witness the killing. As the torture and eventual murder were taking place, van Rooyen’s friends took photographs of the victim in different poses at van Rooyen’s request. Kappeler interprets

34 *The Pornography of Representation*, pp. 2–4.

35 *The Pornography of Representation*, p. 2.

36 Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin have made perhaps more vocal (in a legal context) aspects of the feminist view that Kappeler advances. This view conceives pornography as a form of gender-based violence against women. See, for example, MacKinnon and Dworkin, *In Harm’s Way: The Pornography Civil Rights Hearing*, Harvard UP, 1998; MacKinnon, *Only Words*, Harvard UP, 1996. For a contrary feminist view that challenges the notion of pornography as violence against women see, for example, Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, Princeton UP, 1995.

these pictures of gruesome murder, which were used subsequently as court evidence against van Rooyen, as reminiscent of “pornography, a woman in place of the black man, the white men in their respective positions—in the picture, behind the camera—unchanged”.³⁷ Kappeler describes these photographs as pornographic representation, in fact they serve to objectify the victim, annihilating him as subject and perpetually rendering him as a thing.

Although, like Kappeler, I approach pornography in this chapter as a form of representation, it is important to note some of the misleading claims in these debates about what pornography means and does. The notion that pornography is a form of pathological sexuality signifying cultural decadence is rather a puritanical attitude to representations of sexual practice: we cannot objectively determine in all cases what constitutes obscene and sadistic sex, and there is nothing inherently “dirty” and disapproving in representing sexual practices between consenting adults.

We should ask whether it is pornographic representation that objectifies its target or representation in general. In fact, every photograph or piece of writing has to be considered as a reifying form. How is pornographic objectification different and more abhorrent than other forms of objectification resulting from representation? Kappeler’s explanation of the Namibian murder photograph fails to show how the photographs objectify the victim in ways that a non-pornographic photograph in general will not do. If these photographs had been taken by someone attempting to use them as evidence against the killer, would they then be pornographic, as Kappeler suggests? In such a situation our attitude regarding the photographs might be different. We should also remember that the photographs of Kasire served as court evidence against his murderer, a fact that challenges the notion that such a photograph essentially devalues the victim. Accordingly, we can discuss pornography without reducing it to an inherently dehumanizing and devaluing form.

For critics dismissive of pornography, a major consequence of pornographic representations is that they numb their audience’s empathy and so prevent them from connecting with the suffering of people being depicted in this way.³⁸ According to this view, the

37 *The Pornography of Representation*, p. 6.

38 Note that this view of empathy is not generally accepted. For example, Dominick LaCapra, in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Johns Hopkins UP, 2014), rejects the notion of empathy that suggests self-projection into the other’s suffering. He regards true empathy as the ability to feel compassion for the other as other.

audience is viewed as losing sight of their moral sensibility and as taking immoral delight in the pain of others.³⁹ This criticism of pornography's capacity to degrade what it depicts is perhaps the underlying anxiety in the critique by Dawes and Härting of Courtemanche's novel described in the introductory section of this chapter. In this anxiety, pornography signifies "the problem of excessive affect in which the desire, identification, and agency intrinsic to empathic imagination turn into obliteration of the other, and historical memory becomes nothing but the reflection of a now spatially infinite, narcissistic [white, male] self".⁴⁰ I do not disagree entirely with this criticism of *Sunday*. However, it is important to note that "excessive affect" is not in itself immoral because, for example, grief felt or expressed over atrocity can also signify an instance of excessive affect. The problem, therefore, might not be so much one of pornography as it might be an expression of moral expectation.

By putting aside moral expectation in the context of a reading of Courtemanche's novel, I am inviting reflection upon broader questions of Western representations of African suffering and the use of pornography as a metaphor for criticizing and apprehending "our" relation with others' suffering. That is, I see *Sunday* as encouraging the pornographic in order to mock it and ridicule our dispositions toward certain others' suffering, while at the same time attempting to force us to see beyond pornographic pleasures and look upon suffering with more seriousness. My interest here is to call attention to the challenges of this representation of genocide in Courtemanche's novel not because pornography is self-evidently condemnable but because *Sunday*'s pornographic representation works to reinforce the racism present in the broader context of Western representations of African suffering.

Pornography in *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*

To begin the exploration of pornography in *Sunday* it is important to remember that the novel is largely about prostitution and the love story between a "prostitute" figure, in Gentille, and a client, in Bernard Valcourt. The central setting of the novel is not so much Rwanda as it is a "hotel" in Rwanda, a place of lodging for Western foreign expatriates

39 On this point, see Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Picador, 2003, pp. 41–42.

40 Dean, "Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering," p. 106.

and Rwandans alike, a place for prostitution and libertine impulses. The imagery of the hotel in *Sunday* echoes that in D. M. Thomas's novel, *The White Hotel*, another fictional work described by some critics, notably Kappeler, as a pornographic representation of the Holocaust. The white hotel in Thomas's novel is the setting where the central character Lisa Erdman's sexual fantasies of love and catastrophe play out. In Courtemanche's *Sunday*, the hotel is the dark setting of a white man's sexual fantasies of a love that ends disastrously.

Like *The White Hotel*, *Sunday* employs a documentary style. In the novel's preface Courtemanche remarks that *Sunday* is fiction, but "also a chronicle and eye-witness report". Hence it is as an authentic documentary account that the story is presented. Although narrated from a third-person perspective, the narrative viewpoint focuses on Valcourt.⁴¹ Like a journalist's camera chronicling framed episodes of Rwandan suffering, the narrative follows Valcourt's gaze, his critical perception of Rwandan reality, and his voyeuristic fantasies. This narrative viewpoint with its documentary vision makes *Sunday* read more like Valcourt's confessions of his pornographic fantasies of the Rwandan genocide. Yet, as a form of confessional, we can understand *Sunday* as both a satire of its own limitations in representing genocide and an elegy to a genocide occasioned largely by a failure of representation.

On the issue of pornography in *Sunday*, it is important to note further that violence in the novel is dramatized through sexual acts. Beginning with its characterization of Rwandan women, *Sunday* portrays virtually all its female characters (especially its Rwandan ones) in sexual terms. Be they prostitutes, market women, or wives, these women materialize in the story as objects of men's sexual gazes, gazes that concentrate on the sizes of their breasts and backsides. The major focus of this pornographic gaze in the novel is Gentille. The narrator describes her as the young woman "whose name is as lovely as her breasts, which are so pointed they abrade her starched shirt-dress, Gentille, whose face is more lovely still, and whose ass is more disturbing in its impudent adolescence than anything else about her."⁴² When Cyprien, one of fifty living with HIV who Valcourt is using for his documentary on the disease, tries to warn Valcourt to take

41 I use the character's surname, Valcourt, as the narrator uses it throughout the novel to refer to him.

42 Gil Courtemanche, *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, translated by Patricia Claxton, Vintage, 2004, pp. 5-6.

