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## The Rwandan genocide in writing and visuality: memory, violence representations and the Anthropocene.

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The Rwandan genocide in writing and visuality: memory, violence representations and the  
Anthropocene.

By

Theophilus Okunlola

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The Rwandan genocide in writing and visibility: memory, violence representations and the  
Anthropocene.

By

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Three main challenges often confront societies that have experienced mass atrocities and genocide: understanding genocide, narrating and representing genocide, and reconciling after genocide. While these challenges seem different, they are intertwined and often inseparable. This thesis takes on these questions in various degrees by focusing on the subjects of memory, representations of violence and the Anthropocene. By reading two novels and one graphic novel, I argue that a multi-representational and multi-perspectival analysis of the Rwandan genocide gives a perspective through one can think through the questions of narrative silence and erasures, gender and sexual violence, animality and the boundaries between victims and killers. Altogether, the texts represent a genocide testimony that aligns and at the same counters the official narrative of the Rwandan genocide circulated by the Rwandan government.

## DEDICATION

To the memory of Professor Tejumola Olaniyan

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In genocide studies, the question of how to represent violence remains a puzzling affair because, it is argued, the representation of violence can become complicit with the perpetration of same. Within the context of postcolonial and postgenocide societies in Africa where violence is tied to the ethics of reconciliation, justice and national belonging, representations of violence in cultural productions often become important socio-historical narratives that not only remain in the national repertoire, but sometimes also become a site of power that forever shapes social relations. Put differently, representations and redress of genocide takes on either the dimension of national inclusion or exclusion at the level of individual and collective memory. Against this background, this research seeks to investigate the intersections and divergences of representations of the violence of the Rwandan genocide and what they suggest about the question of guilt, actors and silences and erasures in genocide and postgenocide Rwanda. By focusing on selected novels and a graphic novel that portray the grueling events of the genocide, I argue that, first, a multi-representational analysis of violence presents a written and visual evidence through which one can think through the intersections of memory, historicization, temporality and silences in genocide and postgenocide Rwanda. Second, I argue for a broader consideration and more complicated idea of genocide actors beyond just male dominated subjects but those of females and animals also, especially because a male dominated perspective only presents a partial narrative and silences other ones. Using these arguments, I confront the simplistic polarization of genocide actors as either victims or killers. This research never

suggests that victims and killers are precisely equal in suffering and participation; it never attempts to justify the erroneous notion of a double-genocide. However, it shows how these boundaries can become blurred in different instances and the implication of this to memorialization and historicization of the genocide.

Therefore, generally, this thesis seeks to identify how the national administration—through memorials and commemorations—have erased some fundamental history of the violence and enforced silence and amnesia. In doing this, this work seeks a redress and tries to identify the gaps left by the attempt to create silences in order to provide a more holistic narrative of the genocide that resists amnesia. The respective chapters of this research work together to show how writing and visuality bear the burden of memory, but also respond and resist official narratives of the genocide. Therefore, in a sense, I evaluate the selected texts in this work as counternarratives to the national and official narratives of the genocide. I show how the three writers align but also depart from the official views of Rwandan genocide. Some of these texts do this by providing concurrent discourses where fiction and historical facts are used to re-historicize and present a more holistic narrative of Rwanda's history during and beyond (prior and after) the genocide.

In the first chapter, where I analyze Boubacar Diop's *Murambi: Book of Bones*, I interrogate the limits of the boundaries between victims and killers. The chapter identifies how an emphasis on these two categorizations causes erasures to narratives that may implicate the RPF 'saviors'. Furthermore, the chapter identifies how the questions of animality unsettles these boundaries of victims and killers. Similarly, the second chapter interrogates these boundaries also, but develops the metaphor of the palimpsest to analyze visible and invisible violence in relation to victims/survivors and killers/perpetrator narratives. It studies this in Gilbert Gatore's

novel, *The Past Ahead*. In studying the palimpsest as a metaphor for the visible and invisible, it extends the concept to the narrative of the genocide circulated by the official government in Rwanda. In the third chapter of this thesis, I return to the question of animality along with a focus on gender and sexual violence prior and during the Rwandan genocide in Jean-Philip Stassen's graphic novel, *Deo gratias*. In focusing on these two subjects, the chapter demonstrates how women negotiate their agency through a precarious society, but also how they are rendered abject through rape. Furthermore, it analyzes colonialist's sexualized gaze and animal discourse of Rwanda and the way it pre-empts the continuity of sexual violence in the country. Accordingly, it states that sexual violence and animal discourse are entrenched in every other form of history of violence in Rwanda.

This research covers authors from the three different groups who have often written about the genocide: Rwandans writing about their country (Gatore), other Africans (Diop), and the Westerners (Stassen). Of the three authors, Stassen's work—incidentally a westerner—most prominently elucidates the excesses and complicity of the Europeans, France and Belgium, in the history of violence in Rwanda. The effectiveness of his work can be attributed to the graphic novel genre which effectively visualizes history and the processes of memory and remembering. However, the other novels are also very adept in how they represent the anxieties and realities of violence in Rwanda. They do this by telling not just a story of mass atrocity, but by showing the nuances involved in truly coming to terms with the horror they are representing.

## CHAPTER II

### “THE RESURRECTION OF THE LIVING”: VIOLENCE, RESISTANCE AND MEMORIALIZATION IN *MURAMBI: THE BOOK OF BONES*

Arguably the most horrifying single site that captures the enormity of the devastation of the Rwandan genocide, the Murambi technical school where about 50,000 people were killed is the setting of Boubacar Diop's *Murambi: The Book of Bones*. Diop joined a group of writers who visited Rwanda in 1998 under the theme, *Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire*, 'Rwanda: Writing as a Duty to Memory', in an attempt to create narratives which in themselves will serve as memorial accounts to the genocide. The pilgrimage to the various genocide memorials in Rwanda yielded results. Diop's novel has been a notable contribution to the narratives of the Rwandan genocide, and to writings on mass atrocity in African literature and beyond. The novel was named among "Africa's 100 Best Books" (Hitchcott 49). In this chapter, I attempt to situate *Murambi* as a resistant narrative in the way it presents the narrative of the genocide in Rwanda as well as those involved. I assert that the novel challenges any notions of fixity of memory both in terms of temporality and the all-too-easy reduction of those involved as either victims or killers. My argument about temporality follows the observation that in various literary representations and the official memorials of the genocide; the emphasis on endeavor is always intricately tied to the start of the genocide with the little or no reference to the history of violence in Rwanda that led to the genocide. The basis of remembering the actants and sufferers of the genocide are often framed into binary categories of victims and killers or the guilty and the

innocent. This strict categorization omits the perspective of implicated subjects who may be both guilty killers and innocent victims. Furthermore, I argue that the basis of this binary categorization is anthropocentric and precludes nonhuman agents. Therefore, this work attempts to challenge the simplistic polarization of victims and killers, by presenting an entangled relationship that exists between both human and nonhuman victims and killers. What I am getting at is this: *Murambi*, though written from an official memorial which exists and is circulated, resists the limitations set by that memorial in order to re-present the memory of the genocide, and consequently gives almost a distinct genocide memorial. To achieve this, therefore, in what follows, I argue that the making of the novel as a genocide memorial may be seen from three perspectives. First, although the novel focuses majorly on the events of 1994 and after, it also makes recourse to the complex history of violence in Rwanda prior to the ultimate devastation of the genocide, thereby emphasizing that violence in Rwanda is not only an event reduced to a particular historical moment but a process of before, during, and a possibility of after the genocide. Second, I demonstrate how the novel carefully resists creating an absolute distinction between victims/survivors and killers/perpetrators. And finally, I argue for the perspective of the Anthropocene in telling the narrative of both victims and killers in order to show how the genocide, which almost led to the near extermination of an ethnic group, equally does so to animals. Therefore, what one finds in *Murambi* is a historical specificity through which the novel not only blurs temporal boundaries between the past and present, but the boundaries between the human and nonhuman, and therefore disrupts the categorizations of victims and perpetrators. Diop depicts the complex processes of how violence can implicate anyone, beyond the human and nonhuman perpetrator to including the victims themselves, whether human or nonhuman animals.

## Remembering before, during and beyond the Genocide

The challenge of studying or writing about an enormous atrocity like the Rwandan genocide is that one is likely to concentrate on just the specific event in history while giving less premium to other processes and incidents of violence that have in different ways, to use Gilles Deleuze's term, "precipitated" the ultimate event in question (qtd. in Spain 176). Indeed, studying or writing about the Rwandan genocide while concentrating on one historical moment alone is quite reductionist and fails to articulate as well as seek to underscore the complex historical patterns of violence in the country. Nicki Hitchcott makes this point when she identifies that most of the fiction written about Rwanda focused on the events in 1994, and very few of these writings have thematized the violence of the civil war beginning in 1990 and ending with the outbreak of the genocide (155). The history of violence in the nation can be traced back to 1959 to the early 1960s, a period which witnessed the massacre of the Tutsis. In other words, violence, to an extent, was a part of a longer national narrative of Rwanda. While one necessarily recognizes that creative and fictional representations of violence are not journalistic or historical accounts which attempt a diachronic survey of violence, understanding and writing from the position of the complex history of violence in Rwanda has a significant effect on the representation of the genocide, not in the least in how the memory of the victims and killers are framed.

The framing of memory receives even more urgency for any writer who wishes to ethically articulate violence, knowing full well that the shaping of memory in post-war societies is often heavily influenced by the victorious party. In the case of Rwanda, the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) ultimately won political control of the country in 1994. Six years after the end of the genocide, the Commander-in-chief of the RPF, Paul Kagame became the president of

Rwanda, consolidating the hold of the RPF on the national government. Consequently, commemorative activities presume to take the moral high ground by honoring the ‘victims’ of genocide without acknowledging that such categories are not fixed or uncontested. This is what Chigbo Anyaduba states when he writes that the “basis of 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 nearly entirely on the deaths of targeted civilian populations and ignore the suffering experienced on the battle field” by all involved (437). Part of the implications of this memory constructed as the “official” national narrative of the genocide is that it obliterates the involvement and complicity of the RPF in the complex historical narrative of violence in the country, further enhancing the rhetoric that polarizes victims and killers. This contributes to the continued stratification of the country along politicized ethnic lines. Consequently, an indication that the Rwandan government favors only an aspect of the genocide’s narrative means that official memorials of the genocide are most likely subjective; this makes fictional representations such as *Murambi*, produced from visiting such memorial sites also highly suspect of “7ndeavor” accounts of collective memory and its frames of the genocide. Hence, what forms the burden of remembering and memorialization in Diop’s novel hinges on what is remembered and memorialized, and how it is done but from multiple perspectives. Put differently, Diop’s narrations ask, how does a novel written as a result of a visit to an official genocide memorial resist the homogenous, 7ndeavor7 unified official narratives in order to project a more polyvocal, complex account of violence in the country? And how can this account equally serve as a counternarrative to the official narratives of the genocide and more fully represent the agency of those experiencing the violence?

