

“Rwanda cannot be exorcised”: Representations
of the Trauma of the Rwandan Genocide in
Selected Films and Novels

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To Lydia Owen

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Abstract

Although the Rwandan genocide (*itsembabwoko* in Kinyarwanda) has often been compared with the Holocaust, in terms of literary and cinematic narratives it has been largely underrepresented, with the notable exception of the release of the films *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) and *Sometimes in April* (2005), as well as novels such as Gil Courtemanche's *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali* (2003). However, although there is now a larger oeuvre of works on the subject, they are often not widely known or disseminated beyond their countries of origin. Of even greater concern is the fact that most cinematic narratives on *itsembabwoko* rely on Western narrative structures in their approach to storytelling. As a result, trauma in these narratives largely tends to focus on the experiences of Western protagonists or on Rwandan protagonists from a Western point of view. This tendency can be tied to the use of Western trauma theory in exploring the effects of the genocide on its witnesses and survivors, at the expense of arguably more relevant postcolonial trauma theory. This presents a problem in theorising the trauma of *itsembabwoko*, which occurred in a highly specific historical context involving the processes of colonization and decolonization, and in which the difficulties in unifying a population which had been split along socio-economic lines since pre-colonial times remained unresolved. Despite its shortcomings in the postcolonial African context, it would be a mistake to dismiss Yale trauma theory entirely, however, since theorists such as Cathy Caruth still provide valuable insights into the effects of trauma on both the individual and the collective. As a result, I have sought to find commonalities between the two schools of thought, so as to create a more nuanced view of *itsembabwoko*, its repercussions and the violence preceding it.

In writing this thesis, I have selected mostly Rwandan authors, often survivors of the genocide, whose works provide an alternative view of Rwanda's violent history to that presented in the works mentioned above. Given that the majority of the texts I focus on have been released more recently – mostly the mid-2010s – and are less well-known than their Western counterparts, they provide the opportunity to compare first-hand accounts with those that can only partially recreate the terror of anti-Tutsi violence in Rwanda. My analysis hopefully provides a new perspective on the dominant narratives which have shaped the way in which non-Rwandan (predominantly Western) audiences understand the genocide. The overall aim of this thesis, then, is to demonstrate the importance of placing the genocide and its resultant trauma in a broader historical context, with a view to establishing that it is short-sighted to ignore the impact of pre- and post-genocide trauma on the Rwandan people when

discussing *itsembabwoko*. Though this has been achieved in socio-historical studies, such as Mahmood Mamdani's *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, very little has been produced on literary and cinematic representations of the genocide.

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Introduction

The Genocide in Fiction, Film and Memoir

The Rwandan genocide, although generally well-known, has not generated as much interest from Western writers and filmmakers as, for example, the Holocaust. Moreover, most of the Rwandan genocide literature that does exist has been published in French, making it less accessible to Anglophone readers and, while some works have been translated into English, this often only occurs years after the original French texts appeared. In South Africa, it is difficult to find copies of these translated texts locally: speaking from personal experience, for example, the only way I could source an English version of Yolande Mukagasana's *Not My Time to Die* was through a lecturer with family living in Rwanda. The book thus travelled from Rwanda to Uganda before finally arriving in South Africa. Of the texts I discuss in this thesis, only two are readily available in (selected) South African bookstores. In addition, whilst there are a number of narrative films on *itsembabwoko*, they contain little in the way of eye-witness testimony and the voices of Rwandans themselves. Thus, some of these films – like *Hotel Rwanda* – have raised questions as to the validity of non-Rwandan accounts of the genocide. It is these gaps in literature on *itsembabwoko* that I aim to explore in this thesis. In particular, I focus on the use of a number of different narrative genres – memoir, film and fiction – to examine how different forms of literature can broaden our understanding of the trauma associated with *itsembabwoko*. While memoirs are valuable for their eye-witness accounts, their true value lies in the access to the author's responses that they provide. Scholastique Mukasonga, for example, writes raw and honest accounts of her emotional suffering in the wake of the events of the 1960s and the genocide. As readers, we gain insight – albeit limited – into the emotional suffering that the genocide causes for survivors, a form of intimacy not obtainable through historical texts. This is not to suggest that we are granted understanding of the sufferer's trauma, which remains largely unspeakable, but we are better able to empathise with them despite never having been through such an experience ourselves. Films on the genocide, although generally made by non-Rwandans, allow us to visualise the events that produce the trauma itself. Such visualisation works to make history more accessible to the general public, although we must be careful to interrogate the fallibility of the cinematic narrative. Viewing films which claim to be based on a true story requires the audience to contemplate the subjectivity of representations and the ways in which a director's intentions may impact on the representation of events. Films therefore add to the narrative of

trauma while still encouraging the audience to question the construction of such narratives, particularly by filmmakers with no personal experience of the events they attempt to portray. Films and novels further provide opportunities to find new ways of telling the same narrative. Such creative license allows writers to highlight different aspects of the same history, thus altering the audience's perspective or bringing to light previously neglected narratives. In doing so, we are granted new ways in which to interact with a subject that we may believe we know well. I would argue that this is particularly true of the Rwandan genocide, because explanations of its eruption tend to focus only on the events of 1994, thereby giving us the – incorrect – belief that it was a brief anomaly in the country's history. Novelists like the Rwandan Gilbert Gatore, however, encourage us to look beyond these temporal boundaries as well as beyond the physical boundaries of Rwanda itself in order to better grasp the scope of trauma generated by the genocide and its impact on those on either side of the victim/perpetrator division. I believe that the works I have chosen to examine encourage their audiences to emotionally engage with Rwanda's violent history from independence to the present day in a manner which not only contextualises and humanises the genocide, but also provides fresh perspectives on trauma and its representation.

My goal, then, is to examine not just the genocide itself, but also the events of the 1960s and the aftermath of 1994 as represented by predominantly Rwandan authors. Too often, popular representations of *itsembabwoko* depict only the violence and trauma of April to July of 1994, giving the impression that the genocide was a spontaneous outburst of ethnic violence. It is necessary, however, to place the genocide in its proper historical context not only for educational purposes, but also to acknowledge the trauma that preceded – and followed – it. Films like *Hotel Rwanda* often suggest that *itsembabwoko* ended with the RPF victory in Kigali, and that this successfully brought an end to the civil war and the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Tutsis. They also suggest that, while the genocide may have been traumatic, that trauma also came to an end with the RPF takeover. However, works like Gatore's *The Past Ahead* (2008) and the journalist Jean Hatzfeld's series of interviews in *The Strategy of the Antelopes* (2009) refute this view by showing the ways in which survivors – both victims and perpetrators – have continued to experience genocide-related trauma for years afterwards. Even Mukasonga, who was not present during the genocide, finds herself still suffering from the traumatic events of her childhood in 1960s Rwanda. The aim of this thesis, then, is to trace literary and cinematic representations of Rwanda's post-independence history from the violence of the 1960s, through the bloodshed of the genocide, to the supposed reunification of the current day. In doing so, I will closely examine the following

works: Mukasonga's memoirs – *Cockroaches* (2016) and *The Barefoot Woman* (2018) – and novel, *Our Lady of the Nile* (2014); Edouard Kayihura's *Inside the Hotel Rwanda* (2014) and Terry George's film *Hotel Rwanda* (2004); and Gatore's *The Past Ahead* (2008). I have selected these particular texts because they represent the progression of Rwanda's violent history. Beginning with Mukasonga's works, I lay out the early history of independent Rwanda, exploring the ways in which the events of the 1960s came to inform the violence of 1994. From there, I focus on the genocide itself from the perspective of Western filmmakers and eye-witness accounts. Finally, I examine the lasting effects of trauma on those who survived the genocide.

While some non-Rwandan texts and films, such as *Hotel Rwanda*, end with the RPF take-over of Kigali, it must be acknowledged that the trauma of such a cataclysmic event continues long after the event itself has ended. Roger Luckhurst, for example, writes about post-traumatic stress disorder which often causes the sufferer to relive or re-experience the traumatic event even when it is over (1). Although Luckhurst's analysis of trauma and its lasting effects refers to the experiences of Vietnam War veterans in the United States, his observations are applicable to other traumatic events such as *itsembabwoko* as well. For example, the continued presence of trauma after a major stressor such as genocide often appears in the form of "intrusive flashbacks, recurring dreams, or later situations that repeat or echo the original" (Luckhurst 1), a view evinced by other theorists such as Cathy Caruth. Élisabeth Combres provides an especially good example of this in her novel *Broken Memory*, in which the protagonist – Emma – relives the night of her mother's murder. The narrator describes her cowering against a wall as a convoy of Hutu prisoners passes through her village: "Then, just as she had done that night, she took shelter against a nearby wall, crouching down and burying her head in her arms" (39-40). Emma also experiences a recurring nightmare as a result of her childhood trauma (Combres 55). To forget that the trauma of the genocide extends into the years – indeed decades – following it is to undermine the continued suffering of survivors and fails to accurately contextualise the event itself. For this reason, my study combines postcolonial trauma theory together with the more traditional Yale theories, despite the fact that the latter do not always fully capture the postcolonial African perspective.

Chapter One will outline the historical context of the Rwandan genocide and then focus on the theory underpinning my thesis by exploring the arguments of writers such as Stef Craps, Caruth and Irene Visser. In Chapter Two, I explore Mukasonga's writings, which detail her childhood experiences as a Tutsi in Rwanda in the 1960s. Through her work, I aim

to demonstrate the ways in which the early years of Rwandan independence not only paved the way for the genocide, but also, and more importantly, constitute traumatic events in their own right. I will also compare her novel *Our Lady of the Nile* with Atiq Rahimi's 2019 film of the same name. Chapter Three is devoted to the genocide itself, and contrasts the story of Paul Rusesabagina as portrayed in the 2004 film *Hotel Rwanda* with Kayihura's eye-witness account in his memoir *Inside the Hotel Rwanda: The Surprising True Story...and Why it Matters Today*. This chapter focuses not only on the events of the genocide, but also on the way in which narratives may be distorted to suit a particular agenda. Finally, Chapter Four explores Gatore's *The Past Ahead*, in which we are presented with the twin narratives of Isaro, a Tutsi victim, and Niko, a Hutu perpetrator. The aim of this chapter is to examine the lasting effects of the genocide on survivors and the complexity of applying the labels 'victim' and 'perpetrator' – another issue which most non-indigenous works on *itsembabwoko* fail to address. Furthermore, the genocide has historically been described in binary terms: Hutu versus Tutsi, indigenous versus non-indigenous. However, employing these binaries and the perpetrator versus victim trope occurs at the cost of the real-world complexities of defining people in this way. Gatore's book also demonstrates an alternative way of creating narratives around the genocide and personal reactions to its lingering trauma.