Gentile out of Rwanda because of the impending genocide, he points out to Gentile that she is a prime target of the killers because she has “a nose that’s as straight and sharp as a knife, skin the colour of café au lait, legs as long as a giraffe’s, breasts so pointed and firm they stick through your blouse, and buns, buns ... that drive me wild”.⁴³ Equally, for Valcourt, the smell of Gentile’s body is a “pornographic smell”, not like “titillating perfumes or powerful and exotic spices, but a dark smell of flesh, heavy hair and warm, moist sex”.⁴⁴ Like other men in the story—Rwandan and Western foreigner alike—Valcourt wants to “fuck” (or, rather, rape) Gentile.⁴⁵

The novel’s rhetorical practice that represents Gentile as an object of men’s sexual desire is a criticism of a decadent culture impelling genocide. This decadent culture is the result of a racist and pornographic mentality that instigates hatred, exploitation, and violence. *Sunday* portrays this decadent and immoral culture as a way to understand the process through which human subjects are transformed into objects for elimination. Gentile’s physical traits that attract sexual attention are illustrative, on the one hand, of the racialization of Tutsi women in Rwanda as objects of sexual desire; on the other hand, Gentile figures as an allegory of Rwanda’s condition, as she is both Hutu and Tutsi in one, as well as an object of local and international racism, of sexual fantasies and political opportunism. As Gentile’s father explains to Valcourt, Gentile will inevitably fall prey to the blinding self-hatred of her country’s division because she represents Rwanda’s traits in their totality, traits that each warring side would seek to eliminate in her: “Gentile is like the fruit of the red earth of this hill, a mysterious mix of all the seeds and all the toil of this country. Son, you’re going to marry a country they want to kill, one that could be simply Rwandan if it had the chance.”⁴⁶ The multiple rapes and instances of sexual exploitation that befall Gentile before and during the genocide are only possible because of the pornographic mentality that racializes her as sexual object of rape in the hands of Rwandan men. This pornographic mind-set also renders her as an object of sexual exploitation by Western men, leading to the apathetic response at the time of her violation.

The pornographic mind-set that *Sunday* depicts as underpinning the genocide manifests in the novel’s general characterization of Rwanda as

43 Courtemanche, *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 89.

44 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 35.

45 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 34.

46 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 199.

a place of sexual orgy. In Courtemanche's story, prostitution signifies the nature of the relationship between Rwanda and various Western countries acting as agents of development. *Sunday* takes rape and prostitution to be emblematic of the relationship between Western countries and Rwanda. Rwanda is the fateful harlot and the white Western male her pretentious, exploitative John. Images of carcasses and vultures pervade Courtemanche's depiction of Rwanda's relationship with the West. Rwandan prostitutes are "carcasses—some plump, some skeletal"⁴⁷ and Western expatriates are "vultures" that sometimes "turn into crocodiles".⁴⁸ These images of scavenging signify a situation of decadence. Importantly, the unequal union of African and Westerner based on scavenging, exploitation, and the abuse of power is one of the novel's main preoccupations and themes. This unequal union animates and organizes the romantic events driving the relationship between the novel's two central characters (Valcourt and Gentile) forward.

Sunday portrays the nature of this decadent culture and its dangerous pornographic mind-set through some dramatic episodes that will serve as representative excerpts for further discussing the novel's pornographic representation of the Rwandan genocide. In these episodes and throughout *Sunday*, the depiction of disease, violence, and their ravages conflates violence with sexual intercourse. Consider the strange death ritual of a Rwandan friend of Valcourt's—Méthode—who is terminally ill with AIDS. Méthode does not want to die piecemeal from AIDS, so he convinces a Canadian nurse, Élise, to euthanize him. He prefers this kind of painless death to a death by machete, which he prophesies is about to happen in Rwanda. For Méthode, the Tutsi are a condemned people, like the Jews of Europe. The fate of AIDS is preferable to the fate of the Tutsi:

A triumphant end for a life of thirty-two years, an end [Méthode] was no longer afraid of because he would rather die of AIDS than be hacked up by a machete or shredded by a grenade. "That's the fate waiting for all Tutsis. We have to leave or die before the Holocaust." Since the sickness had been keeping him in bed, Méthode had been reading everything he could find about the Jews. Tutsis and Jews—same fate. The world had known scientific Holocaust, cold, technological, a terrifying masterpiece of efficiency and organization. A monstrosity of Western

47 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 3.

48 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 14.

civilization. The original sin of Whites. Here, it would be the barbarian Holocaust, the cataclysm of the poor, the triumph of machete and club.⁴⁹

References to the Holocaust such as the one found in this quote are pervasive in *Sunday*. The Holocaust provides the legitimating force for apprehending the massacre of the Tutsi in Rwanda as a genocide, as if without such comparisons the reader cannot understand the killings as being a genocide.⁵⁰

However, beyond the Holocaust citations in *Sunday*, Méthode's preference for a painless death as against death by machete is given more significance when, as a result of Valcourt's prodding, Méthode agrees to have his final moments recorded on television as his own testimony against a life lived with AIDS. Méthode uses the opportunity of the camera to speak instead about the looming genocide, conflating the impending massacres with the disease that has ravaged his whole being. Valcourt documents these last moments of Méthode's death supposedly as part of his documentary calling attention to the ravages of AIDS in 1990s Rwanda. As with the genocide, the Rwandan government and other stakeholders have tried to suppress the grave reality of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the country.

Méthode's final moments are quite significant in the story not just for their conflation of AIDS with genocide but even more for the explicit narrative style, which assaults readers with raw details of an eroticized death ritual. The scene depicting Méthode's death helps to bring home the irony that *Sunday* consistently dramatizes, resulting from the way the novel uses the staging of dark pleasure to stress the gruesomely dark reality of Rwanda in 1994. The death ritual that Méthode demands from his friends and family as their final duty is also instructive. He has asked to be properly "fucked" by "a real woman".⁵¹ Mathilde, a prostitute, agrees to be Méthode's "real woman". She too is living with HIV. Like the death that is to come, mutual and illicit sharing of HIV and AIDS is rampant in Courtemanche's story. Everyone who matters to the dying man, including his mother, gathers

49 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 41.

50 Some critics have also called attention to this invocation of Holocaust memory in Courtemanche's novel as the author's way of making the Rwandan massacres globally legible as genocide. See, for example, Eaglestone, "You Would Not Add to My Suffering If You Knew What I Have Seen"; Härting, "Global Humanitarianism," p. 65.

51 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 45.

to witness this final ritual of the AIDS victim's last grasp at pleasure from a shrunken life. The result is a grotesque spectacle of sexual intercourse strangely supported and masterfully supervised by the dying man's mother.

At one point during the intercourse, when Mathilde struggles to rekindle life in the dying man's penis, Méthode's mother urges the prostitute on: "Give him a nice big one before he leaves for heaven, my girl."⁵² Once this sex ritual takes a life of its own, the gathered friends congregate around the bed to watch, Méthode's mother urging the prostitute working on her son's penis to "suck it, so a last drop of life can come out of him".⁵³ When the last drop of life fails to come out of "the living dead man", he exclaims,

"I have no penis left, I have no sperm left. Your tongue is like a serpent bewitching me, but my tongue is still alive, let me drink you." Without a word, Mathilde undressed, and supported by his mother and Raphaël, applied her crotch to Méthode's mouth. Exhausted, sated, satisfied, fulfilled, trembling, she collapsed on Méthode, who uttered a loud cry of pain.⁵⁴

Notice in this scene the voyeuristic gaze characterizing the novel's general depiction of Rwandan women's bodies as objects of male desire. Just as women's bodies are sexualized in terms of their breast and bum sizes, Méthode's diseased body—as with the bodies of other AIDS sufferers and equally the mutilated bodies of genocide victims in the story—becomes an object of voyeuristic spectating. In addition, the gathered audience of this scene is not viewing suffering per se but its sexualization in Méthode's intercourse with the prostitute. This scene pornographically represents Rwandan reality in *Sunday*. Just as with the overall narrative language of the novel, the narration of this scene employs explicit sexual language that Härting has described as "sexual blazoning", a rhetorical approach that "creates the effect of an unmediated and directly recordable reality".⁵⁵

The voyeurism in this narrative style is even more inscribed in the narrated event itself. The sexual act between Méthode and Mathilde has an audience in attendance. Since pornography, as Kappeler

52 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 54.