*Murambi* provides provisional answers to these questions in the way it tacitly references incidences of violence in Rwanda before the genocide, and even, obliquely, anticipating a possibility of further violence after the genocide. The novel sets up the enduring history of violence in Rwanda through the character of Cornelius, the main protagonist in the novel. Cornelius embodies the history of violence in Rwanda both experientially and intellectually: experientially because his exile to Burundi as a child, and then to Djibouti, resulted from the outbreak of the killings in 1973. Intellectually, Cornelius embodies the history of Rwandan violence, while deflecting attention to it. For example, in his job as a history teacher in Djibouti, he tries not to talk about Rwanda to his students because, “The word Rwanda evokes only blood and endless killings for everyone” (*Murambi* 141). The killings in 1973 were the culmination of the repressive regime of President Gregoire Kayibanda, whose administration adhered to a strict ethnic quota policy that restricted the involvement and presence of the Tutsi in government, education, civil service and almost all areas of the state. Towards the end of his administration, “Vigilante committees were endeavor8, and between October 1972 and February 1973, they endeavor8sm the schools, the University, the civil service and even private business to make sure that the ethnic quota policy was being respected” (Prunier 60). This crackdown subsequently led to violence and aggression against the Tutsi, and, according to Gerard Prunier, “Although few were killed (officially only six, but probably two dozen or more), the economic and psychological effects of this hate campaign were sufficient to trigger another massive wave of Tutsi emigration” (61). Clearly, Cornelius was part of these emigrants, and despite having been gone for twenty-five years, he carries the memories of the past with him both consciously and unconsciously while simultaneously living a reality of the violence before, during and after the genocide. Cornelius then becomes an embodiment of the processes and temporalities of violence:

. . . he couldn't forget the days of terror in his younger years when killers constantly lurked around him . . . . In disparate fragments, scenes of the past and present crossed each other in his mind. He sensed how difficult it was going to be for him to put some order into his life and he didn't like the idea. 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. (43-44)

In addition to embodying the process of violence experientially, Cornelius does same intellectually as he makes continuous attempts to understand the violence. Any attempt at understanding the genocide must consider the question Colonel Etienne Perrin asks Dr. Joseph Karekezi—Cornelius' father: "Was it really more important to kill all those unarmed people than to fight the RPF?" (123) This poignant question, even though obliquely, captures the history of violence that was consistently prevalent in Rwanda prior to the genocide and the complicity of the RPF in the nation's narrative of violence. But even more importantly, the question distinguishes levels of violence by intimating that the limits of civil war violence, not in any way less despicable, cannot be comparable to the extermination of civilian lives privileged in the genocide. The civil war violence was particularly marked by reciprocal attacks between the RPF and the Rwandan army and as long as this remained so, the civil war violence remained a lesser evil. However, what ushered in the greater evil and another level of violence were the killings of unarmed Tutsi population in unprecedented numbers. In all of this, what remains clear is the tacit involvement of the RPF. Commenting on this involvement in relation to the orchestration of the civil war in 1990, Rene Lemarchand observes that "without the RPF invasion, there would have been no genocide" (qtd. in Hitchcott 154) to indicate the civil war as a significant causality to the

genocide. Expanding on the link between the civil war and the genocide even further, Mahmood Mamdani explains that the invasion of the RPF led to a massive displacement of Hutu population whose number amounts to not less than 15 percent of Rwanda's total population (204). These displaced population would later have significant roles to play in the genocide as many of them joined the *Interahamwe*, the armed militia group that carried out most of the killings during the genocide. Notwithstanding this inherent link between the civil war and genocide as well as the involvement of the RPF, the rate of the genocide's massacre makes the question remain unanswered.

In many ways, Cornelius finds his efforts at understanding the genocide stifled. Even though "He had read a lot about it [Rwanda] during the last few years" (42), his industry has yielded no clear results. Despite all of his readings "He had impression that everything led him back to the killings of 1994. . . . It was as if the genocide irradiated everything with its gloomy light. . . (42). One argument that can be used to justify Cornelius' lack of understanding is that he did not witness the massacres as he only watched from the safe distance of Djibouti, but this view is also quickly dispelled in the novel as those present during the genocide find it equally if not more difficult to understand. The conversation between Stanley, a witness and survivor of the genocide, and Cornelius unravels the apprehension in the attempt at understanding the genocide:

I talked about our country to lots of people, in little rooms, Bobo-Dioulasso, in Stockholm, or Denver. Nice people too, they wanted to help but first they wanted to understand. Were you able to explain it to them? Sometimes it's enough to drive you mad. . . . I tried, and they would say, 'Is it really just as simple as that?' That was the classic question. And when I answered 'Yes,' they would fire: 'Then why so much

cruelty?’ ‘I don’t know,’ and they would find my explanation suspect. I didn’t want to lie to them. But even I still don’t understand all that bloodshed, Cornelius (46-47).

What can be proffered as a way to understand the violence of the genocide altogether is in not to simplify it to just a single event, but a process, a narrative that resists fixation within the specific temporality of the 100 days in 1994 when the massacre took place. The suggestion to think beyond the genocide does not downplay the magnitude of it; rather, it is to further elaborate how an atrocity of such magnitude can take place in such a small nation. Writing toward this direction, Hitchcott resists a single and homogenized version of the genocide popularized by the RPF government (159). In line with Jennie Burnet, Hitchcott privileges the multi-experiential perspective. Diop achieves this goal in the novel through the use of narrative polyvocality in order to give voices to different characters, both killers and victims, in the novel and the way he weaves the narrative of the genocide along with the history of violence in Rwanda, therefore, hinting that the former is a procedural consequence of the several events that have gone before it.

One of the most significant voices encountered in the novel is Siméon Habineza who is a witness and chronicler of the multiple historical events of violence in Rwanda and the one who better understands the nature of violence in the nation generally. Habineza, Cornelius’ uncle, was the one who led Cornelius, Jessica and Stanley out of Rwanda during the killings of 1973, and of all the characters who are entangled in violence in the novel, he remains the only one who neither occupies the position of killer and perpetrator nor a hunted victim. Being a Hutu, he is spared from the aggression of the killers; however, he also does not support the atrocity at any level. Occupying a position of distance, he becomes an erudite commentator on the history of violence in Rwanda, especially the one who shows how violence does not preclude anyone. Even

more, the distance he has from either of the tags also makes him occupy a temporal distance in his understanding and articulation of violence, and therefore, his commentary often poignantly resists not only a fixity with the polarity of victim and killers, but also with violence as an event. As a result of this, Habineza is the only one who comments extensively about the historical past and its relationship to the present, and makes a somber prediction about the possibility of another spate of killings in the future if care is not taken. Habineza uses the sad and almost hopeless state of orphaned children from the killings to make a point about the past, the present and future:

When I was young, that's how things started. After destroying this house, you'll go back home. On the way some of you will say: a Hutu lives here, let's take his things and kill his children out of revenge. But afterwards, you won't be able to stop for many years. I want to tell you this: you have suffered but that doesn't make you any better than those who made you suffer. They are people like you and me. Evil is within each one of us. I Siméon Habineza, repeat, that you are not better than them. Now, go back home and think about it: there comes a time when you have to stop shedding blood in a country. . . . And I'm going to say one last thing to you: let not one of you try, when the moment comes, to find out if those orphans are Twa, Hutu or Tutsi. (164)

Habineza's emphasis on how revenge, under any context, can become a precursor to recurrent violence and killings along ethnic lines is a precise commentary on how violence became normalized in the nation. In this case, seeing that his commentary is directed to the Tutsi victims establishes the notion that they can equally become perpetrators too inasmuch as they are driven by revenge. Thus, Habineza's comments are retrospective and cautionary in showing how violence, instead of becoming discontinued, can become a continued reality in Rwanda.

Therefore, through Habineza and Cornelius, what becomes apparent in *Murambi* is the centrality

of temporality in any attempt ethically memorialize the violence of genocide in Rwanda. Hence, even though the novel relies on official memorials which crystallized the violence in Rwanda as a single event of barbarism, the novel undermines this perspective in the portrayal and disruption of the manicheanism of equating evil with perpetrator and the “innocent” with victims.

Consequently, Diop invites a critical perspective to memorialization of violence by intimating that every attempt to stay within a certain temporality in the remembrance and memorialization of the genocide in Rwanda will consequently lead to a bias in understanding violence.

Furthermore, an approach to memorialization that solely centers the genocide and divorces it from the larger history of killings will trivialize the suffering and memory of the dead because of the simplistic perspective it will present. Effectively then, if, as the novel concludes, there would be “the resurrection of the living” (181) collective memory of violence in Rwanda must resist attempts to fix clear distinctions between the past, present and future. Accounts should endeavor to historicize the event, by looking before, during and after the genocide. Conversely, to be a living dead will mean that memory is enshrined in just the event.

### **Blurring and resisting the boundary of the guilty and the innocent, the inhuman and the human**

That the efforts of the Rwandan government, since the end of the genocide, has been to ensure that there are two distinguishable factions in their official accounts—killers and victims. A very good example of the polarizing construction of the genocide was the initiative formed by the Rwandan government almost 20 years after the genocide. In July 2013, the Rwandan government started an initiative called, *Ndi Umunyarwanda*—I am Rwandan—that requests that public apologies be made to the victims of the genocide which the government insists are solely constituted of the Tutsi. The initiative was ostensibly based on the ideals of “truth and

reconciliation commissions,” which insists on the power of testimony, forgiveness and healing in truth telling. However, unlike, for example, the South African truth commission which insisted on looking “the beast of the past in the eye, ask[ing] and receiv[ing] forgiveness, and mak[ing] amends” (Craps 57), *Ndi Umunyarwanda* held one group of the population, the Hutu, entirely responsible for the genocide. Therefore, the imperative is for the Hutu to apologize and to take full responsibility for violence, including even those who were never involved in the massacre. Speaking on the idea behind the initiative, Rwanda’s president remarks that “for a people to co-exist one group has to own up the wrongs committed on the other on behalf of those who committed them” (qtd. in Dona 5-6). The president’s view that the apology is a necessary condition for progress is an argument that can be pursued considering that several members of the new generation in Rwanda would have inherited the guilt from the actions perpetrated by members of their family. This was part of the subject of investigation in Jean Hatzfeld most recent account of the genocide, *Blood Papa: Rwanda’s New Generation*. In the book, Hatzfeld revisits—after nineteen years of the killings—the children of men who were involved in the genocide either as victims or perpetrators. The accounts of the children of the Hutu essentially reflect the burden of guilt, shame and stigma from having their father jailed and a level of exclusion from the social order. The first account of the child of a former Hutu prisoner is an apt summary of what is encountered in perpetually all the accounts of the rest who are children of Hutu perpetrators like him. He recalls how at the age of seven he would run to school and not look back because he wanted to avoid those who would often want to point at him, spit at him or stone him because of his father. Even more, his education was stunted because his father was not there to supply the financial resources needed to fund his education, despite his being recognized as a brilliant student (9). This example has been cited here to buttress the point that guilt is

inherited by the new generation. It is also to show that members of the new generation have equally become sufferers in a different kind of estimation. They do not only suffer the trauma through the narrative about the genocide, they also bear some bodily and social impacts as a result of the insults; pelting of stones and stifled progress to their individual ambitions. Even though they are innocent, they have become guilty.

It is against this reality that it is important to state that conversely to the perspective of the Rwandan president, his statement in implicitly emphasizing the insistence on the guilt of an ethnic group, and attempts not to blur the boundaries between the guilty and the innocent can make the nation further drift into separation especially for the new generation. To further burden them with the task of apology is to be insensitive to their plight. Moreover, it equally reduces the incidences of violence in Rwanda to a single event by silencing the history of the years of killings and civil war which he is equally complicit. This silencing, which leads to doctored history, is counter-intuitive and ironic for an initiative that seeks to privilege history (and one with a high level of accuracy) on the road to healing. While, to make it clear again, the argument here is not to undermine the death and suffering of the Tutsi population during the genocide, but an attempt to re-assess the perception of violence beyond the construction of official history and memory and in relation to the ethics of memorialization and representation in cultural production.

Against this consistent posture and frame of reference projected by the official narratives of the genocide, Diop constructs a genocide memorial that deconstructs the separateness of the guilty and the innocent without been disrespectful to the memory of the dead. He does this by isolating any Tutsi, and majorly focusing on Cornelius, a Hutu, who becomes a symbolic representation for others who straddle the boundaries between the guilty and the innocent.

Although he wasn't directly involved in the massacre, his father's orchestration of the massacre in Murambi means that he inherits the guilt of a perpetrator. When Jessica informs him about the actions of his father, she was quick to make him realize he was only one of many other people like him: "Cornelius, listen: after a genocide, the real problem is not the victims but the executioners. To kill almost a million people in three months took a lot people. There were tens or hundreds of thousands of killers. Many of them were fathers. And you, you're just the son of one of them" (79).