In conclusion, my goal is to explore the ways in which the Rwandan genocide and its associated trauma have been portrayed in literary and cinematic texts. While it is undeniable that some works provide more historically accurate or in-depth representations of *itsembabwoko*, it is not my aim to judge these works according to such parameters. Rather, I explore their ability to express the trauma of the genocide and the methods by which they do so.

Chapter 1

Historical Context and Theoretical Framework

This chapter focuses on placing the genocide within its broader historical context, beginning with Rwanda's independence and the rise of the extremist Hutu Power movement in the 1960s, and then moving to the civil war of the 1990s and the genocide itself. It culminates with the aftermath of the genocide, including the actions of the RPF in the wake of its regaining of political power. The chapter further delves into the trauma theory on which my thesis is based.

1.1.1 The Road to Genocide

In order to better understand the Rwandan genocide of 1994, it is necessary to examine its historical background. Of particular importance here is the anti-Tutsi violence of the 1960s, as well as the ideology which informed this violence. During the period of Belgian colonisation from 1916 to 1961, Rwanda's Tutsi minority occupied a complex space in Rwandan society. The country's Belgian colonisers believed they were foreigners who had migrated to Rwanda. Some scholars maintain that the Tutsi moved into Rwanda from North East Africa, possibly from the southern regions of Ethiopia (Mamdani 47), whereas certain physical anthropologists think that East Africa is more likely to be the original homeland of the Tutsi. Jean Hiernaux, for example, argues that the Tutsis' elongated features suggest a genetic permutation in order to survive in the arid climate in the North of sub-Saharan Africa (Mamdani 47-48). No matter what their origins might be, under Belgian rule Rwanda's Tutsis were considered African and were therefore still considered colonial subjects (Mamdani 27).¹ As a result of their supposedly nonindigenous status and their more 'European' physiognomy, however, Tutsis were given a certain degree of power over the majority Hutu, whom the Belgians considered to be indigenous inhabitants.² Tutsis could, for example, work as junior clerks, thus occupying minor roles in the administration of the country (Mamdani 27). This 'inclusivity' was part of the Belgian policy of indirect rule and was meant to create an administrative system that would allow the Tutsi to take over the government of Rwanda once the country became fully independent. In his pre-eminent account of the genocide,

¹ The third group, the Twa, was largely ignored.

² The categories of indigenous and non-indigenous are based on the broader colonial classifications of Bantu and Hamite, respectively. Here Bantu refers to groups who speak a Bantu language, while Hamite is a relic of the Hamitic myth which divided Africans into 'Hamitic' and 'Negroid' peoples.

When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda, Mahmood Mamdani argues that, under Belgian rule, Rwandan Tutsis constituted a subject race and were “*virtual citizens*, deprived of the rights of citizenship, yet considered to have the potential of becoming full citizens” (27). They were therefore both victims and beneficiaries of the colonial project. As a Bantu people, the Hutu majority, meanwhile, were considered indigenous Rwandans: as a subject ethnicity they were “the core victims of colonial rule” (Mamdani 27). Mamdani sums up the difference between race and ethnicity in colonial Rwanda thus:

In the African colonies, only “natives” were said to belong to ethnic groups. “Nonnatives” were identified as races. While ethnicities were said to be indigenous, races were presumed to be nonindigenous. Ethnicity was said to mark an *internal* difference among those constructed by colonial law as indigenous to the land. Race marked an *external* difference, a difference with others, those legally constructed as nonindigenous. Through its discourse on race and ethnicity, the colonial state tried to *naturalize* political differences, not only between the colonizer and the colonized, but also – and this is the important point here – between two kinds of colonized: those indigenous and those not. (27).

He elaborates further:

The language of race turned around the distinction “indigenous/alien”: a racial difference could only be with foreigners, whereas an ethnic difference was with locals. As “race” was said to distinguish the indigenous from the nonindigenous, “ethnicity” was said to separate different groups among the indigenous. As such, the political distinction between a minority and a majority could only be relevant within the same ethnic domain. As a race, the Tutsi were not a political minority; they were politically foreign, as it were, resident aliens. Only the indigenous – ethnic groups – could rightly belong, fully, to both civil and political society. Those classified as nonindigenous would be seen and treated as civil beings, with limitations (discrimination) depending on context, but never as political beings. (135)

The racialisation of the Tutsi identity was underpinned by two institutions meant to promote Tutsi power and further oppress Hutus: the schooling system and, as mentioned earlier, local administration. The former, in particular, was used as a means of elevating Tutsis above their Hutu counterparts. Mamdani writes that: “Of the two, the creation of a school system that could act as a womb of racial ideology was a priority” (89). It was thus used by Belgians, with the aid of the Catholic Church, to further entrench the notion of the Tutsi as a race, occupying both the position of civilising influence and non-indigenous other (Mamdani 89). This ideology was evident in the type of education available to Hutus and Tutsis,

respectively. While Tutsis were given a 'superior' education which readied them for administrative positions in government, Hutus received a basic education that would only prepare them for work as manual labourers (Mamdani 89-90). Indeed, educational opportunities were largely reserved for Tutsi children.

The existence of a Tutsi elite who viewed their power over the Hutu as customary gave rise to a Hutu counter-elite, which was able to tap into the dissatisfaction of the Hutu peasantry and so gain support for a Hutu-led Rwanda (Mamdani 106). This Hutu counter-elite paved the way for the creation of a Hutu nationalist movement, which viewed the Tutsis as a non-indigenous minority who had usurped the right to rule from the indigenous Hutu majority. Hutu consciousness developed in stages, but by the 1950s it had become "the consciousness of a people reaching for power" (Mamdani 117). The Hutu revolutionary movement was helped by a shift in the Roman Catholic Church's policies post-World War II. Unlike their predecessors, clergymen travelling to Rwanda in this period were both more democratic and more sympathetic towards the Hutu masses. As a result, the educational opportunities for Hutus increased (although job opportunities outside of the Church did not), leading to the creation of a Hutu intelligentsia who made use of church publications to air the grievances of their people:

Literally shut out of jobs in the civil service and the private sector, they looked at their new positions not just as ways of making a living but also as opportunities to articulate their major social grievance: the institutionalized exclusion of Hutu from a Belgian-supported Tutsi monopoly over all avenues of social advancement. (Mamdani 114)

These Hutu-run publications catered to a Hutu audience and can be viewed as precursors to news outlets like Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) and the newspaper *Kangura*, both of which were used to spread anti-Tutsi propaganda before and during the genocide. Moreover, Belgian support for Rwanda's Tutsi minority began to waver in 1959 with the formation of the pro-monarchist Union Nationale Rwandaise (UNAR) party. UNAR's policies were anti-colonial and anti-missionary, and the party demanded immediate independence from Belgium (Eltringham 35). The growing rift between the Belgians and their Tutsi apprentices paved the way for the formation of Hutu social and political groups that set about championing the Hutu cause and, eventually, wresting political power from their Tutsi counterparts.

The 1950s were a time of major upheaval in Rwandan society and particularly in its political structures and aspirations. After the Second World War ended, calls for independence in many African colonies grew louder and Rwanda was no exception. Under

Belgian administration, the country was a UN trust territory and the process of decolonisation began in 1952 with a series of electoral reforms (Mamdani 114). Many of these were aimed at setting Tutsi and Hutu on a more equal footing – for example, doing away with the patron-client system which had been set up in pre-colonial Rwanda and was similar to the feudalism of medieval Europe. Under this programme, Hutu peasants performed manual labour for their Tutsi patrons as a form of ‘payment’ for occupying their land. Termed *ubureetwa* in Kinyarwanda, it was adopted under the reign of King Rwabugiri (Mamdani 66). The reforms to this system initiated in the fifties often failed to live up to their full potential, however (Mamdani 114-115). For the Tutsis, independence meant taking over the ruling of Rwanda from the Belgians, given their belief that they had traditionally been groomed to be the country’s overseers. Hutus, meanwhile, pushed back against this idea, mobilised by a growing Hutu elite that was determined to see a fully independent Rwanda under the control of the majority Hutu people. This idea of Hutu Power was derived from the belief that “the Rwandan nation is Hutu and, therefore, power in an independent Rwanda must also be Hutu” (Mamdani 126). No event embodies this conviction more than the 1959 revolution, which was led by the Hutu elite and most notably Grégoire Kayibanda. As Mamdani explains, Hutu groups splintered into two factions, one accommodationist and the other exclusionist. The former sought to integrate the Hutu and Tutsi populations into one broad group – Rwandans. This is similar to President Paul Kagame’s proclaimed goal in contemporary Rwanda. The exclusionists, meanwhile, were prepared to tolerate Tutsis in Rwanda as long as they understood that they were a “resident alien minority” in a country governed by the indigenous Hutu majority (Mamdani 126). On the other side of the aisle were Tutsi politicians with similar ideas – that is to say either accommodationist or supportive of a Tutsi-run Rwanda (Mamdani 126). Hutu consciousness took decades to develop, but by 1952 it was well-established. Mamdani explains:

This development required a confluence of two movements: a genuinely popular movement of (Hutu) peasants against the local despotism of (Tutsi) chiefs; and, for the first time in the history of Rwanda, the emergence of a Hutu counterelite. Propelled center stage by a series of electoral contests, this counterelite put forth a program for the Hutu to seize power to overcome their identity as a subject people. (117)

The armed conflict between the Tutsi UNAR party and the Hutu Parti du Mouvement et d’Emancipation Hutu (PARMEHUTU) in late 1959 highlights the move from political to armed struggle in pre-independence Rwanda. PARMEHUTU was led by a group of Hutus, including Kayibanda who would later become the first president of independent Rwanda. In

November 1959, violence broke out between the militant wings of UNAR and PARMEHUTU after rumours spread that UNAR militants had attacked Dominique Mbonyumutwa, co-leader of PARMEHUTU along with Kayibanda (Mamdani 123). The attack sparked violence across the country, with Tutsis being targeted and their homes burned (Eltringham 35). A United Nations mission visiting Rwanda in 1960 estimated that at least two hundred people were killed as a result of this violence (Eltringham 39). In June and July of 1960, communal elections were held, with PARMEHUTU winning with a convincing 70.4 per cent of the votes. Kayibanda formed a “multiracial” provisional cabinet, but in reality PARMEHUTU meant to take full political control once the transition to independence was complete (Mamdani 127). The following year, the UN organised parliamentary elections for the country which PARMEHUTU again won by a margin of nearly 80 per cent. UNAR won 17 per cent (Mamdani 128). The country was now effectively politically divided between the two parties and their respective ethnic groups. Although there was an attempt at a formal coalition government that included UNAR’s constitutionalist faction, this lasted only eighteen months. In the meantime, Tutsi restorationists – who wished to undo the 1959 Revolution – held on to the “prospect of a return to power through armed exile action” (Mamdani 129). It was from this group of exiles that the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) would eventually be formed, and it was also this group that began smaller, localised raids into the country in the 1960s:

As the internal political process gathered momentum [...] anti-accommodation factions infiltrated small bands of armed guerrillas into border localities. Known as the *inyenzi*, or cockroaches, the armed guerrillas undertook as many as ten known raids into Rwanda. (Mamdani 129)

From the beginning, these raids targeted the newly minted Hutu officials, all of whom were considered a “legitimate target” (Mamdani 129). The Hutu government sought to repress these raids – a repression which, like the attacks themselves, was aimed at a particular group, in this case the local Tutsi population which was viewed as a potential recruiting ground for the *inyenzi* (Mamdani 129). The raids of the 1960s were thus a foretaste of the civil war that heralded the genocide thirty years later. In the meantime, Rwanda gained full independence on 1 July 1962 with Kayibanda as President (Eltringham 39), ushering in what became known as the First Republic.