53 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 55.

54 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, pp. 54–55.

55 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 70.

reminds us, is a matter of representation organized around spectatorship, Méthode's death ritual presents an exemplar of a condition that *Sunday* portrays as lying behind the Rwandan genocide and its representation. This condition is one of a culture of voyeurism that initiates violence upon the sexualized body and exploits the sexualized and mutilated body for its own gratification. It is behind the activities of some Belgian doctors in Rwanda, who have to catalogue a vast list of their AIDS patients in order "to prepare the scientific papers that would open doors for them at the annual International AIDS Conference".⁵⁶ This voyeuristic practice lies behind the booming "tourism" of massacre sites in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide. It is also behind Valcourt's documentary on AIDS in Rwanda, for which Méthode is an interviewee. The conflation in this scene of bodily degeneracy caused by AIDS with sexual acts providing pleasure in the spectators gathered to watch allegorizes the Rwandan condition as impelled by a decadent, pornographic cultural mind-set.

The significance of this pornographic scene is less as a drama of orgasm for the living dead in Méthode and Mathilde. Rather, it is as a staging of an orgiastic ritual for the orgasmic entertainment of the witness-bystanders. Like Valcourt and others witnessing the surreal death ritual that would become Rwanda's fate, the reader also witnesses this act and art of voyeurism and oddity. *Sunday* refuses to completely objectify victims of AIDS such as Méthode. As Valcourt remarks about dead victims of genocide towards the end of the novel, even "dead people have the right to live"⁵⁷ as well as the right to speak and testify to their own suffering. At his funeral, Méthode talks to those gathered to mourn him through a television set placed over his coffin. The television screens a message by the dead man recorded just before his death. From the screen on top of his coffin, Méthode says, "My name is Méthode ... I'm Tutsi, you know that, but above all I'm Rwandan. I'm going to die in a few hours, I'm going to die of AIDS."⁵⁸ Méthode's speech takes the shape of testimonies of Rwandan survivors giving accounts of their ordeal, survivors whose lives after the genocide seem more like an afterlife. It is as one in the afterlife that Méthode testifies against AIDS and genocide, both of which he blames on the "accident" of history. This accident, for Méthode, is the ignorance propelling the AIDS epidemic and fuelling racism in

56 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 40.

57 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 251.

58 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 58.

Rwanda. It is also what condemns him to death for being more Tutsi than Hutu: "So here I am, a Hutu-Tutsi and victim of AIDS, possessor of all the sicknesses that are going to destroy us."⁵⁹

Yet Méthode does not die of "all of the sicknesses", nor does he die from AIDS as he states in his testimony. He dies from Canadian nurse Élise's poison, administered to help him die a painless death. His is what he describes to his mother as "a beautiful death".⁶⁰ A good or beautiful death is a death of pleasure, of eating, drinking, and fucking.⁶¹ In lamenting the reality of a death that takes children before their parents, Méthode's mother rejects her son's notion of a good death, noting that "[f]or a young man, there's no such thing as a beautiful death. Or a death that makes sense. All children's deaths are ugly and senseless."⁶² However, she acts as director in the absurd drama of her son's good death. What she does not acknowledge is that implicit in Méthode's good death drama is the decadence of pleasure. His quest for a life of pleasure brings him sickness and death. The paradox of pleasure is such that it is gratifying and destructive at the same time. Méthode's death ritual dramatizes this paradox most acutely. His sexual act with Mathilde becomes his re-enactment for his friends of the nature of his and their shared ruin.

This theme of "a good death", of the pleasure that kills, is what unites victims, perpetrators, and bystanders in the story. In their different ways, all are after a beautiful death. Killers kill and rape for pleasure and ruin themselves in the process. Western bystanders ruin themselves in pursuit of their sexual fantasies. Victims such as Méthode die from pleasure. This theme of "a good death" is one that perhaps continued to haunt Courtemanche even after the publication of *Sunday*. In his second novel, *A Good Death*, the plot revolves around an enactment similar to Méthode's death ritual. In this case, an old, once-tyrannical father is dying of Parkinson's disease. At first, the family tries to prevent him from eating the "good" things he wants because the doctors declare that those things will speed up his death. Eventually, the family comes around and decides to speed up the old patriarch's death by stuffing him with all the delicious food he is not supposed to eat. Death by pleasure ultimately results, not through food, but through another pleasurable indulgence in fishing.

59 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 59.

60 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 50.

61 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 50.

62 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 50.

By the end of the story the theme of human questing for happiness as both a homicidal and suicidal mission is prominent. This homicidal and suicidal trait in the quest for pleasure and happiness is even more pronounced in another representative pornographic episode in *Sunday*, Cyprien's death.

Like Méthode, Cyprien is dying of AIDS. Yet he still wants to "fuck" all the tomato vendors at the market.⁶³ He pities Valcourt for his solemn attitude towards Rwandans who, like him, are dying slowly from HIV. He sees no difference between his kind of death and deaths in Western countries. He thinks that Valcourt is the one who acts like a dying person: "You're the one who talks like a dying man, like every word you say is going to be your last."⁶⁴ Cyprien accuses the Canadian journalist of "trying to teach him how to live while waiting to die. He wanted to teach the White that you could live only if you knew you were going to die."⁶⁵ To live, according to Cyprien, is to live for the present and to maximize its every pleasure. Just like Méthode, Cyprien describes this pleasure as "accidents" when Valcourt and Élise accuse him of homicide for infecting his wife with HIV, conceiving HIV-infected children and infecting market women with his disease because he refuses to use condoms. "God won't punish me", remarks Cyprien in defence of his acts, "because my wife and I wanted some pleasure. You see, it was an accident."⁶⁶ As described in the novel, this pleasure fuelling the AIDS epidemic in Rwanda in the 1990s is a symptom of social anomie so widespread that "devout, virginal nuns [...] were gathering prostitutes and teaching them about the virtues of condoms" and parish priests hand out packs of condoms from their offices with "the photograph of the Pope watching protectively" in silent support.⁶⁷ The moral degeneracy in the country has reversed the Catholic Church's values and Valcourt thinks of these nuns and priests as "heroic, pious transgressors" on a mission to save not just the country's soul but also its body.

Cyprien's gruesome death scene is even more surreal, dramatic, and graphic than Méthode's. A Hutu condemned as a Tutsi accomplice, Cyprien returns to his house after escorting Valcourt and Gentille to the safety of the Hôtel des Mille-Collines only to find a gang of

63 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 79.

64 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 82.

65 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 86.

66 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 80.

67 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, pp. 18–19.

militiamen who invite him to help them rape his own wife: "Come party with us, Cyprien, come on. Move it, Hot-Nuts, your wife's back here, she's waiting for you and wants you."⁶⁸ The gang leader complains of having tried without success to give Georgina, Cyprien's wife, an orgasm: "We've tried everything but nothing works. Your wife has no pleasure."⁶⁹ After sarcastically describing the horrible ways in which the gang attempted without success to give Georgina "pleasure", the leader remarks to Cyprien, "Now, you know all the secrets of the Whites and Tutsis you hang out with, so you're going to show us, Cyprien, you're going to show us what a man's got to do to make your wife come."⁷⁰

Here, *Sunday* illustrates the nature of sexual assault characterizing the Rwandan genocide. The gang leader's scornful reference to Cyprien's sexual knowledge of "Whites and Tutsis" suggests, as Härting puts it, that "sexual violence against women is legitimized through the historical and present racialization of identity."⁷¹ This understanding of the sexual violence underpinning the genocide is not to be understood solely as a metaphor. Several non-fictional accounts⁷² of the genocide of 1994 attest that rape against women was a central feature of the orgy of violence against both Tutsi and Hutu victims. Many of the corpses displayed at massacre sites after the genocide testified to the mass rape and sadism that accompanied the genocide. Rape in *Sunday*, therefore, is not simply a matter of gender violence. It is central thematic preoccupation in the novel's representation of genocide and is portrayed in the novel as an act of power.