The process through which Cornelius comes to terms with the reality of his own guilt has been described as a katabatic imagination founded on the allusion to the relationship of Apostle Simeon Peter and the gentile, Cornelius in the Bible who was converted by the former (Anyaduba 441). According to Anyaduba, "the katabatic imagination of genocide—that is portrayal of genocide as an encounter with hell—constitutes the pivot on which many stories of genocides revolve" (438). Anyaduba notes that the return of Cornelius to Murambi was a descent to the heart of hell (441). While Anyaduba reads the allusion to largely to show how Habineza "baptizes" Cornelius into new ideas and helps him find new insights into human cruelty" (441), an analysis consistent with the turn of events in the text, I read the allusion first, in terms of the "gospel" being preached, only that this "gospel" preached to Cornelius is not the one that liberates Cornelius from his sins and guilt, but the one that reinforces it. Prior to knowing about his father's involvement in the massacre at Murambi, Cornelius does not view himself as one to whom the guilt is imputed. Technically then, prior to hearing the "gospel", he remained guiltless, his resolve to write a play about the genocide remained largely impersonal and from the perspective of one who stands as neither a victim nor perpetrator. However, as he becomes aware of the actual narrative of events, he realizes he is guilty, and, "Now, his return from exile could

no longer have the same meaning. From now on, the only story he had to tell was his own. The story of his family. He had suddenly discovered that he had become the perfect Rwandan: both guilty and a victim” (78). This perspective to reading the allusion brings to the fore how Diop centralizes the subject of guilt and innocence, and how, in narrating the violence in Rwanda, this boundary is blurred. Furthermore, it also raises the question of what it means to write about the genocide from neither the position of guilt nor innocence, a convenient position that Cornelius had prior occupied. Writing from neither position, for Cornelius, means telling the story of everyone else but his own. What Diop is suggesting here is an invitation to anyone willing to narrate the violence in Rwanda to immerse themselves in it and become presented both in the state of the guilty and innocent. Consequently, Cornelius goes from guilt to regeneration, his understanding of the complexity inherent in an isolationist identification of oneself as neither guilty nor innocent in a society plagued with mass atrocity gives him a new resolve:

He would tirelessly recount the horror. With machete words, club words, words studded with nails, naked, naked words and—despite Gerard—words covered with blood and shit. That he could do, because he saw in the genocide of Rwandan Tutsis a great lesson in simplicity. Every chronicler could at least learn—something essential to his art—to call a monster by its name. (179)

Essentially, although Diop identifies a perfect Rwandan as one who is simultaneously guilty and innocent, the novel is almost decidedly silent in characterizing any Tutsi in this regard. This omission, I suggest, is a way of remaining respectful to the dead even in the midst of an attempt to blur the boundaries of the guilty and the innocent. This in itself is a way of ethically memorializing the victims of the genocide who, although were the ultimate sufferers of the of history violence, should not be entangled when talking about the guilty. This, however, does not

exempt the Tutsis who were historically involved in the machinations of violence in the country. In this regard, several members of the RPF, including the president will remain guilty as well as innocent. Hence, herein lies the difference in the perspective of the guilty and innocent identified in Diop's construction and that of the Rwandan government: for Diop, to be Hutu or Tutsi does not straightforward qualify a person as guilty or innocent respectively, but being tagged in either is only a product of the complexities inherent in a fragile polity that has for decades been bedeviled with destruction of social and political institutions. While the official view of guilt and innocence is simplistically tied to ethnicity. In other words, while the government popularizes the rhetoric of ethnicity in establishing guilt and innocence, Diop affirms that ethnicity and nationality and the two frames of reference are also products and are covered by political violence.

Another way to establish the blurring of boundaries that permeate *Murambi* is the consideration of the effect of violence on the nonhuman, especially animals. Dogs feature heavily in this regard in the novel with their transformation from domestic pets to flesh eating beasts exemplifying their own form of suffering. There is no doubt that the concept of genocide solely considers the massacre of humans, and my goal here is not to contest this conceptualization of genocide victimhood. Rather, I wish to complicate the view of victimhood to include those who ultimately suffer in terms of death, and also those who have sufficiently had an aspect of their existence permanently altered as a result of violence. Here again, the approach is a careful reading of violence in Rwanda beyond a simplistic view of temporality and human participation. Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" is useful in articulating the pattern in which violence can be read beyond the category of the human. In defining the concept, Nixon writes: "By slow violence I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of

delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an irrational violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2). What Nixon indicates here is the extremity of violence that surpasses death and is often overlooked. I conceive this concept very useful because the effect of the genocide violence against dogs manifest as irrational and overlooked. However, I equally view that the violence against the dogs is not slow because considering the swiftness of the genocide, 100 days, it is difficult to situate the transformation of dogs who enjoy the company of humans to those who feast on their dead bodies as slow violence.

Writing about how animals feature in the genocide can take two different approaches. The first is to approach the use of animals basically on symbolic forms by exemplifying how the rhetoric of animalization served to trivialize the life of the Tutsis, therefore, rendering them insignificant and ultimately killable. “Inyenzi,” meaning “cockroaches” was a very dominant word often used to describe and denigrate the Tutsis during the genocide. The system of othering people through the rhetoric of animalization is not new, it was a dominant rhetoric employed colonial discourses in the attempt at denigrating the colonized subjects (Iheka 9). According to Huggan and Tiffin, “both human genocide and human slavery have been, and in some cases, continue to be predicated on the categorization of other people as animals” (qtd. in Ong 215). The second approach is one that transcends the discourse of the use of animals beyond symbols by viewing them as participants and ascribing a level of agency to them. This approach follows the argument of Cajetan Iheka who in his book, *Naturalizing Africa: Ecological Violence, Agency, and Postcolonial Resistance in African Literature*, proposes a shared agency between humans and nonhumans in the environment (4). Following the second analytical approach will make it possible to establish animals in terms of how they complicate the boundaries of the guilty and innocent in the narrative of violence in Rwanda.

The pitiable representation of dogs in *Murambi* draws the attention of the readers to understand the living condition of this nonhuman sufferers. Munslow Ong sets up the historical context necessary in understanding the descent of dogs to corpse-eating carnivores. She writes about the cordial relationship maintained between the humans and their pet dogs before the start of the genocide. However, these animals which had received much support and care from humans started to suffer from the same when many of their Tutsi owners started fleeing from the onslaught of the perpetrators. Left with no choice than to fend for themselves, these several abandoned dogs started to feast on the bodies of their erstwhile owners since it was the most readily available “meal” they found (218). Several particularly disturbing moments in the novel reflect this historical account. Perhaps the most disturbing of these scenes was the one where a father had to watch his “child’s foot clenched in [a dog’s] jaws. The man, who had obviously gone crazy a long time ago, muttered as he crept softly toward the animal: “Ah! Ah! What is this I see? But what is it that I’m seeing? It’s my Damien, I recognize his shoe!” (101). As if the knowledge of his son’s death was not enough, the site of the child’s foot with his shoe still fastened to it triggers an even deeper traumatic response from the father; his son is not only dead, his body has been dismembered by a dog, and to this fact the shoe also testifies.

Such a moment in the novel gives a dual perspective to reading the corpse-eating dogs as both an account of their innocence and guilt as well as victims and killers. Obviously, the position of the dogs as innocent is based on the Anthropocentric consideration of the environment which privileges human activities. What follows this consideration is that human activities affect other nonhuman species. In essence, the activities of the genocide, although largely viewed from the human standpoint, is consequential to what has become of the dogs. By themselves, the dogs will not be motivated to feast on human remains, but the human actions of

the genocide gave the impetus to the ultimate reaction of the dogs. However, on the other side of the spectrum, the ramifications of shared agency between humans and animals emphasizes an equal involvement of the dogs as guilty. After consistently feeding on cadavers during the genocide, the dogs develop a taste for human flesh which then leads them to “attack people” even after the genocide (128). Unfortunately, in an attempt to “dignify” the dead, the UN and RPF soldiers shot several dogs feasting on the dead Tutsi bodies. Reacting to this sad turn of events, General Romeo Dallaire, the leader of the UN peacekeeping mission to Rwanda during the genocide, writes, “I can’t tell you how disgusting daily life could be, the corpse-eating dogs that we shot on sight now had no qualms about attacking the living” (379). The killing of the dogs becomes the final step in a vicious cycle started by human activities and ended by the same, but whose implications sorely affected the dogs.

Essentially then, it becomes necessary that when the genocide narrative is told the simultaneously guilty and innocent dogs should not be overlooked, even if they are placed at the margins. As far as the Rwandan genocide should be viewed, we do not only have testimonies from the living and dead humans, we also have testimonies from living and dead bodies of the dogs: their testimony is found in their stomachs stuffed with the human remains, and their massacred bodies. So, while the official memorial in Murambi polytechnic is an essential space and site of memory, a narrative that is stilled in a certain temporality and preserved to safeguard and inscribe the discourse of violence in Rwanda, it is also a space that must be transcended if one desires to really come to terms with the enormity and complexity of the history of violence and genocide in Rwanda. Therefore, in his effort to ethically and wholly memorialize the genocide, Diop in his novel uses the official Murambi memorial, but transcends it to re-invigorate the narrative with the specifics of resistance, the complexity and multi-directionality

of violence in Rwanda. While the site in Murambi says nothing about dogs, Diop's novel does; while the official narrative of Rwanda sets a pattern that dangerously insists on polarity and exclusivity of some in the history of violence, *Murambi* blurs polarity and emphasizes inclusivity of all.

## CHAPTER III

### MEMORIALIZATION, SILENCES AND THE PALIMPSEST IN *THE PAST AHEAD*

*The Past Ahead*, although one of the few novels written about the Rwandan genocide by an author from the country, reflects a tenuous relationship with the nation's history of the genocide. The novel elides and simultaneously gleans from Rwanda's genocide history to present a narrative about mass atrocity that both contains historical accuracy and fictionalized depiction of the genocide narrative. The novel, in a sense, is a palimpsest of memory about the genocide. In its manifestation as a figure of the palimpsest, the novel may be connected to Slavoj Žižek's concept of "visible" and "invisible" violence. What remains unclear and unseen but whose traces can be found and therefore, known in the novel represents the invisible. At the same time, what is seen becomes the visible. What this chapter hopes to establish is how the invisible and visible interact simultaneously through the inscription of silences, isolation and the pursuit to understand violence. The chapter analyzes the characters Isaro and Niko as figures of the palimpsest and argues that in oscillating between the visible and invisible the author presents, although with very serious ethical implications, post-genocide Rwanda as a palimpsest consistently constructing memories while at the same time erasing it. Hence, the palimpsest is read here as the metaphor for the visible and invisible manifestations and narratives of violence.

A palimpsest simply refers to a piece of writing-material which has been written upon twice, the original writing having been erased in order for something new to be written over it (OED). What this means is that palimpsests are products of layering and superimposition.

Through its use as “The Palimpsest” by Thomas De Quincey in his 1845 essay of the same title, Sarah Dillon observes that palimpsest was “for the first time used in a non-specific sense” (1), thereby imbuing the word with a figurative and metaphorical capacity. Thomas De Quincey describes the process of layering that creates palimpsests with the term “involuted”:

The adjective ‘involuted’ describes the relationship between the texts that inhabit the palimpsest as a result of the process of palimpsesting and subsequent textual reappearance. The palimpsest is an involuted phenomenon where otherwise unrelated texts are involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupting and inhabiting each other. Another word that describes this structure is the neologism ‘palimpsestuous’ (Dillon 4).

By emphasizing the process of layering as against just the end product—palimpsest—the adjective palimpsestuous establishes and describes the “complex (textual) relationality embodied in the palimpsest” (4). Significantly, the palimpsest also then becomes a figure and metaphor not only of layering and superimposition of texts but also of embodiment. Therefore, describing a phenomenon through the metaphor of the palimpsest requires that one studies the phenomenon’s manifestation of embodiments, something this paper will later show in Isaro and Niko.