Some of the oppression faced by Tutsis in post-independence Rwanda included limited access to schooling and civil service professions. For example, a quota system was implemented from the 1960s onwards which limited the number of Tutsi students in

Rwandan schools. Thus, the colonial ideology carried over (inversely) into independent Rwanda, with the Hutu government using it as part of its anti-Tutsi rhetoric. This was in direct contrast to the previous decades of Belgian rule in which such educational exclusions had been imposed on Hutus themselves (Mamdani 139). On assuming power, Kayibanda claimed that the newly created republic was a Hutu nation which would represent the majority group – the Hutus – and, from 1964 onwards, Tutsis were forced out of the political arena (Mamdani 134). Their status as outsiders, created under colonial rule, meant that they were now also considered “politically illegitimate” – effectively removing the benefits that their designation as a race rather than an ethnic group had previously afforded them (Mamdani 134). Here we see another clear example of the way in which colonial ideology shaped the Hutu-led independent Rwanda. Although there was an inversion in those benefitting from political power, the ideas on which this system was based were entirely derived from the colonial structuring of Rwandan society. During the early years of Hutu rule, many Tutsis fled to neighbouring Uganda or Burundi, while others were forced into internal exile, relegated to second-class citizenship and largely confined to certain areas of Rwanda, such as the Bugesera region on the Rwanda/Burundi border. The Hutu government further distinguished between internal and external Tutsis. Those living outside of Rwanda were viewed as a political diaspora whose aim was to overthrow the Hutu government and re-establish Tutsis in positions of political power (Mamdani 135), a belief which came to dominate government rhetoric. Inside Rwanda, Tutsi political parties were disbanded and their leaders killed.

If the killings and exile of the early years of Rwandan democracy constitute the beginnings of Tutsi oppression under the Kayibanda regime, then the continuation of this violence throughout the 1960s should be viewed as a prelude to the 1994 genocide. It is clear that these earlier events speak to the normalisation of brutality against the Tutsis, and suggest that the only difference between these early episodes and *itsembabwoko* is the scale of the latter. In 1962, for example, after a number of raids by Tutsis opposed to Hutu rule, Hutus in the Biumba region of Rwanda launched a counter-attack that left at least one thousand Tutsis dead, their houses burned and their property appropriated by Hutus (Mamdani 129). The example of the Biumba massacre set the tone for subsequent Hutu military responses to raids by Tutsi guerrillas into Rwanda: “[A] raid turned into a signal for the massacre of the local Tutsi population” (Mamdani 129). What separated these early attacks from *itsembabwoko*, however, was that they were localised and easily quashed – unlike the genocide which engulfed Rwanda in its entirety (Mamdani 129).

Another particularly deadly outburst of anti-Tutsi violence took place in Bugesera in November and December of 1963. The Bugesera massacre occurred close to 32km outside of the capital Kigali and was mostly concentrated in the Gikongoro prefecture, which had a large Tutsi population and was home to the former royal residence of Nyanza. It was here that the core of the Tutsi opposition was centred (Mamdani 130). Again, we see the seeds of genocide in this earlier attack, since the attack at Nyanza was a prelude to the massacre that would take place in neighbouring Nyamata nearly twenty years later in which ten thousand (mostly Tutsi) people were massacred. Writing about the Nyanza attack, René Lemarchand states:

Available reports indicate both that the killings began at the instigation of the local prefect, backed by higher state authorities, and that they involved enthusiastic popular participation. The prefect, André Nkeramugabe, is reported to have told an improvised meeting of burgomasters and PARMEHUTU propagandists: “We are expected to defend ourselves. The only way to go about [it] is to paralyze the Tutsi. How? They must be killed.” (qtd in Mamdani 130)

There is little agreement on the number of Tutsis murdered in this attack, but figures range from fifty – the official government estimate – to five thousand, according to an unofficial report by *Africa Contemporary Record* (Mamdani 130). Thus, although many historians point to the 1959 Revolution as the beginning of Rwanda’s descent into genocide, Mamdani argues that it was rather the attempted restoration of Tutsi power in post-independence Rwanda and the Hutu repression that followed “that opened the gateway to a blood-soaked political future” for the country (130). Support for his argument lies in the fact that, during the 1959 Revolution, the number of Tutsis killed hovered around two hundred, while the later attacks of the 1960s regularly claimed casualties between five hundred and one thousand.

In 1973, the First Republic, headed by Kayibanda, came to an end with a coup staged by Juvénal Habyarimana, a northern Hutu. The coup ushered in what is known as the Second Republic. Writing about Habyarimana’s rise to power, Gérard Prunier notes: “When he took power in July 1973, the political immobility and the regionalist infighting of the Kayibanda regime had driven the élite into a state of stifled frustration” (75). He continues:

The artificial and politically-motivated return to the Tutsi persecutions of old had scared both the Tutsi community and reasonable Hutu. The country’s dull international isolation had put it in a difficult position diplomatically and even economically. (75)

The coup was greeted with little fanfare and life remained much the same as before: the quota system remained in place, all citizens were required to carry an identity card, and Tutsis

continued to face institutional discrimination. In some respects, however, the Habyarimana government differed from its predecessor, most notably in the schooling system where the quota of Tutsi students was only loosely enforced, allowing more Tutsi students access to schools and universities (Prunier 75). A small number of Tutsis had also managed to rake in fortunes and were on good terms with the Hutu government. The understanding, Prunier writes, was “‘Do not mess around with politics, this is a Hutu preserve’. As long as Tutsi stuck to that principle, they were generally left in peace” (76). In the education and employment sectors, however, trouble was brewing for the Kayibanda regime. Despite the greater number of Tutsis allowed access to education, the majority of students completing their postsecondary education were Hutu, thus increasing the number of Hutus seeking jobs. There was no “official policy requiring adequate Hutu representation in employment”, resulting in growing anger among unemployed Hutus (Mamdani 136-7). As Mamdani notes: “It was this volatile group that triggered the dynamic that led to the coup of July 1973” (137).

Another factor in the uprising against the Kayibanda government was the slaughter of Hutus in neighbouring Burundi by the mostly Tutsi army, which reignited the “racial” tensions in Rwanda’s middle class (Mamdani 137). In Butare, protests began against Tutsi students by their Hutu peers, and some were “blacklisted” (Mamdani 137). These measures spread to places of employment, and Radio Rwanda began appealing to Hutus to “rise up and avenge themselves” (Mamdani 137). There were further schisms in the country along regional lines with the Hutu in the north of the country – Habyarimana’s stronghold – and those in the south struggling to gain the upper hand in holding political power (Mamdani 138). One of the main differences between the First and Second Republics was the reconstruction of Tutsis from a race to an ethnicity. As a result, the difference between Hutu and Tutsi became one of indigeneity, drawing Rwanda’s Tutsis into the political sphere. Mamdani explains:

We have seen that the language of race turned around the distinction indigenous/nonindigenous. The political distinction between a majority and minority had little relevance within the domain of “race”. For, as a race, Tutsi were simply foreign. Their numbers were of little significance. Once reconstructed as an ethnicity, however, the Tutsi became Rwandan and their numbers became significant, just as the minority/majority distinction also became of greater relevance. As a “race” under the First Republic, the Tutsi had been confined to the civic sphere and barred from the political sphere; as an “ethnicity” under the Second Republic, however, they were allowed participation in the political sphere, but limited to a scope said to befit their minority status. (138)

In terms of politics, Habyarimana banned political parties and then went on to create his own, the Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement (MRND) party (Prunier 76). Rwanda essentially became a one-party state with Habyarimana as the sole presidential candidate in the 1983 and 1988 elections, both of which he won with an overwhelming majority (Prunier 77-8). Politically, the country was splintering further and further along factional lines. Even in the more powerful north, there was infighting between Hutus from Gisenyi – those favoured by Habyarimana for political appointments – and those from Ruhengeri who were given the scraps from the proverbial table (Prunier 86). More importantly, Habyarimana held little social or political power in terms of his lineage, and therefore had only a small political base that was loyal to him and willing to act as his eyes and ears across the country. Instead, he relied on his wife's stronger social standing to cultivate spies, resulting in her gaining a greater share of political power than might otherwise have been the case (Prunier 86). It was in this climate that his wife, Agathe Kazinga, gained her own political following, popularly referred to as the *akazu*. Prunier writes: "Her husband relied on her and her family for many things, but he also gradually became their prisoner and eventually their victim" (87). Kazinga loyalists went so far as to assassinate Habyarimana's likely successor, Colonel Mayuya, in order to maintain their grip on power (Prunier 87). The French push for the implementation of a multiparty system was a further threat, not only to the *akazu*, but to the Habyarimana government in general. The exercise meant that a certain number of Tutsis had to be integrated into the Rwandan political system, even if they were kept away from the "the organs of power: the army and the local state" (Mamdani 141). Nevertheless, Habyarimana agreed to a multiparty system in July 1990 and endorsed the right for Tutsi refugees to return to Rwanda (Mamdani 153).