The killers' invitation to Cyprien to participate in the rape of his wife further complicates the meaning of rape in Courtemanche's novel. Finding his own fate and that of Georgina's already sealed for the worst, Cyprien obliges the killers' request and beckons to Georgina saying: "Wife, better to die of pleasure than torture",⁷³ a view that conflates the couple's impending death with that of Méthode's by intricately linking sexual pleasure with death. Ironically, Cyprien does not apprehend his own coerced rape of his wife as violation and torture. His inability to see rape for what it is—violation—links him largely to the killers. Cyprien in effect is asking his wife to find pleasure in her own rape

68 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 95.

69 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 96.

70 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 96.

71 Härting, "Global Humanitarianism," p. 68.

72 See, for example, Gourevitch's *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families*.

73 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 96.

by him, a rape coerced in order to entertain their killers. Just as in Méthode's "beautiful death" scenario, there is a live audience that views Cyprien's coerced rape of Georgina. The audience consists of Cyprien's friends, too, except that this time the audience of the sadomasochistic drama is comprised of the killers who also precipitate the slow unravelling of the predictable climax of the affair:

Slowly and most of all with a delicacy he did not recognize in himself, [Cyprien] removed her skirt, then her T-shirt in the colours of Rwanda. On his knees between her thighs, he looked at her at length while the militiamen howled their impatience. He lay down on her and began to kiss her [...] The little bearded fellow came up and slashed him savagely across the back with his machete. Cyprien felt his blood running down like a hot river between his buttocks and wetting his testicles. Never had he had such an erection. He sat up and, for the first time in his life, plunged his head between his wife's thighs and sucked, kissed, ate. He had almost no strength left. He penetrated her, and just as he was about to come, the policeman fired. His body gave what seemed like a hiccup and he fell on his back beside his wife. Sprayed with semen, the policeman began to bellow.⁷⁴

The policeman who is the leader of the gang kills Cyprien at his moment of orgasm, which further conflates sexual pleasure with death. Notice too that Georgina's response to Cyprien's performance remains muted in this scenario. She remains passive as her husband strips her of the remaining vestiges of her identification with a nation that has robbed her of humanity ("her skirt, then her T-shirt in the colours of Rwanda") and participates in her dishonouring. The only time we hear directly from her in this scene is immediately after Cyprien's murder, when she begs to be killed, saying: "Kill me now, please."⁷⁵

The circumstances of Cyprien and Georgina's death scene resonate alongside Ugwu's rape scene in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* as discussed in the preceding chapter. Although informed by completely different circumstances, we are presented in both works with a situation in which a man is forced to violate a woman that ordinarily he should be protecting. In Cyprien's case, the rape of his wife is both for the entertainment of his killers and for his own humiliation and

74 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, pp. 96–97.

75 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 97.

debasement. *Sunday* negates Cyprien's complicity in violence with the Hutu militiamen. Unlike in Ugwu's case, where he is cast as a co-violator, Cyprien's situation highlights a crudely different condition of his own victimhood. He is a patriarch participating in the dishonour of his own family. He publicly rapes his wife for the entertainment of his and his wife's killers. His actions may seem cowardly, but he is not the kind of man who tries to prove himself a hero to anyone, and so is unlike the kind of hubristic Igbo men found in Adichie's novel. Cyprien is a very pragmatic man. It is difficult to hastily judge his participation in Georgina's rape. The voyeuristic reader inclined to the story's pornographic gaze perhaps does not readily see Cyprien's actions as a rape because this reader recognizes the absurdity and horror of his situation. This reader's judgements are directed more at the killers (and perhaps also to such readers themselves), who play voyeurs to his death scene.

At the same time, Cyprien's character complicates any hasty moral judgement of the genocide or its perpetrators. Cyprien himself is Hutu accused of being a Tutsi accomplice. A notorious womanizer living with HIV, Cyprien participates in intentionally spreading the deadly disease among market women who are unaware of his health situation. He also infects Georgina with the virus. In this act of masculine sexual violence and inscription of death upon female bodies, Cyprien participates in "the intimacy of tyranny and lends it an aura of political normalcy at the expense of the violated female body".⁷⁶ Yet as a patriarch driven to criminality "by neglect, shame, and the national, personal, and international denial of the disease and of [his] human dignity as an African",⁷⁷ Cyprien wears the garb of a victim. He is both victim and victimizer.

Importantly, it is not just the sheer dark humour and the graphic detail of this rape and murder scene that assaults the reader following its slowly unravelling climax. This scene also banalizes absurdity and cruelty and reveals aspects of some of the deeper ironies of the genocide. Just as Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* depicts how killers blinded by their hatred for their victims contaminate their own lives through the performance of their murderous acts, so too this scene suggests that Rwandan genocide perpetrators dig their own graves in pursuit of the murderous pleasures of killing. Georgina, like Cyprien, is HIV-positive. By dehumanizing and raping her, the militiamen sow the seeds of their own slow deaths. *Sunday* suggests that this mutual contamination of killers and their victims is equally reflective of the nature of relations

76 Härting, "Global Humanitarianism," p. 68.

77 "Global Humanitarianism," p. 68.

between bystander-witnesses and victims' mutilated bodies. Georgina and Cyprien's death scenario reveals "the sexualized nature of the Rwandan genocide and indicts the West/reader as the voyeuristic onlooker"⁷⁸ at this pornographic violence. The voyeuristic gaze of the bystander also serves to taint their moral consciousness. Hence the genocide, as well as its witnessing or representation, is an exercise in mutual self-destruction. Just as killers ruin themselves by killing, voyeuristic spectating of a victim's suffering can ruin the spectator.

The notion of mutual contamination between the oppressor and oppressed, between spectators and the objects of the pornographic gaze, reinforces what Achille Mbembe has described as the "aesthetics of vulgarity".⁷⁹ Mbembe uses this phrase in *On the Postcolony* to describe the convivial relation of resistance and collaboration linking postcolonial African dictators and their subjects. This conviviality is possible because in the postcolony the oppressor and the oppressed "share the same living space" and are both "liable to be entangled with" each other's logics. The aesthetics of vulgarity suggest "the use made of the grotesque and the obscene" by both dictators and their subjects in a mutual robbing of one another's vitality that Mbembe calls "mutual 'zombification'".⁸⁰ *Sunday* invites a consideration of the Rwandan genocide in terms suggestive of mutual zombification.

The cruelty and indignity of Cyprien's and Georgina's deaths, their dismemberment, and the fact that their bodies feed hungry stray dogs together reveal Courtemanche's apprehension of the Rwandan genocide as essentially what happens to the body (as well as the impact of such bodily mutilations on the mind of victims and bystander-witnesses), namely its gruesome degradation and zombification. The writer's emphasis on the physicality of genocidal violence and the voyeurism that accompanies such physical mutilations may explain his preference for the pornographic as an aesthetic instrument for witnessing this degradation. In *Sunday*, the body is the primary target not only of genocidal violence but also of its representation. At once Courtemanche's deployment of the pornographic style may suggest the general degradation of the social body of Rwanda.