Isaro is a genocide survivor who was adopted by a French couple and taken to France at a very young age. She later decides to write about the survivors of the genocide, a book she tentatively titles “In Memory of...” (23). Because of this she travels to her country to speak and interview different people. However, she ends up writing the story of a killer, Niko. We see Niko’s development from the point he was born up to the time he goes to live with monkeys in a cave, after the he had killed lots of people during the genocide. Isaro writes the story of a killer

whose experiences are quite similar to her own in the way they both grapple with the burden of the aftermath of violence.

The figurative capacity the palimpsest takes on particular significance for studying memory. Brecht de Groote observes this when he writes that palimpsest stopped being “strictly a philological curio, with De Quincey, the palimpsest comes to operate as the ultimate metaphor for memory, and more specifically for a writing and reading of memory that develops and traverses an iterative structure of layering” (109). The palimpsest and memory interrelate because the latter, like the former, is a product of layering; of erasures and reinscriptions; and crucially, of the superimposition of the past on the present, the present on the past; the visible on the invisible, and the invisible on the visible. Two traits of superimposition have been described as prevalent in the figure of the palimpsest in literature: first, “the palimpsest superimposes the past and present in its layering of texts from different periods” and second, “the palimpsest involves a superimposition of presence and absences, heard and unheard voices, the living and the dead, that opens the way to establishing a connection between intertextuality and the critical discourse of spectrality” (Carmen Lara- Rallo 101-103). Although these two traits of superimposition differ, they are also interwoven. The first trait—about the layering of texts from different periods—evoke the centrality of the temporality of history and that of memory in the description of the palimpsest. This underlying function of temporality also relates presence and absences to the discourse of the spectral in the second trait. Thus, apprehending the palimpsest either by reading it metaphorically or materially becomes an attempt to also apprehend its attendant temporality.

Reading the palimpsest metaphorically predominantly implies symbolically reading how non-textual forms such as cities, cultures, nations, people and others function as figures of the

palimpsest. In addition, it also requires that one “trace[s] the incestuous and encrypted texts that constitutes the palimpsests fabric.... [It involves] an inventive process of creating relations [between texts] where there may, or should be, none, [relationships] hence the appropriateness of ... incestuous” (Dillon 18). On the other hand, a material reading requires that the palimpsest is read as a document focusing solely on its textuality. De Groot points out significantly that “these two senses [of reading the palimpsest] comes with its own understanding of memory either eternal or temporary...” (112). The former type of reading the palimpsest is also referred to as palimpsestuous, while the latter is called palimpsestic. While the goal of this chapter is also to read the palimpsest in relation memory, its focus is less about the textuality of the novel. Therefore, it analyzes the palimpsest only as a metaphor effective in understanding the interplay of Zizek’s concept of the known and the unknown; the visible and the invisible and how they characterize trauma and memory in the novel. More importantly, this metaphorical reading of the palimpsest in *The Past Ahead* offers an understanding of the ways the characters in the novel, through the ways they remember and process their trauma of the genocide, reflect post-genocide reality in Rwanda.

The characters mirror post-genocide reality in *The Past Ahead* through the almost deliberate inscription of silence throughout the novel. The silence found in *The Past Ahead* sharply contrasts what we identified in *Murambi: Book of Bones*, analyzed in the previous chapter. Whereas Cornelius ends in *Murambi* with the desire to resist silence, the desire to inscribing silence seems to populate all the attempts at remembering in Gatore’s novel. A central and dominant thematic of the novel is silence and erasure, and the novel equally hints that this is also the case in post-genocide Rwanda. Nicki Hitchcott in her article titled, “Between Remembering and Forgetting: (In)Visible Rwanda in Gilbert Gatore’s *Le Passé devant soi* [*The*

*Past Ahead]*” identifies that “despite the novel being clearly based on what happened in 1994, the words “Rwanda” and “genocide” never actually appear in Gatore’s text” (78). What seems like a deliberate attempt to neither mention genocide nor Rwanda in the novel matches the centrality of silencing as a trope used in the novel to think through the Rwandan genocide. For Gatore, his obligation in the book is to resist rehashing a popular narrative of the Rwandan genocide. He clearly mentions this in an interview when he says, “My book isn’t a political tract—and it isn’t yet another book about the poor little Rwandan” (qtd. in de Jager xiii). The insistence to see his book beyond the narrative of another “poor little Rwandan” foregrounds the idea that the nation, whose history seems to be largely narrated all over the novel through references to specific issues like the burial of victims, justice in post-genocide Rwanda, cave monkeys and others, should be silenced and seen as invisible. Hitchcott uses the inscription of silence in the novel to highlight how “Rwanda is both visible and invisible” in the text and how this ties significantly into the burden of remembering or forgetting for the different parties in the genocide: survivors, perpetrators and killers (78). Before proceeding to contextualize the manifestation of silence, often tied to the duty to forget, Hitchcott significantly makes the interesting point that prior to the genocide and its aftermath, Rwanda as a nation itself was largely invisible in the global consciousness (77). This invisibility led to the neglect and misinterpretation by the UN about the severity of the events taking place in the country. Even more, after the end of the genocide the country once again paled into insignificance as “the name of the country, reduced to a synonym for crimes against humanity and the struggles of survivors, along with the ordinary lives of the people who died, were erased from the global consciousness” (77). Significantly then, the narrative of the Rwandan nation itself is that of visibility and invisibility which is defined by the single moment of the genocide in history. The history of

genocide has been superimposed upon everything known about the country. Therefore, erasing this history will practically mean one is erasing the nation also. Part of the burden of the government after the genocide in Rwanda was not only to work towards reconciliation, but it was also how to manage this indelible history of the genocide in an effort to generate newer narratives about the nation. In line with this effort, what became necessary for the government was an even more sustained move towards further erasures and reinscriptions of the social reality and history of the nation, thereby making some narratives about the nation visible and some others, invisible (77). Arguably, the yearly genocide commemoration is the single event the Rwandan government uses to achieve its simultaneous rewriting and erasures of history: hence, the need to also see commemorations as a figure of the palimpsest.

Using the indications of the visible and invisible can especially be productive in thinking through the manifestation of the palimpsest as silence, isolation and the intelligibility of violence in the novel. In his work, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Slavoj Žižek explains that violence exists in the dialectic of both the visible and invisible, seeing without knowing and knowing without seeing (Žižek 7). Slavoj Žižek further explains the polarity in the manifestations of violence by stating that visible violence relates to what is seen, and the invisible one, to what is known. The dialectics of visibility and invisibility and seeing and knowing is even more complicated by the fact that, most often, the understanding of violence is either predicated upon what is seen but not known, and what is known but not seen. In other words, for every visible violence, there is an invisible violence, and for every invisible violence, there is a visible violence. This dialectic is manifest in the two protagonists of the novel: Isaro and Niko who often become the visible and invisible manifestation of one another. As a product of Isaro's creation, Niko appears to be the invisible while Isaro, the creator, is the visible. However,

through the complex narrative that Isaro creates about Niko, it becomes apparent that Isaro uses Niko to process the perspective of the killer; while Niko, through the traumatic hauntings that he suffers, becomes a victim of his own atrocities. In her introduction of the novel's translation to English, Marjolijn de Jager observes that one of the major aims of the novel is to help us find evil intelligible through the character of Niko (xii). The idea of finding evil 'intelligible' doubles as an attempt to apprehend the invisibility of violence. Although the genocide violence is seen, it still obscures intelligibility and knowing, thereby making it difficult to answer the frequently asked question, "why did the genocide happen"? According to De Jager, one of the ways Niko helps us find evil intelligible is through his isolation, or self-exile. Niko leaves his town and decides to take residence with monkeys in "a cave ... located at the top of the hill, which is itself an island" (4). His choice of residence isolates him not just from the site of his atrocity but also from little or no contact with other people. However, beyond staying in a cave, Niko also often lives within his own imagination, by thinking of the cave as the "beginning of a path allowing you to travel to the center of the earth.... Nothing is more delightful, he'd say when he came back to himself, than living inside a universe you have created" (6). In Niko therefore, there are arguably two levels of isolation; one involves him leaving people and the other may be more appropriately referred to as a periodical escape from his environment in order to "find refuge inside his head" (7).

The relationship between the intelligibility of evil and isolation can be analyzed in two different and opposite ways. First, as a representation of perpetrators and killers, Niko banishing himself from the site of his atrocities suggests that one of the ways that perpetrators accept their guilt and try to escape justice is through withdrawing themselves from Rwanda. This position is consistent with the events following the genocide as many of the perpetrators and killers fled

Rwanda—to the then Zaire, now Republic of Congo—in order to escape justice and even death after the RPF took over the government (Burnet 7). Leaving the site of their atrocity becomes a way of denying responsibility for their actions and therefore, in this sense, isolation becomes a way for the killers and perpetrators to disavow their actions. Thus, following this notion, exile does not function to help us make evil intelligible. Conversely, it only further inhibits knowing and sustains the invisibility of violence.

Another way to process isolation and the intelligibility of evil is by focusing on how isolation helps to figure a killer as a singular subject. Often, participants in a mass atrocity are taken as a homogeneous whole with only the leaders of such events receiving specific attention. Indeed, it is very difficult to understand each perpetrator or killer because of how innumerable they can be. While listening to a reporter on a radio broadcast Isaro hears how “at the speed with which the verdicts were pronounced, it would take two or three centuries to examine each of the cases” (11). Although the precise number of killers are unknown, some estimates number them in millions (Mamdani 224). However, it could still be productive to understand the motivation of an individual killer and know the particular reasons—if there are—in participating in the killings. Previous researches including those by Scott Straus (2006), Ann Fujii (2009), and Jennie Burnet (2012) have pointed out how issues like resident disagreements and petty stealing motivated some to seek out specific neighbors and kill them. In other words, the brutality or not of a killer, apart from being a reflection of a group psyche and collective effort, can also be a result of particular and specific reasons. Similarly, while guilt and the processing of trauma by killers may also be collective, it can manifest differently at the level of the individual subject. Therefore, in the isolation of Niko, we see a killer working through his guilt and suffering the trauma of his actions. Niko thinks to himself, “How can you not see the real reason for my withdrawal?...

Don't you smell the odor that accuses me? (7) Through his isolation, though often marked by silences, we observe that Niko suffers the trauma of his own actions: "Noticing that he's in the same position in which he had surprised so many of his victims, he's once again overcome by a flood of memories that sicken and exasperate him to the point that he vomits out everything he's just eaten" (20).

Niko becomes crucial in exemplifying the idea in the novel that isolation is intricately linked to the obligation to forget and attempt to create deliberate oblivion. Niko's unrepressed memories and traumatic hauntings are exactly what a society trying to forget the atrocities wants to avoid. The narrator says:

Burying quickly not out of respect for the dead, but to allow the killers and their accomplices to forget acts they had and hadn't committed.... Erasure followed by oblivion promptly became a reality. No one spoke of, or alluded to, the massacres. In a way, those who had died never existed, their belongings had never been theirs and those who didn't respect the obligation to forget had to go elsewhere, someplace where their memories wouldn't bother anyone. To complete the work, several words that had a more or less obvious connection to the slaughter were banned from the language (86).

Erasing those who died along with their belongings as well as words connected to the slaughter from the language makes violence lack visibility (seeing) and invisibility (knowing). It lacks visibility because the physical and testimonial evidences about the killings have been erased. In addition, it lacks invisibility because the words and people that are supposed to carry the burden of remembering have been banned or required to go elsewhere. This perspective makes us see Niko's self-exile and isolation as a step he takes in his attempt continue to remember the killings in a society that is doing everything to forget them. Isolation here then works as an injunction of

the individual to remember in a situation where the collective is trying to forget. Consequently, while the nation worked to inscribe enforced forgetting and silence, in the decision to isolate himself and the attempt to remember, the killer embraces his guilt.