1.1.2 From Civil War to Genocide and Beyond

The creation of a multiparty state, however, did not stop the RPF from planning its invasion of Rwanda. According to Prunier, there were three main developments that convinced the RPF to escalate its plans for war. Firstly, Rwanda's political system was weak and liable to collapse under the pressure of any strong push from external factors. Secondly, if the right to return was implemented, the RPF would likely lose many of its supporters among the Tutsi refugees if the latter believed they could go home without the need for war. Thirdly, the implementation of a multiparty state would deprive the RPF of one of its best marketing strategies, namely that it was fighting against an authoritarian one-party dictatorship (Prunier 90-91). In 1990, the time for a major invasion had come, and this time the RPF forces were

better equipped and better organised than in the past, thus allowing the violence to spread further and ultimately coalesce into a full-blown civil war with the Rwandan army, the Forces Armées Rwandaises (FAR). Led by Paul Kagame and Fred Rwigyema, the RPF forces were better trained and equipped than previously, thanks in large part to the time they had spent training with the Ugandan militia who had helped bring Yoweri Museveni to power in 1971. While in Uganda, RPF leaders like Kagame and Rwigyema helped form the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), the military wing of the RPF.³ Such men were members of the top echelons of the Ugandan army, and organised a guerrilla force of Tutsi soldiers from within that army itself. In 1990, Museveni, by then President of Uganda, travelled to New York to attend the United Nations General Assembly. The RPF took advantage of his absence to leave Uganda and launch an armed invasion of Rwanda (Wrong 202-203). At first it was assumed that only a handful of Tutsis had defected from the Ugandan army, but it soon became clear that this was, in fact, a mass exodus: they were going home, and they were not going empty-handed (Wrong 203). Aside from their military expertise, the RPF also took with them heavy weapons (such as rocket-propelled grenades), guns, and trucks – all of which they would need in order to pose a real threat to the RPA (Wrong 203-204, 206). In her book *Do Not Disturb: The Story of a Political Murder and an African Regime Gone Bad*, Michela Wrong describes the defection: “Streaming out from barracks and border posts, army training schools, factories, farms, even from State House itself, the Banyarwanda headed toward the border” (205).⁴ Rwandan soldiers would continue to leave Uganda for the next month, with a total of four thousand men defecting (Wrong 206). It was not only soldiers who were leaving either: “As school buses and pickups were commandeered, even civilians joined the high-spirited exodus” (Wrong 205). Winnie Byanyima, Uganda’s ambassador to France at the time, observed: “There were places where you could go and hide and wait for the next car coming, and they were just jumping into the convoys. So there was a highly organized group that set off and others who picked up the message and spontaneously joined them” (qtd in Wrong 205).

The first incursion into Rwanda occurred on October 1 1990, when fifty armed men “came out of the bush near the Rwandese border post of Kagitumba and opened fire on the guards, killing one and setting the others to flight” (Prunier 93). It soon became apparent, however, that this initial attack was not a success: not only did the RPF not have the

³ I will include the RPA under the umbrella of the RPF as their actions are closely intertwined.

⁴ ‘Banyarwanda’ is a collective term for Rwandans, used in this context to describe the exiled Tutsis living in Uganda and other countries near Rwanda.

necessary equipment for traditional warfare, but Fred Rwigyema was an early casualty of the war, an event which severely damaged the morale of the RPF's guerrilla forces. Kagame returned from a training camp in the United States and assumed control of the Tutsi forces (Prunier 114). He decided to take what was left of the RPF into the largely inaccessible Virunga mountains where they could regroup (Wrong 219). There, the movement gathered new recruits, expanding to five thousand men by 1991 and twelve thousand by 1992 (Prunier 117). It also replenished its supply of weapons, again largely from Ugandan connections (Prunier 118). Kagame's strategy was to launch a fresh attack from the Virunga mountains, which would again provide the RPF with the element of surprise (Prunier 119). Importantly, the town of Ruhengeri was nearby and was part of Habyarimana's northern stronghold. As Wrong notes: "[A] successful strike there would emphasise his vulnerability" (225). The RPF attacked in January 1991, "causing immediate panic" and freeing a number of political prisoners on its way to Ruhengeri (Prunier 120) before retreating back to the mountains. It was also able to gather more military equipment and prove that it was a force to be reckoned with (Prunier 120). In October 1991, the RPF attacked again and this time it did not withdraw to the mountains (Wrong 226). In June 1992, the group pushed into the Byumba region and by July had moved its command centre to Mulindi, inside the Rwandan border. More importantly, it had fulfilled one of its political goals – a seat at the negotiating table in Arusha, Tanzania, where a peace agreement was being negotiated (Wrong 227). The RPF continued its military offensive throughout 1992, and by 1993 it had pushed into the southern part of the country, displacing hundreds of Hutu residents as it did so (Wrong 230). Knowingly or not, Kagame's forces were creating the perfect recruits for the *akazu* and other Hutu extremist groups. Anti-Tutsi propaganda broadcast publicly via radio and newspapers fanned the flames of hatred, informing the country's Hutu populace that the Tutsis were arriving to regain political power and once again oppress the Hutu minority (Mamdani 191). As Alison des Forges notes, the radio was one of the most popular ways in which the government delivered "the message of hate directly and simultaneously to a wide audience" (77), and stations like Radio Rwanda were used to warn the country's Hutus of impending attacks by the Tutsi rebels. In March 1992, for example, the station repeatedly broadcast a communiqué which claimed that there would be an attack on Hutus in the Bugesera region (des Forges 79). As a result, Hutus in the area led attacks on the Tutsi populace.

The attack in Bugesera constitutes one of four episodes of popular Hutu uprisings against Tutsi from the beginning of the civil war to the genocide (Mamdani 192). The first of these took place in the weeks following the 1990 invasion, when three hundred Tutsis were

killed in Kibilira. The second occurred in January 1991 as a response to an RPF raid on Ruhengeri, and resulted in the deaths of one thousand Tutsi herders and their families. The third was in Bugesera in March 1992. Mamdani notes that the latter was “less a retaliation than an offensive” and was planned in advance, with Hutu civilians being encouraged to join in the violence (192), as des Forges has already noted. Once again, the number of deaths was in the hundreds. Finally, in February 1993, a fourth massacre occurred following the signing of the Arusha Accords, a protocol meant to ensure power-sharing which came about as a result of peace talks between the Rwandan government and the RPF, facilitated by the Organisation of African Unity, in Arusha. Three hundred Tutsis were murdered in Gisenyi prefecture, in what was believed to be an attack by Hutu Power supporters on those who supported the peace deal. In total, then, it is estimated that three thousand Tutsis were killed between 1990 and 1993 (Mamdani 192). The pattern that emerged from these four events thus served as the blueprint for the genocide: “Prefects and burgomasters organized Hutu militants who identified and targeted Tutsi ‘collaborators’, took over the land of those who were killed or fled, and redistributed it to militants” (Mamdani 193). Moreover, as the civil war continued, FAR appeared incapable of defeating the RPF forces: “Faced with a military defeat that seemed to sound the very death knell of Hutu Power, the *génocidaires* chose to embrace death itself as an alternative to life without power” (Mamdani 215).⁵

In August of 1992, a number of Hutu parties met with the RPF to begin peace negotiations (Mamdani 210). Those opposed to the peace talks portrayed them as negotiations between “the RPF and its internal Hutu accomplices”, playing on Hutu fears of a return to Tutsi rule (Mamdani 210). Once complete, the Arusha Accords set out the following stipulations: the RPF and the Hutu military were to join forces to create a new national army; the RPF would be in charge of the Ministry of the Interior; the RPF would be afforded parliamentary representation at the expense of the extremist Coalition pour la Défense de la République (CDR); and the right of return for exiled Tutsis (Mamdani 210-11). These gains gave the Hutu Power faction “the fodder to convince the population that the opposition had in fact sold the nation, and that all the gains of the 1959 Revolution [...] were now in imminent danger” (Mamdani 211). The Arusha Accords did not bring the peace and stability to Rwanda that they were designed to do, with continued political arguments over the appointment of a mutually acceptable prime minister. Agathe Uwilingiyimana was eventually chosen, but she

⁵ The term *génocidaires* refers to those who took part in planning the genocide, but who were not necessarily members of the Rwandan government.

was unable to build a transitional government (Mamdani 212), and she would later be murdered in the genocide. The transitional government remained paralysed and tensions grew even as the majority of the United Nations Assistance Mission to Rwanda (UNAMIR) forces were pulled out of the country: “The message to the government was clear: implement the Arusha Agreement or else the UN will pull out and the RPF take power” (Mamdani 213). The situation in Rwanda was now one of Hutu armed forces trying to regain control on the battlefield against an RPF that continued to defeat its superior forces. In other words, it was a losing battle. Mamdani further notes that the stasis of the transitional government and increasing tensions resulted in violence as early as February 1994, as “killing, burning and looting spread through Kigali” (213). Meanwhile, the massacre of Hutus in neighbouring Burundi by the country’s all-Tutsi army, made Hutu Power’s claims of impending violence by Tutsis in Rwanda seem more credible to Rwanda’s own Hutu population (Mamdani 214). Politically, Habyarimana and Uwilingiyimana represented the “last major signpost of ‘ethnic reconciliation’” and their deaths paved the way for Hutu extremists – including those within the *akazu* – to take control of the country and so unleash a full-scale extermination campaign against Tutsis and Hutu moderates/sympathisers (Mamdani 216-7).

While the genocide is often portrayed as having started suddenly, there were signs even before the President’s death that something was brewing. This is reflected in some of the literature and films portraying *itsebabwoko*. In Raoul Peck’s *Sometimes in April*, for example, the Rwandan military is seen training ordinary Hutus how to kill (00:15:58-00:16:56). One of the soldiers has also heard rumours of assassinations and massacres “here and there in the provinces. Things are accelerating” (00:16:26-00:16:38). Meanwhile, in *Hotel Rwanda* Paul Rusesabagina’s brother-in-law tells him of the rumours he has heard from his assistant, an *Interahamwe* member, regarding the imminent murder of Tutsis (00:15:51-00:16:27). Gil Courtemanche, in his semi-autobiographical novel *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, best captures the sense of impending terror. The novel’s protagonist, Bernard Valcourt (a clear stand-in for Courtemanche himself), notes that Méthode, a friend and AIDS sufferer, is no longer afraid of dying from his illness: “[H]e would rather die of AIDS than be hacked up by a machete or shredded by a grenade” (39). Méthode himself reflects: “That’s the fate waiting for all Tutsis. We have to leave or die before the Holocaust” (39). He describes the coming events thus:

Here, it would be the barbarian Holocaust, the cataclysm of the poor, the triumph of machete and club. Already in the province of Bugesera, corpses were afloat on Lake Mugesera, drifting towards the Kagera [River], the legendary source of the Nile. (39)

His reference to bodies disposed of in the river, however, recalls both *itsebabwoko* and the killings of the 1960s. In her memoirs, for example, Mukasonga recounts incidents of bodies being washed ashore, while Peck's *Sometimes in April* directly references the use of rivers as sites of disposal. Courtemanche's work therefore bridges the gap between the violence of the 1960s and the genocide of 1994, clearly demarcating the similarities between the two.