Most prominently in the novel, Courtemanche uses Gentile to show that it is the physical attributes of the Tutsi that constitute the major focus of their physical elimination. The Tutsi physique was one

78 Härting, "Global Humanitarianism," p. 68.

79 Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p. 104.

80 *On the Postcolony*, p. 104.

of the defining elements of the genocide, as it served as one of the major marks of difference between the Hutu and the Tutsi. This emphasis on the body as the site of genocide highlights two further elements in need of consideration in a discussion of Courtemanche's representation of the Rwandan genocide: genocide as the violence of language; and the violence of desire. The violence of language here signifies division or difference by symbolic means. It is language that ensures, as Slavoj Žižek explains, that neighbours who live on the same street "live in different worlds".⁸¹ To designate a human body as Tutsi is a violent act, one that simplifies that body and imposes upon it meanings external to it.

Violent language is associated with the violence of racism, as well as of representation. Hence, on this score, linguistic violence is the originary instigator of any genocide. On the one hand language can simplify a group in order to normalize violence on them; on the other it can instigate desire for the absolute. It is violent language that leads to violent desires to perpetuate ideas of oneself above and beyond the Other, as Hutu extremists have done, because, as Žižek explains, it is language "which pushes our desire beyond limits, transforming it into a 'desire that contains the infinite,' elevating it into an absolute striving that cannot ever be satisfied".⁸² This desire that contains the infinite is generally not an occasional striving. It is often tied to the conditions of our social life. Frequently it manifests as the desire for immortality, or for the infinite. In our general thinking, according to Žižek, this desire for the infinite stands in contrast to mortality, which is often construed as evil:

According to the traditional ideological commonplace, immortality is linked to the good and mortality to evil: what makes us good is the awareness of immortality ... , while the root of evil is the resignation to our mortality (we shall all die, so it doesn't really matter, just grab what you can, indulge your darkest whims ...).⁸³

Cyprien's preference for mortality, as with several other Rwandan characters in the novel, which he understands to be the most suitable way of philosophically approaching the demands of existence, expresses

81 Žižek, *Violence*, p. 66.

82 Žižek, *Violence*, p. 65.

83 *Violence*, p. 65.

itself in his insistence on the notion that the aspiration for immortality constitutes evil. Cyprien finds the Hutu killers' desires for immortality, their desire to perpetuate themselves infinitely and absolutely by eliminating the Other who must be condemned as mortal, in some ways as similar to Valcourt's general disposition towards ailing Rwandans. In Valcourt's eyes, these living corpses look like the physical embodiment of evil. He finds their brute mortality repulsive. To be distanced from them is to be permitted the room to construct a superior sense of oneself. For Cyprien, however, the acceptance of mortality tempers genocidal violence. Even so, Cyprien's attitude to mortality might also serve as his alibi for his own crimes of infection, and therefore as a shield against the stark reality of his own guilt.

However, even though *Sunday* makes a subtle case for the acceptance of shared mortality in response to extreme violence, particularly the violence instigated by language, its overall attitude to its employment of a pornographic mind-set to represent genocide seems priggish and appears to suggest that only in such instances of moral depravity can genocide result. More importantly, it makes this case while using a pornographic style that is saturated with racist stereotypes. *Sunday's* racism disables its critique of the confluence of political, cultural, and historical circumstances that impelled genocide in Rwanda.

Racism in *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*

Simply put, the problem with *Sunday* is not that it is pornographic but that it is racist. *Sunday* enlists racist stereotypes that show disregard and insensitivity to a long history of Western racism that generally characterized Africans in depraved terms. In the world of the novel, disease-ravaged Méthode demands as his death wish to have proper sex as a token for quitting life. Cyprien seeks "to fuck" all tomato vendors at the market with his "infected cock".⁸⁴ A multiply raped Gentille seeks sexual pleasure as compensation for her rape. What distinguishes Rwandan from Western characters in the novel is the former's innate proclivity for bodily pleasure and the latter's investment in reason and idealism. The relationship between beautiful Gentille and old Valcourt demonstrates this racialized union between the African body and the Western intellect, between sentiment and rationality, between emotion and reasoned thought. The failure of this union, as Härting

84 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 93.

notes, suggests that Africa's darkness and uncivilization impair anyone, usually Westerners, attempting to rescue her children. This racialization of the Rwandan body and the Western mind in a failed union is the reason I agree with Härting's conclusion about Courtemanche's novel that surely "its gratuitous and pornographic scenes of apocalyptic sexual frenzy clamor for moral affect and perpetuate normative representations of Africa as a site of intimacy and abjection rather than shock readers into political consciousness."⁸⁵

One of the most controversial aspects of *Sunday* is its depiction of Gentille, especially after her capture by a Rwandan military commander. Having been abducted and raped multiple times by the officer, and gang-raped by different men, including men set upon her by the commander's wife, Gentille's main desire is to find pleasure and feeling with her body. Most strangely, what seems to matter to her most is her body's loss of beauty and her lack of excitement during her brutal rape experiences. She notes in her diary that she has one regret related to these experiences of rape—their utter lack of pleasurable content: "I'd rather my rapist remind me of my husband and give me pleasure. I know it's ridiculous. This time [the commander] was in less of a hurry and pawed my breasts and my buttocks. Not a single memory came back."⁸⁶

During one of her gang rapes, what rankles Gentille is how her rapists refuse to acknowledge her beauty and fail to show desire: "They didn't even ask me to undress. They know I'm beautiful but they're not interested in that. They don't want to look, they want to get inside."⁸⁷ She goes on to describe her rapists' wilful attempt to humiliate her: "The first was enormous and completely drunk. He picked me up with one arm and laid me on the little table so my legs dangled and he could stay standing, without ever leaning on me. 'They're dirty, the Tutsis, they have to be washed.' And he stuck his beer bottle in my vagina."⁸⁸ In the wake of this encounter, it finally dawns on Gentille that what the killers are after is to render her—and the Tutsi that she represents in their imagination—ugly and without *jouissance*. In the wake of their sexual violence she becomes a remnant of what used to be a beautiful Tutsi body. She is transformed into a decomposing thing and loses her sexual vitality, signifying her complete abjection.

85 Härting, "Global Humanitarianism," p. 66.

86 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 243.

87 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 246.

88 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 246.

By the time the *genocidaires* are done rendering her body ugly, without breasts and lacking desire, there is nothing left of it for Bernard Valcourt to return to. Both her perception of herself and Valcourt's thinking of her suggest an imagination of Gentille in terms representing her as body. We see this perception of Gentille as body after Valcourt finally finds her and declares that "We're going to leave here."⁸⁹ She tells him,

Bernard, I'm not a woman any more. Don't you smell the sickness? Bernard, I don't have breasts any more. My skin's dry and tight like an old drum. I can only see with one eye. I probably have AIDS, Bernard. My mouth is full of sores that keep me from eating sometimes... Do you understand what they've done to me? I'm not human any more. I'm a body that's decomposing, an ugly thing I don't want you to see. If I left with you I'd be even sadder than I am now because I'd see in your eyes as you look away that what you really love is your memory of me.⁹⁰

So, to preserve Valcourt's memory of her beautiful body before it is ruined by the genocide, Gentille refuses to reunite with Valcourt. Valcourt challenges neither her description of herself as a decomposing body nor her refusal to follow him. He accepts this view of Gentille as rotten and leaves her.