Although there are unmistakable similarities in the novel and post-genocide Rwanda as it relates to the banning of certain words in connection to the genocide, that similarity is fairly tenuous. The most obvious words banned from use in Rwanda by President Paul Kagame are the ethnic labels, “Hutu and Tutsi” because “identifying people in these terms risks promoting social division” (Hitchcott 81). However, this does not suggest an attempt in post-genocide Rwanda to create deliberate silence or forgetting. Contrarily, the constant commemorations and memorial sites of the genocide entrenches the duty to remember the genocide, while forgetting is emphasized in banning the use of the ethnic identities by the government. In post-genocide Rwanda therefore, remembering and forgetting are simultaneous with the overall objective being the pursuit of social cohesion and national belonging.

The survivor, Isaro, also experiences Isolation and silence. Because she was very young when the genocide happened, she saw very little or nothing about the event and her memory of everything about her life before she gets to France is at best, skewed. Put differently, Isaro suffers from the anxiety of knowing without seeing. She figures as palimpsest, a body upon which something perceived to be awful and not worth remembering has been writing but vigorously wiped away. In the place of what was there, a new narrative is now written about her humane and successful life in France. However, she is still seen in light of the events in her country but as someone who is privileged to have survived. For this reason, “Demonstrations [were] organized in her name to collect funds and help other children not as lucky as she” (29). The demonstrations she is used for proves the notion of white savior in its entirety. Not only was

Isaro saved by whites, now whites are also contributing to help other children. But what remains unclear is the usefulness of the funds they gathered for the children who are already dead.

Moreover, the demonstrations prove how Isaro has become a subject of invisible violence through which others can substantiate their knowledge of the killings which they did not see.

Therefore, although Isaro has left her home country, she still represents it and suffers from its reality. As a result, she searches for what she does not see but she knows and represents to many who see her. In a very pivotal moment in the novel when she turns eighteen years, her adopted parents present her with a photograph “which the details of her life unfolded in chronological order” (29). Ironically, Isaro searches for what is beyond the photograph, what she knows exist but not present in the photograph:

“Everything’s here!” her father said, noticeable proud. Her arrival, the first photograph, in which she appeared skinny and scared, bundled up in a sweater that was too big for her.... Her birthdays, confused with the date of her arrival since her real date of birth wasn’t known.... Everything was there except for what was missing—what had taken place before the first photograph that is.... She couldn’t help crying. She let the gathering believe they were tears of joy, moved as she was by the flood of memories. In reality, what saddened her was that the careful and systematic chronicling of her acts and gestures since she had arrived only highlighted what was omitted, what had been there before all this (29-30).

The photograph and Isaro become two sides of the same coin. The photograph itself is a site and palimpsest of memory, it is a narrative of the chronology of events, but also an elliptical narrative of other events. It contains the invisible and the visible, the seen and the known, just like Isaro’s life and identity which contains silences about her past. Her position is even more

complicated by the fact that while she recognizes that something about her past remains silenced and invisible, she cannot ask about those things. She must become complicit in the attempt to enforce her own total oblivion about her past and “embrace that silence and oblivion as a way of expressing her gratitude, appearing to be happy so they wouldn’t have any regrets, pretending that what she had, thanks to them, compensated for what they had lost” (29).

However, embracing silence only spurs her desire to really know more about her past. Therefore, she uses imagination so that she can see the invisible which she knows to fill the silent voids of her past life. Isaro uses fact she has handy to create fiction, and makes imagination serve as her foray into memory instead of searching for the accuracy of memory. She prepares the mind of her readers from the outset in the story she writes about Niko by stating that “if, before you take one step, you feel the need to perceive the indistinct line that separates fact from fiction, memory from imagination;... you may well find this journey unbearable” (2). Interestingly, she creates a character that loves to dwell in his own imagination also. In presenting memory and imagination as a sort of continuum of one another, the novel frequently oscillates between the invisible and visible, thereby making violence both clear and oblique.

Therefore, in their polarized classification as survivor and killer, they mirror one another in many striking ways—they can be read as correlatives, at once they render both visible and invisible the suffering of the victims and killers. Saying they mirror one another is in no way a suggestion that their sufferings are equal even though they both suffer similar the striking traumatic hauntings, the fact that one character is a product of the others imagination means they do not have the same status as characters.

It is precisely Gatore’s troubling way of representing the relationship between the victim and the killer as well as each of them in their individual capacities that has made several critics

aver that the novel is severely unrealistic and almost downright unethical in its representation. Catherine Coquio views that it is almost impossible for a genocide novel to empathize with a killer to the level that Gatore does in the novel (qtd. in Hitchcott 86). Similarly, Hitchcott echoes Charlotte Lacoste's view of the novel when she writes that:

Gatore's attempts to present his fictional perpetrator as a victim bears comparison with the global media's decision to focus, at the end of the genocide, on stories of the appalling living conditions of the Hutu refugees from Rwanda living in Zaire, stories that...did help to strengthen the revisionist theory of a "double genocide" (86).

For Madeline Hron, it remains unclear and "unnerving" that Isaro who "transcribes survivor's testimonies all day [ends up] compos[ing] a killer's chronicle" (172). These criticisms against the novel predominantly allude to the question of empathy and forgiveness, but they are also implicitly about the question of representing the narrative of a killer. It is possible to ask for example, how do you represent a killer's perspective in a fictional writing about the genocide ethically without trying to neither generate unnecessary sympathy nor further demonizing the killer?

However, despite these very crucial responses and the questions they can generate, it is also vital to state that the perspective of a killer is a legitimate narrative of the genocide and part of the holistic history of the country. To pretend that killers have nothing to say, or that they do not have their own chronicles will ultimately lead to a move towards making their narratives invisible. Therefore, in a bid find an alternative perspective to thinking through the representation of the victims and killers as correlatives, while at the same time escaping serious ethical implications, one may read the entire narrative as a palimpsest upon which the layering of visible and invisible violence has occurred. This move towards a reading of visible and invisible

violence follows the view that for every visible account of a victim, there is an opposite and invisible account of a killer, and vice-versa as we find in Isaro and Niko. Metaphorically, the palimpsest has allowed us to see how the characters are in themselves visible and invisible. But we have also seen how their narratives are interwoven and entangled narratives within the same social reality of the genocide. This view potentially clarifies Hron's corrected observation about the strange turn from documenting survivor's stories to writing about a killer in Isaro's writing. As a survivor, and for other survivors, they face the inescapable reality of confronting that there were and are killers. In other words, the existence of any narrative of a survivor is only validated because the narrative of the killer existed and still exists. Thus, being the visible manifestation of the violence, Isaro produces a palimpsest containing the narrative of visible and invisible violence by writing the narrative of an invisible killer. She could have decided to further her documentation of survivor narratives and ensured the further erasure and silence of whatever the killers have to say. However, what Isaro writes is the imagination of the survivor who is trying to understand the killer by seeing and making visible the violence to herself. Isaro's narrative therefore functions, not to suggest she is sympathizing with a killer, but to reflect how invisible violence is entangled with the visible one and are both involuted as a palimpsest.

It is this same entanglement between the visible and invisible; the killer's and victim's narrative that the government in post-genocide Rwanda confronts. Reading the commemorations in postgenocide Rwanda as a palimpsest of the visible and invisible will mean that it will be important not only to locate the narratives that are visible, but to also become aware of those that have been erased and invisible. In itself, the commemoration activities especially in societies that have experienced mass atrocity, is a predominantly political system of knowledge production. Dillon establishes a fundamental relationship between the palimpsest and Michel Foucault's

argument about ‘genealogy’ and ‘archaeology’ which is especially productive in understanding the way commemoration intersects with history and ultimately becomes a grand act of layering and superimposition as well as a national figuration of the metaphor of the palimpsest in postgenocide Rwanda. For Foucault “genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times” (qtd. in Dillon 17). What is apparent in the Foucauldian conception of genealogy is the image of the palimpsest which is directly interwoven with the construction of history and memory. Specifically, a genealogical perspective to the understanding history and memory asks for both erasures and absences as well as presences and reinscriptions—that is, the invisible and the visible. In a similar direction, Foucault views archaeology “as a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborate: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity” (qtd. in Dillon 17). Like genealogy, archaeology also privileges every form of knowledge, it is interested in the minutest of details, silences and traces that may be used to better understand the production and circulation of knowledge. In the case of Rwanda, the government’s ban on what can be said about the genocide and where it can be said ensures an enforced silence that affects both survivors and killers (Hitchcott 77). This would therefore suggest that commemorations only act as superimpositions, as a tool to remember the genocide, but also to inscribe silence. In this regard, a combination of genealogy and archaeology highlights the way a metaphorical reading of visible and invisible violence works in that it focuses on the correspondence of both the underlying and superimposed narratives. In this case, it seeks the recovery of both victim and killer narratives.

This interrelatedness between the palimpsest and genealogy and archaeology in understanding the production of and circulation of knowledge opens precisely why the imagination of the killer's narrative is not only necessary in the novel of Gatore, it is equally vital in postgenocide Rwanda. Therefore, in making Rwanda invisible in his novel, Gatore shifts his novel from the superimposition of the victim-dictated and governed knowledge production about the genocide in postgenocide Rwanda. The obvious omissions of the name Rwanda and lack of explicit references to the genocide and specific events make the country invisible, yet the sparse but undeniable references about genocide and the country makes the country visible.

## CHAPTER IV

### NARRATING AND VISUALIZING THE RWANDAN VIOLENCE: GENDER, SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ANIMALITY IN DEOGRATIAS

This chapter analyzes *Deogratias*, a graphic novel drawn about Rwandan genocide. It focuses on the representation of sexuality and animality in the graphic novel and argues that these subjects are intricately tied to the history of violence and nationhood in Rwanda. Jean-Philip Stassen's graphic novel takes up issues such as the historical representation and narrative by articulating a gendered perspective in relation to difficulties of representing trauma and the narrating victimhood. Intricately, it amplifies the intersections of coloniality, sexuality and animality and how they all connect to the question of violence in Rwanda.

The graphic novel (or comics) has existed for a long time as a fictional mode of representing trauma; however, it has also been used by graphic artists such as Art Spiegelman and Joe Sacco to represent non-fictional narratives. The success of Spiegelman and Sacco in using the graphic novel to historicize and memorialize events of mass atrocities—the holocaust and the Palestinian experiences respectively—immediately signal how effectively the form can be used in testifying to serious human right violations with a high level of historical accuracy. It is this question of historical representation through the graphic novel that prompted Hillary Chute to argue for the distinction between the terms “graphic novel” and “graphic narrative.” In her article “Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative,” Chute gives a brief history of comics and argues that while the term “graphic novel” is used to describe the form, a more

appropriate term to describe the works of Art Spiegelman and Joe Sacco should be “graphic narrative” because their works are non-fiction. According to her “Graphic narrative suggests that historical accuracy is not the opposite of creative invention; the problematics of what we consider fact and fiction are made apparent by the role of drawing” (459). In other words, the graphic narrative tries to disrupt the distinction between creativity and historicity through its visual-verbal and image-text representation. The reference here to Chute’s careful observation about the distinction between using the term “graphic novel” or “graphic narrative” in relation to the representation of history through the form is less about raising arguments about the appropriate use of a term. Rather, signifies that understanding the works of graphic artists who have written about the Rwandan genocide, predominantly Rupert Bazambanza and Jean-Philip Stassen, requires a consideration of their adherences and departures from the historical reality of the genocide. Put differently, the graphic form of representation works in at least two significant ways: one, it is beneficial to history and memory because it makes the accuracy of historical representation and process of remembering lucid through visualization, but conversely, the same mold can also make historical misrepresentation, forgetting or disavowed guilt clear. In particular, Stassen represents disavowal of sexual violence via images of animality. Deogratias’ representation of himself as a dog who has no confession to make exemplifies this position