That his work is partially set in the build-up to the genocide thus shows that the execution of Tutsis was not confined to April to July of 1994, but instead began during the civil war started in 1990. This is evidenced by further scenes in *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*. As Valcourt and a small group of friends leave Méthode's funeral, Radio Télévision Mille Collines announces his death, calling him a terrorist and threatening the elimination of anyone seen at his funeral (Courtemanche 63). Furthermore, the house of yet another Tutsi friend, Raphaël, has been burned down during the night (Courtemanche 63). This event was documented in the non-fictional newspaper *Ijambo*, in an article published in November 1991, and confirms the semi-autobiographical nature of Courtemanche's novel (64). What is shown here is the continuation from the 1960s of the rhetoric and actions that would come to be associated with the genocide. Méthode's observations thus prove to be rather prescient, a fact that his friends later acknowledge. Lando, a bar owner, for example, tells Valcourt to leave the country before it is too late: "You should leave, Bernard. Our friend Méthode was more observant than I thought. He was right. The big bloodbath is brewing, bigger than all the others Rwanda and Burundi have seen" (Courtemanche 60). As if to prove his point, he takes Valcourt to a check point manned by men who are "neither policemen nor regular soldiers" (Courtemanche 60), a likely reference to those who would later become known as the *Interahamwe*:

"Hello, gentlemen of the presidential guard," called Lando. "I drink to the health of Rwanda. Would you like to drink with us? No, you would not like to drink with us. You are Hutus, real Rwandans, and I am a villainous Tutsi, a fake Rwandan. You are only awaiting the command that will kill me. That is not tonight, I know, but which of my friends will you kill when he leaves here? Which one will you follow patiently all the way home so he can die in front of his children and neighbours?" (61)

The answer to this rhetorical question comes sometime later when a mutual friend, Cyprien, and his wife are murdered at a roadblock (Courtemanche 96-7). Lando's allusion to real and fake Rwandans is reminiscent of Mamdani's writings on the categorisation of Hutus as indigenous and Tutsis as non-indigenous, and once again highlights the continued use of

colonial ideology to justify the mass slaughter of Tutsis in 1994. Méthode's reference to Bugesera, meanwhile, is equally significant, as it was often in this region that attacks on Tutsis occurred during the 1960s, given its proximity to the Burundian border and the fact that internally displaced Tutsis were sent to live there when Kayibanda came to power, a fact recorded by Mukasonga in her memoirs.

The genocide itself began in the late hours of 6 April 1994, following the downing of the plane carrying Habyarimana and his Burundian counterpart, Cyprien Ntaryamira. In the wake of this assassination, an extremist regime, headed by Colonel Théoneste Bagosora and his cohorts, was installed, resulting in a "tidal wave of violence" (Mamdani 218). Over the next three months Rwanda was engulfed by wholesale blood-letting, in which an estimated eight hundred thousand to one million Rwandans were slaughtered. Tutsis made up the bulk of those killed, but a number of Hutu collaborators/sympathisers were also murdered. At first, it was believed that the violence of the early 1990s would be confined to certain areas, as this was the historical precedent. The outbreak of violence in 1994, however, soon dispelled this notion. As Prunier notes in his book *The Rwanda Crisis 1959-1994: History of a Genocide*, the killings spread from the countryside to the interior of the country as early as 7 April 1994 (236). Nowhere was safe. Prunier continues: "The war was now on, but it was not the war which was killing most of the people. It was the enormous wave of civilian massacres now gathering momentum and sweeping right across the country" (237). His observation here highlights the difference between the war and the genocide itself. Although linked, the war was a military affair fought between Tutsi guerrillas (the RPF) and the regular Hutu armed forces. The genocide, however, was the systematic massacre of civilians by irregular armed forces like the *Interahamwe*. Nonetheless, many Hutu officials were involved in the planning and execution of the genocide. This was particularly true at the *préfecture* level, which received its orders from the Rwandan government. Prunier explains:

[T]he killers were controlled and directed in their task by the civil servants in the central government, *préfets*, *bourgmestres* and local councillors, both in the capital and in the interior. It was they who received the orders from Kigali, mobilised the local *Gendarmerie* and *Interahamwe*, ordered peasants to join in the man-hunts and called for FAR [Rwanda Defence Force] support if the victims put up too much resistance. (244)

Given the localised nature of the killings ordered by the administrators of each town or village, it was easy enough for the victims to be flushed out and murdered, since they would have already been known to their murderers. While it is true that some among the Hutu peasantry – those mainly responsible for the executions – killed under duress, it is equally

true that there were many cases in which the local Hutu population spontaneously rose up against their Tutsi friends and neighbours (Prunier 247). This has made it all the more difficult to prosecute those accused of murder, because there is little chance of ascertaining whether their claims of having acted under compulsion are true or not.

Aside from continuing the ideologies of colonialism, some of the rhetoric surrounding the genocide was based on the language and practices of pre-colonial Rwanda. In particular, the practice of *ubureetwa* was mirrored in the way in which the media referred to ridding the country of its Tutsis as a form of communal ‘work’. *Ubureetwa*, the system which entailed peasants performing forced labour as a form of payment, continued under Belgian rule with one crucial difference: Hutus were now able to escape this practice by relocating to the Congo and performing contract work for the European occupiers. Those who stayed in Rwanda were still expected to work for Tutsi chiefs, predominantly on public works projects (Mamdani 109). As indicated earlier, *ubureetwa* was abolished after the 1959 revolution (Mamdani 134). However, the idea of communal labour for the public good continued. Under Habyarimana, it became known as *umuganda*. Explaining the implementation of *umuganda*, Habyarimana told the Paris newspaper *Le Monde*: “[T]he population must get down to work – the Government and myself want to emphasize the value of work on the land. Thus we shall devote each Saturday to tilling the soil with hoes in our hands” (qtd in Mamdani 146). This language of “co-operative communal labour” (Mamdani 146) also informed media propaganda during the genocide. Hutus were called on to ‘go to work’ – except that this time the ‘work’ was not farming, but killing Tutsis. They were encouraged to do so with whatever weapons they could find: machetes, clubs, even farming implements like hoes. Such oblique references to the slaughter of Tutsis continued with the use of metaphoric terms for the victims themselves. Due to stereotyping – reinforced by colonial categorisation of the Rwandan populace – Tutsis were believed to be taller than their Hutu peers. As a result, they were often referred to as ‘tall trees’ or ‘the long grass’. Thus, calls to cut the trees or the grass became a euphemism for the killing of Tutsis. We can see this rhetoric at work in *Hotel Rwanda* when Thomas, Rusesabagina’s brother-in-law, says: “He said that there is a signal. It is ‘Cut the tall trees.’ And when they hear this signal, the militia are to go to war” (00:16:17-00:16:23). Later, a radio broadcast calls on Hutus to “clear the brush”. It continues: “We must cut the tall trees. Cut the tall trees now!” (00:22:30-00:22:56). These words follow the broadcaster’s claim that it was Tutsi rebels who shot down Habyarimana’s plane, which thus makes it clear that his references to cutting the brush and tall trees are a metaphor for murdering Tutsis. Although such language would otherwise appear innocuous, in the context

of Rwanda and the genocide it becomes menacing, an indicator of the slaughter to come. There is also no mistake about who the targets of this slaughter will be – Tutsis. It is equally clear that the call to action is not designed to reach the Hutu military, which is already at war with the RPF, but rather ordinary civilians fearful of a return to Tutsi rule and the oppression they believe it will bring. What followed in the footsteps of the civil war was therefore three months of bloody massacres which came to be recognised as a genocide.⁶ Tutsis hid wherever they could – in banana groves, false walls, pit latrines, swamps or anywhere else they thought might be safe. Many tried to flee, but were often stopped at the roadblocks set up across the country, or were hunted down in the bush. By the time the slaughter ended almost one million Tutsis and Hutu collaborators were dead. Rwanda was a land of ghosts.

In the aftermath of the genocide, Rwanda faced not only collective and individual trauma, but also a new exodus, this time of Hutus who feared reprisals from the new RPF government. Many, whether they had taken part in the killings or not, went into self-imposed exile in what was then Zaïre. Others ended up internally displaced in Rwanda itself, housed in makeshift refugee camps run by UNAMIR and other relief agencies. The same international community which had spent months prevaricating about whether the events in Rwanda constituted a genocide or not now rushed in to help those fleeing the country. The French established *Opération Turquoise*, which allowed a safe route for Hutu refugees leaving Rwanda. There has been much criticism of this project as it also provided a means for *génocidaires* to evade justice. Moreover, while it seemed that the RPF government would bring with it a lasting peace, there are debates as to how successful it has been. Not only did the country have to process the terror and trauma of the civil war and the horrors of *itsembabwoko*, it also had to find a way to bridge the ethnic schisms of the past decades. One way in which this could be achieved was through the re-integration of Hutus and Tutsis into their former communities. An example of how problematic this strategy was appears in Hatzfeld's *The Strategy of Antelopes*, in which he relays his interviews with the residents of one community in Nyamata. Hatzfeld's interviewees highlight the difficulty of re-integration, explaining that it is only possible to talk about the genocide during *gacaca* court sessions. Others find it impossible to speak of *itsembabwoko* at all due to their continued trauma – an inability which emphasises the unspeakability of trauma when it comes to catastrophes of the magnitude of a genocide.

⁶ It was a number of months before the international community designated the events of April to June 1994 as a genocide with the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda being set up in November of 1994 to “prosecute persons responsible for genocide” (United Nations, par. 20).

Another way in which the country attempted to move forward was through the search for justice and healing. Thousands of Hutus had been arrested and languished in the country's overpopulated prisons. One reason for the large prison population was the difficulty of knowing who was guilty and who had been falsely accused of murder. Unlike the planners of the genocide – those in power who had actively organised the massacres – accusations against ordinary civilians were mainly predicated on eye-witness testimony which was not always accurate. To deal with the issue of justice at a grassroots level and to clear the backlog of prisoners, the Rwandan government set up a system of *gacaca* courts based on traditional methods of dealing with conflict in communities. Under this practice, individuals were judged by the members of their respective communities. Accusations could be levelled against an individual and corroboration in the form of witness testimony was needed, after which the accused would be judged accordingly and sentence passed by the presiding judge, usually a village chief.⁷ Prisoners were also offered the chance to confess their crimes, and the system further allowed the accused to ask forgiveness from survivors. *Gacaca* courts were thus a means of clearing the prisons while also encouraging the rehabilitation of otherwise divided communities. Before perpetrators could re-enter their communities, however, they had to undergo a re-education programme in which they were taught how to interact with their Tutsi neighbours. As Hatzfeld's interviewees testified, this often included not talking about the genocide or their individual crimes with survivors (81). Finally, the Kagame government has also focused on doing away with referring to ethnicities, preferring to create an environment in which all citizens identify as Rwandans. The success of this strategy is debatable, however, as it is difficult to erase the categories of victim and perpetrator. Given that these labels are often drawn across ethnic lines, we must question the degree to which such a dictate is even possible under the circumstances.