The problematic depiction of Gentille's attitude to her experiences of rape and her inflexible assessment of herself in essentially physical terms made tragic by the disfigurement and degradation of her beautiful body exposes not just the masculinist vision propelling Courtemanche's story but also its racism. The novel's depiction of Rwanda as a mutilated, disfigured, decomposing body evokes a pervasively normative representation in the Western media following the genocide. The pornographic gaze organizing the specifics of Courtemanche's depiction of Rwanda signifies not just journalistic desire for the defiled naked body but also the necrophilic craving of this media for the Rwandan corpse. These pornographically rendered details of barbarity—made possible by the genocide, it must be added—provided opportunities for different international agencies as well as Western writers and journalists such as Courtemanche to realize "a vision of powerful, amplified self", to imagine and hypothesize adventure into the heart of African darkness,

89 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 256.

90 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 257.

like Marlow in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and "to gaze upon himself, to see how he has acquired new depth and meaning by encountering tragedy" and horror.⁹¹

Not even his self-criticisms of his place and role in the Rwandan hell can excuse Valcourt (and by extension the writer himself) from his tours through these scenes both as a witness and as a tour guide for other Westerners. In several instances in the story Valcourt is summoned to guide newly arrived European or North American men and women to sites of the horrors of Rwanda, introducing them to tableaux of death and diseases. Arthur and Joan Kleinman, quoting a British psychiatrist (Ian Palmer) in Rwanda in 1994, note that the atrocities in the country created "a voyeurism among Westerners [in Rwanda]—the relief agencies, the United Nations and the journalists".⁹² Like tourists, Western visitors and diplomats sightsee massacre sites to feast on the indignity and cruelty done to African bodies, a situation that highlights "the more ominous aspects of globalization, such as the commercialization of suffering, the commodification of experiences of atrocity and abuse, and the pornographic uses of degradation".⁹³ The suggestion here is also that Western journalistic, touristic, and artistic practices are turning the Rwandan genocide into marketable sleaze designed to gratify Western audiences. Although *Sunday* criticizes this practice, its representation of Rwanda as a place of sexual depravity and savagery overlaps with a normative practice of Western journalism and art that depicts Africa in such racist terms.

Racism in Courtemanche's novel serves as subtext to the novel's representation of the Rwandan genocide and recalls Chinua Achebe's criticism of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in so far as Western representations of the Rwandan genocide serve as pretexts for setting "Africa up as a foil to Europe, a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest",⁹⁴ depicting Africa as "a site of grim self-discovery for white men".⁹⁵ The same kinds of criticism that Achebe applies to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* easily apply to Courtemanche's *Sunday*. As

91 Dawes, *That the World May Know*, p. 34.

92 Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, "The Appeal of Experience; the Dismay of Images: Cultural Appropriations of Suffering in Our Times," *Daedalus*, vol. 125, no. 1, 1996, p. 23.

93 Kleinman and Kleinman, "The Appeal of Experience," p. 19.

94 Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa," *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1978, p. 2.

95 Dawes, *That the World May Know*, p. 35.

some critics have noted, *Sunday* seems like a modern version of *Heart of Darkness*. According to this reading, Valcourt is at once Kurtz and Marlow, bearing a legacy of darkness in him, seeking communion with the darkness of Africa, and playing participant-witness to the barbarity that takes place in this darkness.

The theatre of this kind of inordinate voyeurism and vulgarity is Africa, the literal and metaphorical place of banal barbarisms and where the West seeks orgiastic epiphanies confirming its own “kinship” with barbarity. The problem underlying this Western image of Africa, at least for Achebe, is that those like Kurtz and Bernard Valcourt who fail to heed the warnings inherent in their fantasies about Africa will be ruined by their close association with the continent.⁹⁶ These Western men and women are like the pregnant Marie-Ange Lamarre in *Sunday*. Marie-Ange is the wife of the new Canadian Consul to Rwanda. Not even the relatively minor incapacities associated with a near-term pregnancy can tame Marie-Ange’s sexual fantasies about Rwanda. Through Valcourt Marie-Ange meets Justin, the pool attendant at the Hôtel des Mille-Collines. Courtemanche portrays Justin as a vengeful African monster and HIV carrier who, like Mustafa Sa’eed in Sudanese novelist Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*, has vowed to “decolonize” white women with his huge penis: “Every time he fucked a White—and there were so many of them walking around with their uncertain bodies and their hidden lusts, their fascination with the barbarous, powerful negro—every time, he was getting even for being a ... mere lust object for the boss ladies ... for being Black”.⁹⁷

Marie-Ange’s sexual encounter with Justin leads to her premature delivery (or perhaps an abortion), and also leaves her infected with HIV. The representation of this encounter reinforces the racist stereotypes of Africa as a place of depravity, a place for Western realization of dark lust. Justin takes on the image of the African savage with a virile but destructive sexuality. In this, he presents a sexual foil to Valcourt. Where his sexual virility is the object of white women’s wanton desires, Valcourt’s mind is given as the dream of black women’s romantic desire.

To be sure, Courtemanche’s preference for a pornographic vision of the Rwandan genocide is most probably intended to condemn

96 On this point, see Sherene Razack, *Dark Threats and White Knights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping, and the New Imperialism*, University of Toronto Press, 2004. See also Ruth Mayer, *Artificial Africas: Colonial Images in the Times of Globalization*, University Press of New England, 2002.

97 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, pp. 129–30.

Valcourt's position as a privileged bystander, as well as the voyeurism that his privileged position allows, in order to highlight the ironies of his inappropriate fantasies and those of others like him.⁹⁸ In this sense, one may understand the novel to demonstrate an awareness of its Western pornographic gaze in order to expose, ridicule, and critique it. This way of looking at the pornographic elements of *Sunday* further suggests that the problem of pornographic representation is not exclusively with the author but essentially with a culture that demands such salacious imaginings of others' suffering. Understood in these terms, Courtemanche's novel is a critique of this spectatorial culture and an invitation to the reader to confront and look beyond his or her own "pornographic expectancy".⁹⁹

By the end of the story pornographic excess begins to give way to the plain and the simple. Valcourt learns in retrospect to remain in his world. He learns how best to be a bystander even when living in the world of others. He remains in Rwanda, but this time "with a Swedish woman his own age, a doctor who works for the Red Cross".¹⁰⁰ Although still in the business of journalism and so a user of words, Valcourt finds less fascination with wordiness and representation. His romantic partnership signifies his effort to offer more practical healing to the wounded Rwandan body, far different in kind from his previous attempts to chronicle it pornographically. These shifts and transformations in Valcourt's life gesture towards his newfound moral and political consciousness.

Nevertheless, and echoing Achebe's criticism of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the novel's criticism of Western voyeurism and hypocrisy participates in a broader racist discourse through its appropriation and endorsement of language that speaks about African suffering in racist terms, even when it is claiming to do so in order to denounce racism. There is a prevailing mythos underlying Courtemanche's characterization of Valcourt that has a long history in Western travel writing and representations of the colonized "African" world. We can loosely sketch this mythos thus: a "white" man (sometimes a woman) tired of life in the West seeks a new adventure in Africa; he finds himself fatally attracted to the decadence and degeneracy of the African world, a decadence that in some direct and remote ways is linked to him or to the colonial history propelling his generally undefined mission on the

98 Keren, "The Bystander's Tale," pp. 24–26.

99 Dean, "Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering," p. 102.

100 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 258.

continent. This white man scavenges through the debris of the African world in search of meaning in his own life. More like a *bildungsroman* of the aged and exhausted white man of late European modernism, the man's exposure to African suffering brings him an epiphany and illuminates his darkened mind—unless, like Conrad's Kurtz, it is already too late for him—and he is forced to confront the reality of the horrors of existence.