In addition to how the graphic novel blends visual-verbal representations and merges with other modes to represent history and memory, it can also contrast both, and act as a potent media of memory because of how the form can be used juxtapose the past and present and also overlap temporalities. In the graphic novel, ‘Hotel Umusambi’ is used to contrast the past and present and it also underscores the centrality of place in establishing the continuity of the past and present. In addition, in several panels in Stassen’s *Deogratias*, the present and the past are

juxtaposed or presented as a continuum, through an intermittent use of images for flashbacks. *Deogratias* tells the story of a character of the same name, Deogratias, a Hutu. During the genocide, Deogratias participated in the killings, and most especially in the sexual violence against women. Throughout the graphic novel, Deogratias is haunted especially by his involvement in the sexual violence against two sisters and their mother—Benina, Apollinaria and Venetia. After being raped, Benina, Apollinaria and Venetia are killed, and their bodies are eaten by dogs. Deogratias witnesses the dogs eating their bodies and equally sees, Bosco, an RPF officer shoot the dogs who ate their bodies. Upon seeing this, Deogratias is traumatized: he begins to constantly talk about dogs so much that people start to refer to him as a dog, “Deogratias! Arf! Arf! How goes? Still a dog?” (53). Displacing his own culpability, Deogratias also decides to “avenge” the death of the three women by poisoning those in a way involved in their death, as well as Bosco, the man who shot the dogs who fed on their bodies. In the closing panels of the novel Deogratias tells Brother Phillip, a Belgian priest, about all he has done but he insists that which he offers is not a confession since he is only a dog (78). Animals are often thought to be driven only by a present need. Therefore, reducing himself to the position of an animal, Deogratias suggests that participating in the rape and murder of Venetia, Benina and Apollinaria, is only as a result of his present drive triggered by the genocide. However, through the blend of temporalities the graphic novel reflects Deogratias’ act of sexual violence cannot be subject only to pure present drive. Consequently, through the blend of temporalities, Stassen substantiates Chute’s position in “Comics form and Narrating Lives” that “Comics can express life stories, especially traumatic ones, powerfully because it makes literal the presence of the past by disrupting spatial and temporal conventions to overlay or palimpsest past and present” (109). *Deogratias* narrates a vital history of gender violence in Rwanda prior and during the genocide.

Also, he intricately links how animality is inextricably linked to the history of Rwanda prior to the genocide and during the genocide. Therefore, Stassen's graphic novel is not only a story about the Rwandan genocide, it is a story about the history of sexuality and animality in Rwanda and how they can be illuminating in understanding a gendered perspective as well as an animal discourse to the genocide.

Jennie Burnet in her significant book *Genocide Lives in Us: Women, Memory and Silence in Rwanda*, shows the necessity of a gender perspective in understanding the dynamics of genocide as well as reconciliation in Rwanda. Written from an extensive ethnographic work she did in post-genocide Rwanda, Burnet highlights how the peculiarity of gender complicates the notion of violence, survivorship, memory, silence and reconciliation in Rwanda. Commenting on the various experiences of women during and after the genocide, Burnet points out that:

During the genocide, women were more likely to survive than men, but they often experienced sexual violence—rape, sexual torture, and sexual enslavement. After the genocide, many women found themselves as heads of household because their husbands were dead, had fled into exile, or were imprisoned on accusations of genocide. In the aftermath of the genocide, Rwandan women transformed society by breaking cultural taboos not because they sought liberation from gender oppression but because they had no other choice—their male kin and neighbors were dead, imprisoned, or untrustworthy (6).

Her comment illuminates the coincidence of sexual violence and the assumption of leadership positions by women in Rwanda. Stassen demonstrates these two very related and significant facts in *Deogratias* through the character of Venetia and her children. First, some of the experiences of women Burnet identifies above were not only typical during and after the genocide, they were also women's lived realities at during the civil war from 1990-1994. Second, the graphic novel

highlights how gender positioning can in fact become a viable means of sustaining leadership roles during the continued period of violence and ethnic segregation during the reign of President Habyarimana. Indeed, Burnet mentions this also in her book when she refers to the coping mechanism women used during the civil war to maintain daily life (5), and she gives a more detailed discussion of the complexity of gender and sexuality in Rwanda in her article, “Situating Sexual Violence in Rwanda (1990-2001): Sexual Consent and the Political Economy of War”. This chapter will read *Deogratias* as a documentation of a historical continuum of gender, desire and sexual violence, and the way it grows in tandem with the manifestations of all forms of violence in Rwanda. It situates in the graphic novel the layers and complexity inherent the discourse of sexual violence by arguing that sexual violence is not only tied to rape even though rape and the eventual killing of women is final act of violence against women. Furthermore, this chapter analyzes how sexual violence is precipitated by discourses of animality by interpreting their interrelatedness in the graphic novel.

Another equally important perspective to the history of violence in Rwanda and one which Stassen equally emphasizes is the role of animals. Animals, especially monkeys, dogs and cattle were integral in defining and in creating ethnic labels and belonging in Rwanda. The hills of Rwanda are particularly known for the monkeys which was a subject of attraction for several tourist and was, arguably, what the global community knew the most about Rwanda prior to the genocide. While monkeys gave Rwanda a name in the global imaginary, cattle and dogs were part of what defined ethnic identities within Rwanda. Jade Ong states that, “prior to the genocide, dogs were fairly common in Rwanda as pets, watchdogs, and used in hunting, particularly by the Twa people...” (218). The Twa people’s hunting occupation is also emphasized in *Deogratias*, where, in Benina, Apollinaria and Deogratias’ class, their teacher is talking about the ethnic

distribution in Rwanda. The teacher identifies the Twa as the least populated ethnic group in Rwanda who predominantly practice “pottery and hunting” (18). Therefore, because of their profession, the Twa people maintained a strong connection with their dogs, and dogs also became a representative label for them. Similarly, the Tutsi are known as cattle herders. The teacher identifies the Tutsis as a “Nilotic race who arrived much later from their farway north. With their cows and weapons, the Tutsi took advantage of the natural integrity of the poor Hutu peasants and treacherously enslaved them” (18). The reference to cows here underscores how cows are important indices of the Tutsi. But while the description of the Twa people was not inundated with any reference to violence, mentioning weapons and enslavement alongside cows immediately evokes a sense of savagery by the Tutsi against the Hutu. Furthermore, being a primary possession of the Tutsi, what the teacher is suggesting is that cows become a category of the “weapons” used to enslave the Hutu. This sort of rhetoric which implicitly identifies cows as participants in the act of destroying and unsettling the life of the Hutu then renders the animals equally killable alongside their Tutsi owners during the genocide. Jean Hatzfeld testifies to this when he writes that “murderers cut the animal’s throat before their owner’s eyes first, to humiliate them, and before killing the owners themselves” (41). The killers often feasted on the slaughtered cows to mark their daily accomplishments. However, the killing of the cows will have even more implications in postgenocide Rwanda as Ong pointed out that the “mass destruction [of the cows] greatly affected the speed at which the Rwandan economy, agriculture, and individual livelihoods could recover after the genocide (217). Given the nation’s reliance on its cattle and agriculture as a major economy.

In the opening pages of *Deogratias*, Stassen indicates how a gendered and sexual discourse and questions of animality will set the tone for the development of the rest of the

novel. Critically, these pages open with the dialogue between a traumatized Deogratias and a French soldier who served during the genocide but who is now visiting Rwanda as “only a tourist this time” (2). The Frenchman is seen in “Hotel Umusambi” where Deogratias approaches too but the bar attendant tries to chase him from the bar with a club before the Frenchman recognizes Deogratias and asks that he should be allowed into bar to drink with him (1). Deogratias enters the bar and seats beside the Frenchman. The panel where the conversation between both characters begin is drawn as a wide shot which puts the Frenchman and Deogratias in focus. The former is visibly excited to be in Rwanda and he shows this with his wide grin and index finger pointing upward as he informs Deogratias how he “missed this place [Rwanda], so I came back – only as a tourist this time” (2). In contrast, Deogratias sits with his hands folded as he gazes passively into an empty space. The contrast between the excitedness and sullenness of the both characters indicates how differently both of them process the trauma of the genocide in postgenocide Rwanda. And indeed, the Frenchman’s attitude might be indicative of the reaction of the global community who, as has been stated so often in this work, treated the genocide with indifference. The return of the Frenchman as a tourist only underscores how the nation remains only a sight of either pleasure or spectacularized violence, or, as the graphic novel will reveal, the horror of the Frenchman’s propensity for both . This view is even further amplified when in the following panel where the bar man brings a drink for Deogratias. This panel is a closer shot and quite striking in the way it captures the emotions of the three characters. The Frenchman is shot in the middle of the two Rwandans as he retains his smile when he says, “I just got back from volcano country. I saw plenty of gorillas. Look at the cool pictures I took. I had them developed in Kigali – on just a day, like in Europe” (2). The Frenchman’s excitement is met with the same disinterested and sullen gaze by Deogratias, but even more significantly, he is met with

a very angered facial expression from the bar man. That the Frenchman is excited because of his visit to the gorillas shows that one of the things he really misses Rwanda is the view of the animals. Therefore, Rwanda is rendered here rendered as only a destination to see animals with little or no interest in the events of the mass atrocities that had just taken place in the country nor his country's role in it. This colonialist gaze of Rwanda was also clearly mentioned in Rupert Bazambanza's graphic novel, *Smile Through Tears*. Ironically, as Bazambanza pointed out, the world knows about the gorillas in Rwanda and even shot a film about them, but the country remained largely invisible to them after the genocide started (1).

Beyond showing how Rwanda is defined by the presence of its animals the panel also articulates quite clearly an aggression between the Frenchman and the two Rwandans. It brings to fore, as subsequent panels in the graphic novel will further elaborate, the complicity of the French in the genocide. It is important to state that since the end of the genocide, relations between France and Rwanda have remained strained. The colonial gaze of Rwanda is replaced by a sexual gaze as the Frenchman follows his interest in the animals with that of women. The two final panels on the same page the Frenchman had mentioned his visit to the gorillas, introduces a turn to sexual discourse. The Frenchman, seeing two ladies walking outside the bar says, "Holy shit! Deogratias, check out those two bitches! Man, are they hot or what" (2). Through another four panels, the Frenchman recounts his experiences with Tutsi ladies and states that what he misses the most about Rwanda is having sex with Rwanda women. Speaking of women slaughter and rape, he graphically states, "Man, those Tutsi girls! You know what I mean, right, Deogratias? That's what I missed the most... And its such a shame when you think about it. All those beauties who won 't be sharing their soft little thighs with anyone anymore. All those sweet pieces of ass hacked to bits with machetes... what a waste! (3). The Frenchman

goes ahead to inform Deogratias that he has found himself another lady to meet him at the brothel (3). The Frenchman's sexualized view of the death of several Tutsi women precisely captures how much he trivializes the genocide. His comments is as though the women only existed for his own and other men's pleasure. Just like the animals were for tourism and to be captured by film. Thus, the case of both the women and animals are about exoticized consumption and spectacularized pleasures. Interestingly, it is the sexualized rendering of the Frenchman's visit and conception of Rwanda that triggers Deogratias' foray into his own past. The subsequent panels on the page gradually convey his own sexual escapades prior to the beginning of the genocide. Later in their conversation when Deogratias invites the Frenchman to drink the banana beer, Urwagwa, the Frenchman declines and calls Rwandans "Bunch of savages" because they "drink their beer warm" (6), as though his own savagery has not been made evident with through the wild expressions and excitements he shows when talking about women.

What becomes clear in the opening pages of the graphic novel and in Frenchman's description of what he misses and his motivations for a tourist visit to Rwanda is how animality and sexualized images onto women's body combine in the description of Rwanda. His rhetoric is laced with a fascination for both animals and female bodies, and for him, both ensure the pleasurable "exploration" of Rwanda. Such a rhetoric trivializes the death of thousands from global consciousness, and it alludes to a specific kind of suffering women face prior, during and after the genocide. In essence, it establishes sexualization of and subjugation of women as instrumental to the mass killings that happened in the nation's long years of violence. Rendering the importance of a nation in light of feminine bodies is especially a disregard to the suffering of women during the genocide. What Rwanda then becomes is a simultaneous object of fancy and

rejection. Fancy because of the visit to the gorillas and sex with the women, but rejection because aside from these features, Rwandans are still generally as “bunch of savages” (6). Jonathan Glover puts it so adequately when in commenting about the Frenchman he says, “As equal parts ex-soldier, tourist, and potential sex tourist, the Frenchman becomes a composite of various forms of European corruption and exploitation (military, economic, sexual)” (116).