Moreover, the behaviour of the RPF in the direct aftermath of *itsebabwoko* has raised questions regarding its commitment to peace. Although the current government would like us to believe that its ascension to power was peaceful, there is ample evidence of violent reprisals against Hutu civilians. One of the better documented examples of these revenge killings comes from the Kibeho refugee camp in south-western Rwanda. The camp, run by UNAMIR, housed thousands of Hutus. Rwanda's new government wanted Kibeho and other refugee camps for IDPs (internally displaced persons) to close as soon as possible, claiming

⁷ Those convicted of planning the genocide were tried in formal trials in Tanzania known as the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Some of those who faced prosecution include Colonel Théoneste Bagosora, FAR commander Augustin Bizimana and RTLM founder Ferdinand Nahimana.

that the country was safe for all its citizens (Gourevitch 188). The displaced Hutu populace, however, was wary, worried about revenge killings, a concern which was based on rumours circulated in the camps by *génocidaires* who were hiding amid the general Hutu refugee movement (Gourevitch 189). In the case of Kibeho, the *génocidaires* also frequently left the camp to “terrorize and steal from the surrounding communities, attacking genocide survivors and Hutus whom they suspected might bear witness against them” (Gourevitch 189). As the smaller camps were shut down, many *génocidaires* fled to Kibeho. By 1995, Kibeho was home to eighty thousand Hutus. In an effort to close it, the RPA surrounded the camp, terrifying those living within its wire borders. Gates were established where relief agencies could process the refugees as they slowly returned home (Gourevitch 190). Conditions in the camp were deteriorating, with food and water supplies running low and the Hutu Power elements in the camp fuelling fear with their rumours of anti-Hutu violence beyond the camp’s borders (Gourevitch 190). Many of those living there did not want to leave, despite the cramped conditions they were forced to endure. On April 19, refugees pushed back against RPA intimidation, throwing stones and trying to grab the soldiers’ weapons (Gourevitch 190). Three days later, “the wet and tormented mass of IDPs at Kibeho once again surged and stampeded against the RPA lines, breaching the cordon at the downhill end of the camp” (Gourevitch 191). Gourevitch documents what happened next:

A stream of IDPs ran through the opening, heading across the valley to the facing hills. RPA troops opened fire, shooting nonstop and indiscriminately into the crowd, and scores of soldiers set out in pursuit of those who had fled, shooting and lobbing grenades at them. The RPA barrage continued for hours; in addition to machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades and at least one mortar were fired into the camp. (191)

One Australian medic described a scene he witnessed: “It was pretty horrific to see at least four RPA stand around one IDP and empty a magazine each into him” (Gourevitch 192). He added that the RPA threw rocks at IDPs who stopped running so that they could get them moving again and so continue to shoot them (192). What these anecdotes show is that the RPF’s take-over of Rwanda was anything but peaceful. Instead, we see an army ready to carry out the very same violence that their fellow Tutsis had experienced just a year before. What happened at Kibeho belies the notion of the RPF as a liberating force, and collapses the dichotomy of ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’. Although it is easy to paint events like these as having two clear antagonists, the reality is that these categories are not as clear-cut as the literature would have us believe. Such reductive dichotomies make it easier for audiences to identify the character/s with whom they are meant to sympathise, but they also misrepresent

the complexity of such traumatic events. As Gourevitch shows, it can be difficult to tell who is the hero and who the villain when the hero *becomes* the villain. The title of Mamdani's book, *When Victims Become Killers*, points to this conundrum too, and constitutes a recognition of the complexity of Rwanda's history. In pre-colonial Rwanda, some might see Hutus as the victims of Tutsi oppression – and certainly they were largely relegated to lower roles in society. As colonialism arrived, however, it could be argued that both Tutsis and Hutus were the victims of Belgian oppression. Again, this is true, but – for Tutsis at least – only to a certain extent. Because they were given administrative jobs, Tutsis maintained a modicum of power over their Hutu peers. This laid the foundation for the 1959 revolution and the rise of Hutu Power. The roles were then 'reversed' between 1959 and 1994, as Rwanda's Hutus used their political dominance to strip Tutsis of many of their privileges. This latter state of affairs is generally where we begin our education in Rwandan history, therefore making it easy to classify Tutsis as the victims and Hutus as the perpetrators, and this view is only reinforced by the horror of the genocide. However, because much of the genocide literature, particularly that more easily available to foreign audiences, does not go beyond the RPF victory in July 1994, our understanding is limited. Engaging with the works of authors like Gourevitch, Mamdani and Gatore reveals our ignorance of post-genocide Rwanda and the reversal of violence the country experienced. Thus, as Mamdani's title suggests, the identities of 'victim' and 'perpetrator' are fluid and ambiguous. For simplification's sake, we can break the cycle into three distinct sections: pre-colonial and colonial Rwanda, in which Tutsis were, if not perpetrators, then at least in positions of relative power; the 1960s to early 1990s, when Hutus were the dominant political power and the perpetrators of violence; and the post-genocide period (mid-1994 onwards), which has seen Tutsis rise to power once again and, in doing so, become the perpetrators rather than the victims of violence. Such a view is, of course, overly simplified, but it serves to illustrate the point that Mamdani makes – namely, that the categories of 'victim' and 'perpetrator' (or killer) are not immutable. They can, and do, overlap. While acknowledging this fact may be uncomfortable, it is necessary if we are to examine the 1994 genocide with any degree of honesty and objectivity.

1.2 Trauma Theory and Rwandan Genocide Narratives

Trauma as a concept is difficult to define, perhaps even more so now, given that research in the field increasingly suggests that the experience of trauma in a postcolonial context should not be viewed through the same lens as Euro-American trauma. Prominent Yale school trauma theorist Cathy Caruth defines trauma as “an overwhelming experience of sudden, or

catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (*Unclaimed* 181). Jenny Edkins, in her work on what she terms “trauma time”, defines trauma as an event incapable of being integrated into a linear narrative or timeline (132). Stef Craps, meanwhile, argues that trauma “is a ubiquitous cultural paradigm, a way of making sense of the aftermath of conflict and violence, whether natural or anthropogenic” (xii). While much of Caruth’s approach to trauma is derived from Freud’s theories, especially those put forward in *Moses and Monotheism*, both Edkins and Craps have largely moved away from what Ananya Jahanara Kabir terms “a Holocaust-centric” (64) approach to trauma. Despite the differences in their approaches to trauma, however, it remains possible to make use of both Yale and postcolonial trauma theory simultaneously, linking them in a way that allows for them to complement, rather than contradict, one another. This is the approach that I take in this thesis, as the trauma of *itsebabwoko* arguably cannot be examined through the lens of only one theory.

In her writings, Caruth focuses a great deal on the concept of belatedness as it relates to trauma and traumatic experiences. Writing in response to Freud, she argues that there is an inherent latency in trauma which explains the “peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness” of the traumatic experience itself (*Unclaimed* 187). She explains that it is this period of latency that causes a traumatic experience to be registered as such, not in the moment in which it occurs, but rather sometime after its occurrence:

The pathology consists, rather, solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it.
(*Trauma: Explorations* 4)

Once more drawing on Freud’s trauma theory, Caruth further argues that one of the hallmarks of trauma is the manner in which it manifests itself through the constant intrusion of the event into the sufferer’s consciousness in its original form (*Trauma: Explorations* 5). This repeated encroachment of the traumatic event via dreams or flashbacks suggests that the trauma cannot be fully assimilated into the victim’s consciousness in the same way as other experiences, but instead results in the continued incursion of the past into the present. An example of this phenomenon can be found in Elisabeth Combres’ *Broken Memory*:

Emma woke up with a start, exhausted by the same nightmare that she had almost every night. Ever since that day in April 1994, when the men burst into the house and murdered her mother. (17)

In Combres' novel, Emma, a teenager growing up in post-genocide Rwanda, is plagued by a recurring dream of her mother's brutal death nine years previously. Although she now lives a stable life with an old Hutu woman, she is unable to escape the memory of her mother's murder. Not only does this cause her nightmares, but it also impacts on her sense of security, particularly in crowds (Combres 28). When a group of alleged perpetrators returns to the village to be tried at a *gacaca* court, Emma is once again overwhelmed by the memory of her mother's death. This time, however, she physically re-enacts her actions from that night, curling up against a nearby wall, making herself as small and as invisible as possible (Combres 40). Significantly, the foetal position is often used in writing to symbolise trauma, as it reminds us of our most vulnerable state and the need to be protected from harm. It is evident in other literary works, such as Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden* (Marais 2). Emma cannot be roused from this traumatised state until the following day (Combres 41), and her response to the presence of the perpetrators – one of whom she thinks was part of the group that killed her mother – constitutes a re-enactment of her trauma, as she once again huddles against a wall. The only difference is that this time there is no sofa to conceal her. This is significant for a number of reasons. As Emma herself notes, the sofa prevented her from actually seeing what happened to her mother. Her trauma is thus predicated on what she heard – and presumably imagined – as she hid silently behind the sofa (17). Seeing the prisoners on the back of the truck, now that she has no furniture to hide behind, Emma is forced to confront the previously unknown figure of a man who (possibly) tortured and killed her mother. This man is no longer a faceless shape in her nightmares, but has rather solidified into a person in his own right, giving an image and sense of reality to the trauma of her past – a past she has only previously encountered in her dreams. This sudden confrontation with her history leads Emma to re-enact her trauma, but this time she is exposed to the gaze not only of the perpetrator, but also of the women at the market. In a situation in which she is not the only one to face her trauma head on – she initially holds hands with another woman who experiences flashbacks (38) – Emma's noticeably visceral reaction to the sight of the prisoners is an uncomfortable reminder to those around her of what these men represent: a traumatic past that genocide survivors are striving to forget. In her work, Edkins notes that, when it comes to remembrance and commemoration: "There are those who want to return as rapidly as possible to the security of the accounts of continuity and wholeness" (132). The fact that the villagers attempt to rouse Emma from her stupor and then leave her alone, suggests that they wish to continue their lives as normally as possible, without reminders of the genocide or their personal traumas. This interpretation of events is reinforced by