We find these foster children of Kurtz and Marlow in writings by both African and Western writers. For example, in several of J. M. Coetzee's novels, but prominently in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace*, we find this kind of character. The magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and David Lurie and his daughter Lucy in *Disgrace* emerge from within this mythos. Violent encounters with black Africa and its dark realities find them out, to echo Achebe's powerful criticism of *Heart of Darkness*. Likewise, in his surrealist novel that reimagines colonial relations, *Radiance of the King*, Camara Laye gives us Clarence. He too is seeking to commune with the African jungle. He is fatally drawn to this mysterious environment, and as with Kurtz the darkness finds and overcomes him. The same is true of Richard in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Valcourt in Courtemanche's *Sunday*.

In several instances, the communion with Africa sought by these characters inspires in them visceral, corporeal love, almost as if an idea of a sensualized African body might hold the answers to all the mysteries of their desires. Rape and illicit sex characterize this desire to commune with Africa.¹⁰¹ Richard seeks it in Kainene and is unable to completely grasp it. Valcourt seeks it in Gentille and is unable to fully have it, at least in a lasting sense. In these novelistic quests there is a kind of mutual conviviality between the foreign seeker and the feminized African body. In *Sunday*, what the African woman seeks to obtain from access to the Western foreigner's mind, the foreigner desires to obtain from her body. Whereas Gentille finds the magical words of old Valcourt soothing, Valcourt finds her body sexually alive. This kind of conviviality also characterizes the relation in *Sunday* between killers and their victims, one that is suggestive of what Mbembe describes as

101 It is perhaps noteworthy that a counter-mythos of black Africans desiring the white body is also not in short supply. Ranging from Frantz Fanon's discussion of the colonized peoples' desire for whiteness in *Black Skin, White Mask* (translated by Richard Philcox, Grove Press, 2008) and *The Wretched of the Earth* to recent fictions including Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, as I highlighted in the previous chapter using Richard, this subject, the nature of desires and uses of white bodies in the imagination of African colonial and postcolonial experiences, has attracted, strangely, very little scholarly attention.

“the mutual zombification” characteristically arising from violence in Africa’s colonial and postcolonial worlds.

This mutual zombification requires a context within which both the oppressor and the oppressed rob each other of “vitality”, leaving both “impotent”.¹⁰² *Sunday*’s pornographic representation of the Rwandan genocide dramatizes this experience of mutual zombification—the reciprocal devitalization of selves—and participates in the aesthetic practice of vulgarity characterizing violence representation in Africa’s postcolony. The staging of vulgarity in *Sunday*—one that is excessive, theatrical, grotesque, and obscene, and embodies a kind of baroque *jouissance*—signals a stylistics of “madness, pleasure, intoxication”,¹⁰³ a hedonically charged dramatization of routinized cruelty, not merely for the sustenance of brutal power but for entertainment. Without its theatrical elements—a crowd of onlookers, say—the glamour will be lost in these atrocious scenes.

Yet, precisely because the vulgarity repudiated in the novel’s representational choices is a product of colonization, *Sunday* inadvertently perpetuates the very underpinnings of the colonial. In colonial imaginaries Africa is the landscape of barbarism, the alter ego of the civilized world, a theatre of the grotesque and the obscene. The violence of colonial representations of Africa and its dark realities is what Mbembe calls the “*spirit of violence*”. Mbembe notes that this spirit makes violence in the colony “omnipresent” and normalized in ways suggestive of sexual practice: “[T]here is no violence in a colony without a sense of contiguity, without bodies close to one another, fleetingly or longer, bodies engaged in particular forms of fondling and concubinage—a commerce, a coupling.”¹⁰⁴ The violence of the pornographic dramatized in *Sunday* is also the violence of colonization, of the penis, since to colonize is to “accomplish a sort of sparky clean act of coitus, with the characteristic feature of making horror and pleasure coincide”.¹⁰⁵

This colonial mode of representing Africa as a world of impulsive sensations, dark and chaotic, or a world where such sensations, when fantasized, can be realized, characterizes Courtemanche’s narrative. His is, properly put, a racist, colonial gaze upon African suffering, one refusing to vitalize and ennoble the suffering of the damned and the dehumanized, instead turning it into a fetish object through the

102 Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p. 104.

103 *On the Postcolony*, p. 116.

104 *On the Postcolony*, p. 175.

105 *On the Postcolony*, p. 175.

meditation on which a fading Western man can attempt to regain some semblance of humanity.

There is an implicit contradiction and hypocrisy in the way Courtemanche renders Gentille's Rwanda as a site of catastrophe that is in fundamental ways different from the non-violent outside world that Valcourt represents. The inside–outside bifurcation perpetuates the very binary of Africa as a metaphor of violence to which the West understands itself to be the antithesis. Courtemanche's novel does little in its narrative trajectory to overturn this myth, and he does not acknowledge the fact that in the West there are nationalist and racist sentiments similar to those that resulted in genocide in Rwanda. Valcourt refuses to “rescue” Gentille from the darkness of Rwanda not because of his apprehension that no refuge exists outside the country. Rather, his decision to remain in Rwanda until it is too late is selfishly prompted by the “allure of the jungle” that is Valcourt's attraction to barbarism.

Unlike Richard in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Valcourt, at first, is trying not to find but to forget himself. Meeting Gentille significantly changes the trajectory of his quest and he begins to think about marriage. The youthful Gentille restores his sense of living sensuously. Valcourt is unable to take Gentille out of Rwanda and his inability to do so dramatizes remarkably the paradox of his situation, since the degeneracy he finds in Rwanda is what revives him. Removing Gentille from Rwanda, he knows too well, is the surest way to lose her. In Rwanda Valcourt matters as a white man, a foreigner, a writer of horrible things. Like the scavenging vulture, he lives on the decomposing world of Africa's postcolony.

Yet Courtemanche refuses to grant Valcourt the redemption he seeks through his Rwandan experience. He cannot ultimately be restored by Gentille's young body. Whether this lack of restoration expresses the West's failure to salvage its own modernity and claims to civilization from the African hell is unclear from the novel. What is clear is that Bernard Valcourt, a man now “at peace with himself”,¹⁰⁶ in the end accepts his place in the cycle of violence that he believes to be in the process of reconstituting itself. This time, however, it is the Tutsi who are in charge and he, Valcourt, has to play his part once again from the sidelines as an outsider–insider.

Courtemanche's narrative further highlights some of the issues regarding the challenges of his representational strategy in *Sunday*.

106 *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, p. 258.

Although the novelist claims in his preface that the events in his novel, though fiction, are “a chronicle and eyewitness report”, his choice of a fictional mode with a largely conventional narrative form does little to advance an alternative conception of genocide (in Rwanda or elsewhere). *Sunday's* narrative form emphasizes causality, a harmony of actions centred on individual motivations as well as predicated on maintaining certain accepted modes of social organization such as the family. Both Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* and Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* adopt this narrative mode as well. Both novels attempt to reassert familial forms of social relations in significant part as expressions of resistance to genocide. In *Season of Anomy*, Ofeyi combats the disintegration of familial relations. He has to ward off the lure of infidelity to the point of transforming a mistress into an ally so as to rescue Iriyise. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Odenigbo and Olanna's family survives genocide and war with a relatively new awareness of itself. This awareness is grounded in a rejection of any masculinist hierarchy that anoints the man as the family's head and acceptance of a view of women as equal partners in the domestic union.