### **Transactional sex, consensual sex, and the question of sexual violence**

While Stassen’s graphic novel is inundated with consistent sexualized images and sexual violence, the portrayal of sex in the graphic novel is not simplistic as there are multiple layers through which one can approach gender, sexuality and sexual violence in Rwanda. Most especially as a historical discourse parallel to the multiple years of violence in the country. More often than not, sexual violence is often tied to rape. However, it necessary to state that to reduce sexual violence in Rwanda solely to the incidents of rape will be to trivialize other forms of sexual violence and women’s agency in relation to it. The female characters in the graphic novel, but more especially in the character of Venetia, demonstrates how some women were forced to use sex as a tool for survival during the Civil War, especially when these women are the only ones left to take up leadership roles in their families. Therefore, the argument here is that sexual violence occurs also outside the purview of rape, complicating the questions of exploitation of women, transactional sex, and agency. Even though transnational sex is used as means for family stability, Venetia’s life dramatizes the precarious state of women’s lives in a nation where women have been navigating sexual violence.

Jennie Burnet’s ethnographic work on sexual violence in Rwanda establishes some of the complexities that one must confront in thinking through the discourse of sexuality during the nation’s long years of violence. Among other things, her argument focused on the different

manifestations of sexual violence in Rwanda before, during and even after the genocide. She explains that although sexual violence manifests in several ways during the genocide against Tutsi women and girls, which include “forced marriage to rape to sexual torture to mutilation,” however, the several years of conflict in the nation “were characterized high rates of sexual violence as well as militarized sex...” (98). Also important is the fact that “[m]any Hutu women and girls” were also victims of sexual violence during the genocide, and “unknown number of Rwandan women and girls of all ethnicities were pressured into sexual relationships with RPF soldiers after they reached the safety of internally displaced persons camps in RPF-held territory” (98). Burnet’s work makes the persistence of sexual violence clear, and this violence articulates the victimhood of sexual violence only along ethnic lines. Appropriately, her argument about sexual violence—which implicates the Hutu genocide perpetrators and also the RPF forces—indicates that a gendered perspective to narrating the Rwandan violence will expand on the ethnic conception which often solely defines who is a victim.

Despite the women’s tortuous experiences of sexual violence during the conflicts in Rwanda, women’s agency and resistance enabled their survival; they were not reducible to mere powerless subjects who wielded little or no control over her own sexuality. Burnet emphasizes that reductionist approaches that classify sexual violence only from the perspective of rape may be significant in directing attention to the woeful plight of women and girls, but they are also harmful because they do not always represent the attempts of women to claim their own agency even in the crisis:

Conflating all forms of sex in conflict zones as harm undermines women’s and children’s rights because it reinforces “conservative hierarchies of gender and sexuality” and diverts attention from the searing poverty that characterizes transitional post-conflict societies.”

Obscuring the complexity of sexual encounters in the context of violent conflict—whether these encounters are violent, coercive, transactional, voluntary, labor, or pleasurable—denies women’s agency. It also ignores the reality that initiating sexual encounters can be a coping strategy in the aftermath of conflict and violence (99).

In essence a discourse on sexual violence in times of conflict should not be reduced to an approach to only sympathize with the victims; rather it ought to recognize how women negotiate their own sexual practices in situations of coercion and even violence. As Venetia demonstrates, victims of sexual and gendered violence assert their own agency and resilience via reclaiming sexuality.

Stassen clearly demonstrates this in his graphic novel where sexuality is conflated with animality to present a complex view of feminine agency through sexuality and a unique Rwandan history of the genocide. Venetia, the mother of Apollinaria and Benina, demonstrates this victim agency the most in the graphic novel. Venetia is first seen in the graphic novel in Hotel Umusambi where she turns down the request of Deogratias to have sex with her despite the fact that he has some money which he stole in order to pay her (3-4). Venetia’s rejection takes place before the start of the genocide. Framing the past for the first time in the novel, Venetia’s tale captures the negotiation and reclamation of her body. In the frame, we see Venetia in a brothel along with other women and a man speaking to one of the women. Deogratias approaches the entrance of the brothel, calls Venetia and shows her how much he has in an attempt to have her agree to have sex with him. This framing of the past in the graphic novel which concentrates on sexuality follows directly after the turn of discussion between the Frenchman and Deogratias focused on the same topic. But beyond focusing on the same topic, Hotel Umusambi where the conversation is ongoing in the present is the same place where the

recourse to the past returns to. Essentially, what Stassen creates is a discourse of sexuality that is tied to a place and exists across time—before and after the genocide. Hotel Umusambi becomes a site of memory that triggers the remembering of the specifics of sexual negotiation and the idea of the commodification and victimization of the feminine body. After the Frenchman mentions how he “managed to find ... this little bombshell [referring to a woman]; you’re going to see her... I told her to meet me here [Hotel Umusambi]” (3), the panel focuses in quite a close capture on Deogratias’ eyeballs as he stares into the past. Being triggered to remember the past by the words, “I told her to meet me here” amplifies how ‘here’—Hotel Umusambi—becomes not only a narrative of place but also that of the history sexual violence associated with both the present and the past. However, Venetia’s decision to reject Deogratias’ offer goes contrary to what would be seen as her continuous presence in the brothel portends. Instead of accepting Deogratias’ offer she takes a stern position by questioning where Deogratias gets the money he wants to use from. Her questioning makes Deogratias run away. Therefore, what Venetia does in this scene is not only to assert her agency over her body, she is also able to reprimand someone who should have been in the position of dictating how she ought to use her body. What this scenario creates is precisely a sense of role reversal where the victim trumps the social construction dictated by the violence during Civil War in Rwanda which ought to render her powerless.

While it cannot be denied that Venetia indeed trades her body to men, her use of sexuality which is not one from which she cannot reclaim the right to her own body should be seen from the position of transactional sexuality. According to Mark Hunter, “women approach transactional relations not as passive victims, but in order to access power and resources in ways both challenge and reproduce patriarchal structures” (105). This is precisely the position of

Venetia who although rejects Deogratias, is seen to have sexual relations with a military official in Rwanda (19). After one of their encounters, Venetia requests a favor from the man to allow her daughter Benina take college classes, a favor she says would be last one. However, the man tries to refuse by reminding her about the ethnic quotas put in place by administration of President Juvenal Habyarimana. However, after a little more prodding the man agrees to “see what [he] can do” (20). Apart from the military man, Venetia engages in sexual relations with the Frenchman, when he was still in Rwanda as a soldier. The panels Venetia is seen with the Frenchman is immediately after several panels where she just refused Augustine’s, a Twa and her childhood friend, marriage proposal. Prior to the arrival of the French soldier, Augustine tells Venetia that he wants to marry her, but she simply makes fun of his proposal before her children who are present at the scene. To really emphasize his point, Augustine says how “it hurts me to see what you have to do to raise Benina and Apollinaria. With my salary I’d be perfectly able to provide for all of us” (30). Augustine offers to marry Venetia in order to help her with the financial capacity she needs to raise her daughters. Accepting his proposal would limit Venetia’s sole responsibility of catering for her family—a responsibility she has every right to hold on to. Moreover, marrying Augustine will also be a way of reproducing patriarchal ideals in a nation whose descent into violence has already been dictated by men. Even more, within the social and political setting of Rwanda, Augustine being a Twa and groundskeeper, offers no real security—financial, political or ethnic.

The building where Venetia’s rejection of Augustine and acceptance of the French soldier significant takes place is important. “FRARWA LAC” is conspicuously written on the building. The portmanteau, “FRARWA”, constructed from the first three words of France and Rwanda respectively, indicates the strong bilateral relationship between France and Rwanda at the time of

President Habyarimana's reign. This bit of visual evidence again emphasizes that the historical context that the action takes place is the period before the start of the genocide. Here again, the past is presented as a transition into the present seen from the Deogratias' perspective. The panel that transitions into the past only captures his legs as he walks, in the present, in front of the gate of the same building. Structured similarly to the early parts of the graphic novel, a specific place—this time the gated house—becomes the trigger for the remembrance of the past and this time, that past is also permeated with the sexualized discourse and imagery with Venetia again being the center of attention. Against this consistent pattern established by Stassen, the graphic novel narratives of men's projection onto and desire for Venetia, while she navigated choices in situations of extreme restraint in specific places and across different temporalities.

Therefore, Venetia's preference to decline both Deogratias and Augustine is her way of exercising her agency over her body, while her relationship with the military man and the French soldier shows how she uses transactional sex and her understanding of masculine sexuality to maintain full responsibility of her family. During an altercation with her daughter, Benina, Venetia fully explains why she decided to take up transactional sex:

what do you think, Benina? That I chose the life I had? That I was glad to lose my mother and leave for another country? When the two of you were born, I had to feed you!...

When we came back here, of course I'd have preferred to grow bananas and beans! But our plot of land had been stolen! All I did, I did for you! And all I do is still for you! How else do you think you were able to go to college, study your books, become somebody?

(42)

The reference to the loss of her mother and her subsequent fleeing to another country (the then Zaire) refers to the period when several Tutsi were killed in the 1970s and had to run for their

lives. This passage highlights how consistent violence and ethnic politics led to the deprivation of resources that forced several women into trading their bodies in order to survive. Against this background, what Venetia is able to achieve through transactional sex demonstrates her ability to challenge and manipulate the structures created by political administrations and violence.

Although she is victimized by gendered violence and position, Venetia's uses of her understanding of masculine sexuality and men's hyper-sexualization of her body to negotiate her agency. In doing this, she represents not just a mere victim of sexual violence.

### **Rape, animality and the abject present of the genocide**

Venetia's precarious agency is wholly shattered during the genocide when she is raped, mutilated and killed during the genocide (74). Venetia's death is hinted in the early pages of the graphic novel through the symbol of a bug and reference to dogs eating corpses (5). After the panel where Venetia rejects Deogratias' sexual advances before the genocide, the graphic novel returns to post-genocide Rwanda in the present and to the conversation between the Frenchman and Deogratias. The latter asks Deogratias if he remembers Venetia, but when he asks this question, neither his face nor that of Deogratias is shown, the focus of the panel was on a bug on the table where they are drinking. The panel that follows is a close shot that images the Frenchman and Deogratias looking at the bug on the table, and in response to the Frenchman's question, Deogratias speaks for the first time in the graphic novel and his word, while his face focuses on the bug, is simply, "Venetia..." (5). Suggestively, the bug symbolizes Venetia because that is the image the graphic novel focuses on when she is asked to be remembered. In other words, to remember Venetia becomes coterminous with remembering an animal, a bug. At the same time, that Deogratias' first word was Venetia shows how his present state of trauma is in a way connected to her. The next panel is an aerial shot that and here the Frenchman raises a

fist in the attempt to crush the bug as he says, “Damn bugs” (5), but Deogratias responds saying “No!” (5), using one hand to defend the animal while the other is slightly above his mouth ajar with fear.

Ong’s view that, “[t]he tension created by the interaction of word and image in the association of Venetia, a Tutsi woman, with the cockroach, echoes the overwrought animal language used to describe the Tutsi during the genocide” (220), explains the panels in light of a historical reality in Rwanda before and during the genocide. However, in this case animality is not just a symbol for the Tutsi, but also of defilement with female’s bodies which prompts the reference to Venetia demonstrates how negotiating sexuality does not necessarily offer any protection to women. This is reflected in the panel where Venetia’s lifeless body is on the floor; her head split, and her legs are apart showing a bloodied bottle placed just in front of her equally bloodied vagina (74). This image is one of the most excruciating and explicit representations of the rape during the genocide. The image gives credence to the graphic novel’s representation of the different ways women were killed during the genocide where “Perpetrators mutilated women during the rapes or before killing them by cutting off their breasts, puncturing the vagina with sharp objects, or disfiguring their body parts that looked “Tutsi”...” (Burnet 108, Des Forges 215). After Venetia is raped, mutilated and killed, Venetia’s body is eaten by dogs. After stopping the Frenchman from killing the bug, Deogratias says, “The dogs... They’re eating the corpses...” (5).