Combres' ending the chapter with this sentiment: "So little by little, life carried on around her, and her huddled figure eventually blended into the peaceful countryside at the end of an ordinary day" (40). In this environment, Emma's all too obvious fear, her prolonged physical reaction to the prisoners, is an uncomfortable visual reminder of things most of the people in her village would rather forget. The desire of Combres' characters to forget is similar to that expressed by some interviewees in Jean Hatzfeld's *The Strategy of Antelopes*, a number of whom speak about actively trying to forget *itsebabwoko* and its traumas. One woman explains, for example, that these attempts to forget the past are a means of salvaging the future, particularly for those who have prospered in the post-genocide years: "They don't want unpleasant rumours coming back about their rags and lice. They keep silent to escape what they fled from. The more you tell of your survival, the more you run yourself down in others' eyes" (89). It is also possible that the act of consciously trying to forget the events of 1994 is a means of enabling a relatively smooth re-integration of perpetrators into a society filled with their victims. Indeed, such an attitude is reflected in the Rwandan government's diktat which makes speaking openly of the genocide in public virtually illegal. Jean-Baptiste Munyakore, another of those interviewed by Hatzfeld, explains that: "We are not allowed to speak bluntly of the killings with the Hutus. During the *gacaca*, we can ask anything, but otherwise it's forbidden" (84). Pancrace Hakizamungili, a Hutu perpetrator, further states that, once released from prison, the culprits of the genocide were sent on a mandatory three-month training session during which they were taught how to behave in the new Rwandan society (Hatzfeld 80). In particular, these sessions emphasised the need for former killers to "never speak directly of the killings, never ... offer appalling details" or even provide direct apologies to their victims (Hatzfeld 81). In a post-genocide society that places so much importance on the need to forget, it is unsurprising that Emma's all too visible trauma alienates her from the rest of the villagers. Interestingly, her physical re-enactment of the events of the night of her mother's murder is a corporeal representation of her recurring nightmare, in which she is once again hidden behind the couch, listening as her mother is raped and killed. Given that, by the end of the novel, Emma has come to terms with her past (Combres 131), I would argue that the playing out not just of her past, but also of her dream, is a necessary step on her road to acceptance and recovery – similar to the drawings she makes in her pseudo-psychologist's office. Both the drawings and the repetition of the events surrounding her mother's death draw our attention to Emma's continued fixation on the wall against which she huddled on the night of the trauma. In all three iterations of her trauma, the wall represents a sense of safety and constancy in an event otherwise characterized by fear

and loss. It is also a visual depiction of the wall that blocks her from confronting her past, making any recovery impossible. This latter interpretation of Emma's focus on the wall is further evidenced in her second session with the old man – who is clearly meant to be a psychologist as he is offering therapy of a kind – in which she is described as being able to retrace her life with Mukecuru, but unable to go further back to her life before that (Combres 99). In this sense, it seems as though the wall that previously protected her has now closed in on her, acting as a chamber in which she is trapped, forced to experience the repeated invasion of her trauma mentally, physically and emotionally. It is only by breaking down this wall that Emma is able to process her traumatic memories and move beyond their otherwise suffocating effects.

Although fictional, Emma's experiences provide an excellent example of Caruth's ideas on the intrusive nature of traumatic events and the way in which they prevent the victim from fully healing. Combres' portrayal of Emma's trauma also links to another aspect of Caruth's trauma theory: latency. As previously mentioned, Caruth believes that the trauma-inducing event is not experienced as it occurs, but rather 'after the fact'. Using the example of the Jews' murder of Moses, as employed by Freud, she argues that "since the murder is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time" (*Unclaimed* 187). This line of thought implies that trauma victims are not entirely cognisant of their experience at the moment at which it occurs. Instead, the event is only fully realised in the aftermath of its occurrence. As a result, victims tend to view their experience from the vantage point of a different place and time to that which they currently inhabit. For Emma, this aspect of the traumatic experience is both literal and figurative. After her mother's murder, she moves to a new village where she spends the rest of her childhood. She therefore quite literally experiences her mother's death as an event connected with another place (her previous village) and another time (the time before her life with Makecuru, an old Hutu woman who takes care of Emma after her mother's death). Emma is initially unable to fully internalise or process the circumstances of her mother's death. She therefore views the event as having occurred outside of her present timeline or plane of existence. Because the incident in question was so violent it can be viewed as an aberration, a departure from the expected, and therefore a deviation from Emma's linear sense of time or the expected chronological events that make up a 'normal' life. If we apply Caruth's notion of latency to Emma's trauma, we see that she can only inhabit the events of her past by accepting the existence of two narrative strains – her current (linear) narrative and one that exists parallel to it, but does not occupy the same spatio-temporal domain.

The idea that traumatic events occur outside of the orthodox construct of linear time is explored by Edkins in her essay “Time, Personhood, Politics”, in which she introduces an alternative concept of time, namely “trauma time”, one which challenges the traditional notion of time as a linear progression. Perhaps the easiest way to visualise the concept of trauma time is to think of time as a tree. Normal, or linear, time forms the tree trunk, growing in one straight line. The trunk represents the progression of the tree’s growth over time, a continuous trajectory that does not deviate or allow for interruptions. Trauma time, meanwhile, can be imagined as the branches of the tree. Although they form part of the tree, these branches are off-shoots – they diverge from the tree’s otherwise linear growth and are never re-incorporated into the trunk; instead, they end abruptly. Trauma time can be viewed in the same way: although it forms part of a society’s timeline, it branches off from the linear timeline and is never integrated into this timeline. As a result, events occurring during trauma time, which falls outside of a nation’s linear history, can be brushed aside by governments in favour of a linear timeline that suits their agenda. According to Edkins, trauma time occurs when the social order of the sovereign nation-state is disrupted by a violent or traumatic event (131). For Rwanda, *itsembabwoko* constitutes such a failure of the social order and, by extension, a failure of the production of linear time on which the state relies in order to maintain its legitimacy (Edkins 127).⁹ The events of the genocide are thus viewed in relation to trauma time, not linear time, as they occurred as a result of the breakdown of the Habyarimana government’s control over Rwanda’s social order. In this sense, *itsembabwoko* can be viewed as an aberration in Rwandan history, an event of such an extraordinary nature that it defies full incorporation into the country’s collective memory, despite the reinstatement of a social order and linear time under Paul Kagame’s presidency.

On a smaller scale,¹⁰ the experience of trauma is not only a suspension of ‘normal’ linear time, but also of the integrity of self. The trauma of witnessing her mother’s murder creates a break in the otherwise linear progression of Emma’s life. Because of its

⁹ Edkins’ argument that sovereign powers rely on linear time to maintain their power over the social order of their nation-state is a reference to the notion that history operates chronologically. As a result, those in power are able to insert their own narrative into the linear narrative of a country’s history, thus providing evidence of their legitimate right to govern. Such an act often comes at the expense of alternative or conflicting historical accounts which call into question the ruling regime’s legitimacy (127).

¹⁰ While Edkins’ argument is usually applied to the collective, it can also be applied to the individual. In terms of the Rwandan genocide, for example, we can see the effects of trauma time on individuals: when these individual experiences are collated, they constitute a collective experience. Edkins points out that politics focuses on the group, rather than the individual (130). What I attempt to do by focusing on the individual is to reinstate the personhood of the individual rather than relegating them solely to a role in the collective population.

exceptionally violent nature, Emma is unable to make sense of the murder of her mother, and this causes a breakdown in the previously well-structured passage of her experiences. This rupture in Emma's previously ordered existence causes her traumatic experience to fall outside of coherent linear time, becoming instead an incomprehensible event that occurs in trauma time. Edkins' concept of trauma time thus adds to Caruth's suggestion that a traumatic event can only be experienced at a different time to that in which it occurred. In Emma's case, her mother's murder constitutes an aberration, a deviation from the expected linear course of life, and therefore cannot be integrated into her narrative, even when the latter returns to an orthodox linear trajectory as a result of the re-imposition of stability and order after she moves in with Makecuru. She is only able to experience her trauma as a repeated intrusion into her life via recurring nightmares or the physical re-enactment of the event, both of which constitute latent reactions to a traumatic occurrence, according to Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart (164). Emma is unable to incorporate the witnessing of her mother's murder into the comprehensible linear order of her life, and thereby remains incapable of processing it. The event thus continues to exist only in trauma time.

Emma's initial inability to integrate her trauma into her life is also an example of Laurie Vickroy's argument that the fundamental aspect of trauma "is that the past lingers unresolved, not remembered in a conventional sense, because it is not processed like non-traumatic information, either cognitively or emotionally" (12). Vickroy, in her writings on trauma, goes some way towards explaining the science behind Caruth's assertion that traumatic experiences are preserved unaltered in the memory. Drawing on the work of psychologists van der Hart and van der Kolk, Vickroy explains that, unlike non-traumatic memories, which are integrated into our mental schema and adjusted as new experiences occur, traumatic memories often defy assimilation and are instead preserved in their original state (12). This is due to the fact that traumatic memories cause the sufferer to unconsciously follow previously laid down thought patterns. Such patterns or pathways are created by the original traumatic event and can be triggered as a reaction to subsequent traumas or stressors, even if these are not the same as the original trauma (Vickroy 12). Charlotte vanOyen-Witvliet describes trauma memories as extremely distressing emotionally and as having the potential to "activate the same emotional intensity that occurred during the original trauma" (511). She also explains that the varying degrees of emotional and behavioural responses to

traumatic flashbacks are measured along two axes, namely valence¹¹ and arousal (510). An event that results in a high negative valence and a significant degree of negative emotional arousal is likely to be encoded in the memory as a traumatic experience. The intensity of emotions experienced during the trauma itself may in turn result in the repetition of similar feelings should a new trauma occur, or even in the event of a recall of the original trauma, such as a flashback, nightmare or other triggering occurrence (510).

While Caruth's writings on trauma and memory are largely focused on the individual, Vickroy extends her theories to include the effects of trauma on social and cultural relationships, thus providing a bridge between Caruth's writings and those of later trauma theorists, including Craps who argues that trauma theory in the postcolonial context includes the collective trauma of a group, not just that of the individual. Vickroy notes that "social supports are essential to survivors' adjustment", and when support is not present in a culture, the individual feels vulnerable and isolated (14). This may explain why some survivors choose to write or speak of their experiences as a means of working through their trauma, since these attempts provide a sense of connection to a broader cultural or societal group, partly the audience which engages with their testimonies and partly their fellow trauma survivors. Such representations of trauma, however, lead to the question of the ethical nature of aesthetic representations of a hugely traumatic occurrence, such as genocide. As Anne Whitehead notes, trauma "comprises an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation ... how then can it be narrativised in fiction?" (3). Geoffrey Hartman adds that "the line that is supposed to distinguish between factual and fictive versions of truth becomes a battleground precisely because a distinction that must be made is often difficult to make" (25-26). The latter observation is particularly accurate when it comes to fictional portrayals of the genocide such as *Hotel Rwanda* and *The Past Ahead*, because they are works of the imagination rather than memoirs. As Hartman notes, it is difficult – perhaps impossible – for an audience to distinguish between fact and fiction, which can give rise to a skewed understanding of the event being portrayed. This may not be intentional on the part of the author, but it occurs nonetheless, especially in narratives created by those with little first-hand knowledge of the traumatic event. For example, authors from other African countries have struggled with writing about the genocide, as evidenced by the Fest-Africa project. Entitled "Writing by Duty of Memory", the project tasked a number of

¹¹ Valence in this context refers to the intrinsic positivity or negativity of a situation and is also used to categorise specific emotions. For example, joy is a positive emotion and therefore has a positive valence, while fear, as a negative emotion, has a negative valence (Frijda and Scherer 207).

these writers to work as writers-in-residence in Rwanda for three months, during which time they would produce a novel or other work on the genocide (Applegate 77). As Elizabeth Applegate notes: “Despite this clear intention to inform their readers, many of the Fest-Africa writers did express discomfort with the act of writing a novel about the genocide” (77-8). Many of the authors wondered if they had the authority to write about what had happened in Rwanda. While it is necessary to address such concerns, it is also important for writers and filmmakers to produce works on the genocide, so as to draw attention to the atrocities that occurred in 1994, as well as raise questions about how one represents such trauma in an ethical manner.