In Courtemanche's *Sunday*, genocide disrupts the budding transnational, inter-racial family of Valcourt and Gentille. In its atrocious aftermath, however, this familial experiment does not survive, even though its founding love does. Unlike Soyinka's and Adichie's novels, which emphasize survival and familial continuity, Courtemanche's text emphasizes the facts of genocidal destruction and tells the story of a different kind of continuity and survival—not of the family but of what it is in the family that has died. Yet in another sense *Sunday* is not too different from Soyinka's and Adichie's novels. Love in its very heroic ideal survives between Gentille and Valcourt, both of whom make sacrifices of physical distance and bodily denial in order to grant the other psychological ease.

In his defence of the thematic foci and stylistic choices found in Courtemanche's *Sunday* and some other “African trauma literature” in their representation of African suffering, Robert Eaglestone argues that texts such as Courtemanche's are “forms of engaged literature that seek to influence, explain, and educate”.¹⁰⁷ This kind of literature makes genocide communicable by narrativizing it and by insisting that difficulties and complexities accompanying the atrocities of genocide can be grasped and thought through. Part of the pain of the Rwanda genocide

107 Eaglestone, “You Would Not Add to My Suffering If You Knew What I Have Seen,” p. 84.

was that wilful Western colonial ignorance failed to apprehend the situation for what it was, misrepresenting genocide as little more than an instance of the recurrent savagery of Africans innately predisposed to murder one another. It is for this reason, according to Eaglestone, that a novel such as *Sunday* relies heavily and positively on cultural and representational apparatuses available for describing traumatic encounters, especially for Western audiences.

What Eaglestone does not fully acknowledge is that these representational apparatuses used in depicting African suffering for Western consumption in *Sunday* iterate the same racist attitude that wilfully mischaracterized the genocide in order to ignore it. Although *Sunday* attempts to reproach this racist attitude, in its narrative style, choices, and story the novel fails to do justice to this reproach, as it instead reinforces and feeds the racism of its Western consumers.

Epilogue

By working in this book to expose and understand the tendencies, debts, and collisions in which the postcolonial African genocide novel is implicated, I have attempted to proffer primary (that is, textual–interpretive) and secondary (that is, broadly conceptual) critiques that continue to be much needed in both literary and genocide studies circles. Among other things, this book has tried to show how and why the postcolonial African genocide novel has become a significant means not just of witnessing genocidal atrocities but also of providing a path to representation in the wake of atrocious experiences. While the arguments of this book have enabled me to rethink some emergent literary traditions in Africa, my larger hope is that the book will provoke further conversations on what genocide in Africa means for our understanding of literary representations of mass atrocity.

I also wanted to show that the postcolonial African genocide genre owes some debts to the tropes and vocabulary supplied by those writing fictionally and non-fictionally about the Holocaust. These tropes manifest overtly in the dominant features and tendencies exhibited by the African genocide novel, including the idea of genocide as a descent into hell, the portrayal of victims as objects of ritual sacrifice, and writing about genocide as duty to a moral imperative. By invoking cultural memories of the Holocaust in the context of African genocide narratives, these works invite further reflection on the mechanisms whereby the history of Nazi Germany's genocide of European Jews becomes used as a platform for imagining postcolonial genocides in Africa. A major consequence of the African genocide novel's formal and thematic reliance on the Holocaust is that works in the genre tend to overlook or otherwise downplay some particularities of local political and cultural contexts and events. The point is not that the dependence on Holocaust

tropes by those attempting to represent African mass atrocities as genocide is utterly mistaken. Instead, at least in the contexts of Nigerian and Rwandan genocide literatures, it is to appreciate the ways that these tropes encourage artistic responses offering powerful moral visions of reform in a genocide's aftermath—yet visions that raise significant challenges for thinking about political redress and the political preconditions of genocide in their specific contexts of origination. All of the tropological features of the African genocide novel outlined in the book nurture a tendency in the genre to galvanize visions of redress centred on varying notions of individual moral reform. This tendency, in my view, shrinks the imaginative horizon responsible for sustaining ideas about how to respond to genocide in terms consistent with real political redress and justice in Africa's postcolonies.

In Wole Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*, genocide presents as an allegory of an anomic and horrific condition requiring a demonstration of superhuman will in order to be confronted. In the novel, Ofeyi's successful show of will in confronting and transcending the horrors of mass atrocity signals the individual's victory over the anomic conditions of genocide. The political preconditions for genocide in the postcolony—in particular, the violent nation-state system inherited as a legacy of European colonial political arrangements, a culture of racism and xenophobia, and the economic injustice endemic in postcolonial African states—barely exist to help focus ideas about reform in Soyinka's and the others' novels. While Soyinka's novel exposes the failures and contradictions of this colonial state, it does not challenge the legitimacy of its political structure as a viable basis for reform. In Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi, the Book of Bones*, these structural enablers of mass violence and genocide lie at the margins of the novel's reformist vision of decolonization. Instead, Diop in *Murambi* remains more concerned with a moralizing genocide narrative centering on individual (and therefore private) introspection as the basis for redress and reform in the aftermath of atrocity. Gil Courtemanche's *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali* similarly stages genocide as the site of Bernard Valcourt's quest for the meanings in his own life. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which deconstructs the masculinist tropes underpinning African genocide novels (especially those written by men), likewise succumbs to genocide's moralizing pull, notwithstanding that the novel demonstrates clearly the political preconditions of violence and the unviability both of the Nigerian and Biafran polities. Yet, in Adichie's novel, individual soul-searching, as we see with the character of Ugwu, signals her vision of justice.

These artistic visions embody commitments to moral agendas that, while serving to highlight certain micro-dynamics of genocide (by stressing individual experiences and nuances), tend to depoliticize and dehistoricize African genocides, turning their representation into allegories conducive mainly to individuals' own personal ethical reform. One question that must be asked of the genocide novel is whether (and, if so, why) African genocides resulting from essentially political crises in some way overdetermine the likelihood of moral responses to them. Moral visions of redress privileged in African genocide novels tend to encourage a view of genocide as resulting from a breakdown of individual and social moral structures, hence the genre's tendency to displace politics as the main locus of redress in a genocide's aftermath.

Ultimately, my reading of the postcolonial African genocide novel in this book was designed to achieve two broad goals: to map the various meanings (and approaches to representation) that these novels construct in the attempt to make sense of genocidal violence in Africa's postcolonies; and to highlight some underlying challenges in the artistic attempts to construct enduring and usable meanings following exterminatory forms of violence in Africa. In making these points, I submit that both in the Nigerian and Rwandan contexts one can glean from the works of writers of different ideological persuasions some of the major characteristics and tropes of African genocide narratives: the concept of genocide as ritual sacrifice performed in a fiendish, often metaphysical space and requiring, thereafter, an obligatory memorialization in narrative that naturalizes carnal injury and pain. Because these narratives represent the sites in which one encounters the casualties of genocidal violence as hell-on-earth and the journey there as a descent into hell, I have contended in this book that the African genocide novel is a descent narrative. In such narratives, the protagonist plunges into a spatialized infernal world that looks like an afterlife. After a tour of the infernal underworld, he or she emerges to compose a narrative that bears witness to the unspeakable carnage and destruction he or she saw there and, thus, makes sense of. Thus understood, postcolonial African genocide novels have been intervening in the discourse of African violence as a legacy of cautionary tales in which the damned bequeaths to posterity the hermeneutic "truths" about its genocidal past.

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