Although Venetia’s daughters, Benina and Apollinaria, are also raped and killed, their experience with sexuality contrasts their mothers. The two sisters are wooed by Deogratias, but only Benina agrees to have sex with him. Unlike Benina, Apollinaria maintains a conservative position about sex, she rejects claims to sexual desires and warns Benina against having

consensual sex with Deogratias (48). It was while Benina was still in Deogratias' room after they had sex that the genocide breaks out. He hides her in his room for two days, but she later finds her way out by unscrewing the door. After escaping she finds her sister, Apollinaria, and they both had to hide in the latrines. Exhausted and hungry, they come out of their hiding and met an armed militia group headed by Julius, a group Deogratias was a part of. They also see their dead mother before they are eventually raped and killed.

Deogratias' interest in Tutsi women is arguably as a result of his internalization of the colonialist's sexualized gaze. According to Burnett, "Since colonial times, Tutsi (or Watussi) women were heralded as great beauties by European colonizers. Beauty as a marker of Tutsi-ness was so strong in the popular imagination that Hutu women and girls who were considered beautiful risked being mistaken for Tutsi and raped, sexually tortured, or even killed" (109). Thus, the colonialists created a notion of beauty and feminine sexualization that made Tutsi women more sexually desirable. However, Deogratias interest not only in Tutsi women but the biracial one, Apollinaria, complicates this notion of Tutsi women's beauty further. Although he is generally interested in Venetia, Benina and Apollinaria, Deogratias is even more specifically interested in Apollinaria. Deogratias woos Apollinaria first but she rejects his advances (14). After this rejection, he shifts his attention to Benina who accepts his advances. However, Deogratias goes back to Apollinaria, and not only tells her that they should "make love", but also insists that it is Apollinaria he loves (39). Deogratias' choice reflects a sexualized hierarchy that places a biracial Tutsi woman ahead of a black-skinned one. This sexualized hierarchy also shows when Deogratias and the militia men rape Benina and Apollinaria. Speaking about the rape, Julius says: "...The black one [Benina], Deogratias had already fucked her, so he left her to us. But the mulatta, he kept her pussy for himself. That's the kinda guy Deogratias is: he likes

refined stuff” (71). The idea that Apollinaria is a “refined stuff” underlies a sexualized hierarchy that makes a biracial subject more sexually desirable and also, implicitly suggests Deogratias’ performance of hypermasculinity.

After Venetia and her daughters are killed, their bodies are eaten by dogs. Killing the dogs marks the finality of the three females lives whose memory will have little or no traces, not their dead bodies nor the dogs that fed on them. Seeing what the dogs did as well as the dogs being killed makes Deogratias upset and loose his senses. However, for him to be upset with the dogs and those who killed the animals is a way of denying his own responsibility in raping them. Therefore, the entrance of animality is the moment of disavowal of guilt in the graphic novel. His transformation into a dog along with the poisoning of the Frenchman, Julius and Bosco are all attempts at disavowal and shifting his culpability in the death of Venetia, Benina and Apollinaria.

His transformation into a dog also means he becomes incapable of remembering the victims. He suggests this when he says, “I’m only a dog! It wasn’t a confession” (76) after he narrates the events about the death of the three women to Philip. Although, it is possible to suggest that being a dog means he was forced to “eat” the women too especially if we follow the position that animals are subject their demands in the present. Indeed, Deogratias suggests this when he tells Augustine that “they forced [him to rape and kill the women], don’t you see” (71). However, this position is not consistent with his retelling of the story to the Philip, where he does not claim responsibility only for the death Augustine (69-70). He accepts his culpability in the death of the women as well as the Frenchman, Bosco and Julius.

Deogratias also poisons Philip’s beer and tries to make him drink it forcefully (76). He is subsequently arrested at the end of the graphic novel after he fully transforms into a dog by

police officers because he “assassinated a French tourist [using] the product farmers use to fight parasites on cows’ hides (77). As it was in the beginning of the graphic novel where there was a meeting between a foreigner and Deogratias at Hotel Umusambi, the graphic novel also ends with a meeting between a foreigner, Belgian this time, and Deogratias in the same place.

Similarly, in the conversation at the end of the graphic novel, references are made to sexual violence and animality with Deogratias consistently repeating “the dogs were there... (73-75), and the flashback images of how dogs were shot by the RPF army. Moreover, cows are also mentioned in connection to the poison Deogratias used in killing. The graphic novel returns to the present and ends on a similar premise it started with but reflects how the present is only a continuation and combination of the past. It elucidates that the amplification of sexual violence and animality during the genocide is only an extension of a predominant practice in the nation’s history and several years of violence. It also indicates Rwanda’s foreign relations and how it has variously impacted on the nation. Although Philip is in Rwanda as a priest, he represents Belgium that introduced division in and use of the divisive identity cards when she colonized Rwanda.

Therefore, Deogratias’ success in killing the Frenchman and his attempt to poison Philip can be read as a bid to get rid of foreigners who have had quite exploitative and divisive impacts on Rwanda’s history. Although Philip does not die and his image is one of the four images in the final four panels of the graphic novel, the fact that everyone he used to associate with is either dead or has left him indicates there is little or nothing left for him to do in the nation. Apart from the image of Philip, Hotel Umusambi is one of the final images on last page of the graphic novel. vGiven quite a large panel in comparison to two other panels on the page, the hotel as has been mentioned before becomes a memorial site evocative of the narrative of sexual violence

perpetrated against women. Its existence at the end of the graphic novel is even more significant because there almost every trace and person who knew about Venetia, Apollinaria and Benina and their eventual end is dead. The brothel remains the cogent evidence of their existence and a testament to the associative history of sexuality and violence before, during and after the genocide in Rwanda.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The primary attempt of this research to explore a multi-perspectival approach to the representation of memory and genocide violence in postgenocide Rwanda was shaped by at least two reasons. The first is to identify the complexities inherent in memorializing and historicizing the Rwandan genocide by using the polar classifications: victims and killers. This project identified how the continuous use of these polar classifications in the history of the genocide is politically motivated as it primarily shaped by the Rwandan government. Therefore, part of what this work has identified is how literary representations of the genocide problematizes this polarity, and in doing so become counternarratives to the official narratives of genocide. The second reason is to focus on comparatively less represented genres and participants in the genocide. In this regard, this thesis studied how sexuality and animality can be used to memorialize and historicize the Rwandan genocide. In addition, it uses the graphic novel to study the representation of sexual violence and animality during the Rwandan genocide. In studying sexuality, the research argued that the simplification of every sexual violence during the genocide solely to rape downplays the agency of women and other ways sexual violence was perpetrated against women. Furthermore, it established the relationship between sexuality and animality and analyzes how both have been a fundamental part of the history of violence in Rwanda. Because of the way it concurrently visualizes and narrates the history of the genocide,

the graphic novel was effectively productive in studying sexual violence and animality by giving visual evidences to women's sufferings and violence as well those of the animals.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I analyzed the Boubacar Diop's *Murambi: The Book of Bones* where I interrogated the boundaries between victims and killers in both human and nonhuman animals. The chapter pointed to the centrality of memorial sites in the memorialization of the genocide in Rwanda but also identifies how these sites are themselves tools used by the government to amplify their own narrative of the genocide. Therefore, it analyzes how the novel, *Murambi*, although narrates the slaughter in one of the memorial sites, resists telling the history of the genocide from the perspective of a memorial site which only implicates the killers. Rather, the novel uses the site as a touchstone to tell the history of violence in Rwanda. In telling this history, it shows how the complexity in identifying who is a victim and who is a killer. The chapter also explained the references to animals and their involvement in the genocide and both victims and killers. Following the complex and expansive narrative of the history of violence and genocide the novel creates, the chapter argued that the novel itself subsequently becomes a genocide memorial.

The second chapter studies Gilbert Gatore's *The Past Ahead* and emphasizes the idea of the palimpsest of memory by reading the palimpsest as a metaphor for the visibility and invisibility of violence and narrative. It situates how the concept of the palimpsest can help us apprehend the various manifestations of erasures and silence in the novel and how this can impede a catholic representation of why the genocide happened. It also interrogates the challenges inherent in a narrative that discusses the representation of the killers as victims but shows how it might be necessary to also understand a killers perspective of the genocide without. This chapter raises further questions which include how one can interrogate literary

representations of Hutu victims during the genocide. Most literary representations and analysis focus mainly on Tutsi victims, which were no doubt the most affected during the genocide. However, there were also Hutus who were killed alongside Tutsis during the genocide. This raises the question of how appropriately it is to categorize these Hutus as victims. Furthermore, because of the chapter's focus on reading the palimpsest as a metaphor, it excluded a materialist reading of the concept. Therefore, what further studies can undertake is a more expansive reading of the palimpsest that focuses on the metaphor but also material and the textuality.

The research focused on the question of sexual violence and animality in Jean-Philip Stassen's graphic novel, *Deogratias* in the third and final chapter of the thesis. It identifies the ways sexualized gaze and animality have been used to define Rwanda's identity before, during and after the genocide. It reflects the how the history of violence intricately subsumes that of sexualized images of women's bodies, women agency and animality in Rwanda, thereby showing how women and animals have been fundamental actants in Rwanda's violence and genocide history. In addition, it identifies the multiple perspectives that that may be used to define sexual violence during the genocide in such a way that does not undermine the agency of women as well as their suffering before, during and after the genocide. It builds on the analysis of animality in the first chapter and establishes the nuances involved in classifying the animal subject as a participant in the discourse of Rwanda's identity. Among others, this chapter highlights how a more detailed studies on gender and sexual violence in Rwanda can add further perspectives to the understanding of the genocide, especially the experiences of women. Indeed, Rwanda's long history of violence and the genocide's narrative is male dominated, leaving the participation of women into fringes. Women were also participants in the genocide as perpetrators, killers and victims. Therefore, the need for a gendered approach to studying the

genocide becomes necessary so as to amplify the role of women during the genocide. The same thing can be said about the role of animals in Rwanda. From their importance in the categorization of the different ethnic groups in Rwanda, to how they shaped the nations economy and subsequently how they are used both symbolically and literally as participants in the genocide, animality in Rwanda is a copious discourse that is inextricable in the history of Rwanda. Finally, the third chapter elucidates how graphic novels and other visual cultures can be effectively used to study the genocide.

However, beyond the further areas of exploration that have been highlighted, one the most prevalent issues this research discussed is the role of commemorations in the production and erasure of knowledge about the Rwandan genocide. Commemorations are, as this research has indicated several times, systems of knowledge production and restriction. Thus, studying commemorations as performance—its narratives and contradictions, its actors and audiences, the processes and props—and as an event that embodies Rwandan reality can become useful in understanding violence, and also literary representations about the violence in Rwanda.

That said, this research, restricting itself to the two reasons it sought to discuss, has demonstrated how genocide studies and violence generally continues to instigate intellectual interest. The complexities inherent in almost every event of mass atrocity exemplifies the impossibility of fully understanding why people find reasons to treat others with excruciating pain. Literary representations in their capacity contribute to this desire to comprehend violence and evil, but the challenge to this undertaking still remains how effectively do you describe what is evasive. The analysis in this work have suggested nuanced ways writers use to confront this challenge. While I will not suggest that these are the best ways to represent violence or state the texts analyzed here are without representational faults, what I have done is to modestly

participate in the continuous intellectual struggle to really understand why the genocide happened and why have these authors written about it the way they did? It is a question that others will return to, probably, ad infinitum.

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