A focus on group trauma is particularly important when examining *itsembabwoko*, because the trauma is in many ways a collective one, stemming as it does from Rwanda’s colonial past and its legacy. Perhaps most notably, Vickroy acknowledges the effects of trauma on both individual and group confidence: “Traumatic experience can inspire not only a loss of self-confidence, but also a loss of confidence in the social and cultural structures that are supposed to create order and safety” (13). Such a loss of confidence in the Rwandan government has indeed been evident in post-genocide Rwanda. In Véronique Tadjo’s¹² interviews with Rwandans, at least one of the subjects interviewed expresses a lack of confidence in the government’s ability to bring about the changes needed to materially better the lives of citizens. A university student at the time of the genocide, this man tells Tadjo that he finds it difficult to envision a future in Rwanda: “How can you envisage the future here? What future?” he asks (110). His belief in the futility of planning a future in post-genocide Rwanda stems from his sense that there is no continuity between one day and the next, that one has to begin all over again each day (110). The interviewee sums up his lack of faith in the new government thus:

When the war ended, we thought that everything could at last go back to normal, that we could start again on a better foundation. Not make the same mistakes again. But after a few years, everything seems to be settling back into place: corruption, impunity, uncertainty. Promises are not kept. They vanish one after another. (110-111)

In a final bleak observation, he adds “No one trusts anyone else. Everyone takes refuge in themselves. How can we build something together, sit at the same table?” (111). This interview took place in 1999, just five years after the genocide occurred, and emphasises Vickroy’s contentions regarding the collective nature of trauma and the lack of confidence it

¹² Tadjo took part in the Fest-Africa project.

engenders. Taking the interview into account, as well as more recent opinions on the track record of Rwanda's current government, it is clear that Vickroy's writings accurately describe the trauma of a country still trying to come to terms with its vicious past.

Interestingly, however, Vickroy's argument appears to contradict Edkins' observations on trauma time. Edkins asserts that traumatic events cause a disruption in government control over the nation-state because they occur outside of the linear narrative on which the state relies to assert its legitimacy over the social order (131). According to Edkins, the cessation of the traumatic event occurs when the sovereign power is able to re-instate its control over the social order, thus returning to a linear narrative that it controls and which once again proves its legitimacy as the governing power (131). This view contrasts with Vickroy's, as it suggests that a return of the sovereign power's regulation of the social order also constitutes a return to a collective sense of the state's continuity, a convergence that would require renewed confidence in the sovereign power's ability to lead the country into a future in which it is healed again and the possibility of a return to a state of trauma or emergency is minimal. However, Edkins' concept of trauma has more in common with Vickroy's than first appears. While Edkins posits that trauma time and its attendant traumatic event ends with the re-assertion of government control over the social order, she goes on to argue that the individual does not necessarily share the state's desire to restore order through new narratives of legitimacy and linearity (132). Instead, individuals who have suffered through collective trauma are more likely to want to retain the insights they feel they have gained from their experiences (132). This difference in responses to trauma at the state and individual level suggests that the sovereign power's reinstatement of a functioning social order may not be entirely successful, since the occurrence of trauma in the first place weakens the public's confidence in the state's ability to maintain its control over the social order. In other words, the fragility of the latter has been revealed and cannot again be concealed. Edkins writes:

In contemporary politics, the sovereign state provides a crucial point around which the symbolic order is constituted. The state, through its accounts of historical origin and its vision of continuity into the future, provides a location in relation to which subjectivity, and its imaginary wholeness, is produced. However, the wholeness, both of the state and of the subject, is fragile. When what we call traumatic events occur, the inevitable incompleteness of the symbolic order is revealed. (132)

In light of these observations, it is clear that Vickroy's and Edkins' views on trauma, far from being contradictory, complement each other. Vickroy's argument that trauma reduces the

collective's confidence in the state is supported by Edkins' contestation that the occurrence of national trauma reveals the fragility of state power, together with its inability to maintain the illusion of wholeness in the aftermath of a traumatic event. It can be argued, then, that the lack of faith a society has in its government after it has been through a trauma is due to the fact that a violent event shakes that society's previously held belief in the wholeness or stability of the government. This is because the "smooth *linear time* of the state, and its stories of past and future, have been thrown into question by the intrusion of *trauma time*" (Edkins 132).¹³

When discussing time and trauma, it is also necessary to take into account the notion of continuous trauma. In his book *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma out of Bounds* (2012), Stef Craps, one of the most influential proponents of postcolonial trauma theory, challenges the Freudian notion that trauma is a "single, extraordinary, catastrophic event" (4). Instead, he argues for a model of trauma which "can account for and respond to collective, ongoing, everyday forms of traumatizing violence" (4). According to this model, the traumatic experiences of those living in previously colonised countries, such as Rwanda, are not caused by one specific event, but can rather be traced back to the originary trauma of colonisation. Viewing trauma in this light removes the violent event from an isolated, ahistorical perspective, and resituates it in a wider historical context that allows for a detailed examination of both the initial trauma and any other traumas which continue to affect the postcolonial society. In his analysis of trauma, Craps pays particular attention to the continuation of trauma in postcolonial countries in various forms. Drawing on Frantz Fanon's writings on the psychological effects of racism and colonialism, he explores the ways in which trauma, contrary to Caruth's assertions, does not occur as a singular event, but rather is comprised of many events, ranging from colonialism and genocide to daily micro-aggressions in contemporary society. Craps uses terms such as "insidious trauma", "oppression-based trauma" and "postcolonial syndrome" to describe the ongoing nature of the traumatic experiences of people in the postcolonial context (4). Irene Visser, in her writings on trauma, concurs with Craps's assessment of trauma in a postcolonial context, arguing that:

For a postcolonial trauma theory [...] the definition of trauma would need to be formulated more comprehensively to account more astutely for the aftermath of colonialism's systematic oppression, with its characteristics of prolonged, repeated and cumulative stressor events. (276)

¹³ I will return to this idea later in the chapter, with specific reference to the Rwandan context.

As well as arguing for a postcolonial trauma theory, Craps observes the need to “take account of the specific social and historical contexts in which trauma narratives are produced and received” (5). Such an argument coincides with Mamdani’s contention that the genocide of 1994 ought to be analysed within the framework of the broader political concerns of the East African region as a whole (160). Like Craps, Mamdani believes that *itsembabwoko* cannot be viewed as an isolated event in Rwanda’s history, but rather as a continuation of the social, political and ideological differences established by the colonial state decades before. Craps’ and Mamdani’s observations play a key role in my thesis, as they challenge dominant non-native representations of the genocide as having occurred in a vacuum with little to no connection to the rest of Rwanda’s history. Such representations of *itsembabwoko* mislead audiences into thinking that the genocide can be viewed as yet another example of Africa’s endemic ethnic conflicts. This is a gross oversimplification of what is an extremely complex historical event.

While Euro-American notions of trauma cannot be dismissed out of hand in any discussion of trauma, postcolonial trauma theory is, in many ways, more applicable in the context of previously colonised countries, as it takes into account the lasting effects of colonialism on the country’s socio-political system. Furthermore, in many cases colonialism serves as the originary trauma, embedding itself in the very fabric of the country’s memory and so working itself into the psyche, collective and individual, of its citizens. In Rwanda the after-effects of Belgian colonialism are especially noticeable in the country’s postcolonial identity politics. Although the colonial legacy is perhaps most noticeable in the events leading up to the genocide, it has resulted in a number of traumatic events in Rwanda’s political sphere, especially anti-Tutsi violence prior to *itsembabwoko*. Mamdani relates at least ten examples of post-independence violence in the course of his book, incidents which occurred between the years 1959 and 1992. Given that the vast majority of these events took the form of massacres, largely aimed at Rwanda’s Tutsi minority, it is safe to conclude that they constitute moments of trauma. As Mamdani explains, the 1959 revolution against Rwanda’s Tutsi minority should not be viewed merely as the transfer of power from one group of elites to another (133). It was necessary for the revolutionary government, under Kayibanda, to make certain alterations to the country’s political system in order to retain its newly gained power (133). The most notable of these changes were, firstly, the shift in political representation from the minority Tutsis – previously favoured by the colonial government – to the majority Hutus, and, secondly, the establishment of elections at local and national level (Mamdani 133-4). While these changes are significant, they did not entirely do

away with colonial ideological or political models, however. For example, Rwandan society was still separated into ‘alien’ and ‘indigenous’ ethnic/racial groups: as under Belgian rule, Tutsis were identified as ‘foreign’ settlers, while Hutus were considered to be the country’s ‘indigenous’ population (Mamdani 134). The significance of the 1959 revolution therefore lies largely in the fact that it brought the previously oppressed ‘indigenous’ Hutus into power, thereby breaking with the colonial custom of privileging the ‘foreign’ Tutsis. As mentioned before, this change in government did not bring an end to violence, or its corresponding trauma, in Rwanda. Instead, it gave the new Hutu rulers a chance to impose social and political restrictions on the country’s Tutsi minority. These included the implementation of a quota system, which limited the number of Tutsi learners allowed into secondary schools (Mamdani 139), and the privileging of Hutus in both the civic and social spheres (138). The implementation of Hutu rule after 1959 consequently resulted in three waves of Tutsi exodus from Rwanda to its neighbouring countries, with the highest concentrations of exiles settling in Burundi and Uganda (Mamdani 161). The early years of the First Republic, governed by Kayibanda, also set the tone for subsequent bouts of anti-Tutsi violence. For example, in retaliation for the deaths of a number of Hutus in cross-border raids by Tutsi guerrillas, government forces in Biumba killed up to two thousand Tutsis, burned their houses and confiscated their property (Mamdani 129). Although these actions were at first viewed as an aberration, Mamdani notes that:

[W]hen the life of the coalition ended amid the expanded raids of 1963, the repression of Biumba provided a norm: a raid turned into a signal for the massacre of the local Tutsi population, and for the distribution of their property among those organised as the local self-defence group. (129)

The Biumba episode thus provides evidence for Craps’ assertion of the continuation of trauma stemming from the colonial project into the post-independence state. In fact, there were similar episodes of violence throughout the years leading up to the 1994 genocide, proving that the portrayal of the genocide as an isolated anomaly in Rwanda’s history is problematic and misleading as it skews outsiders’ understanding of Rwanda’s social and political history. Of greater concern, however, is the fact that such representations of *itsembabwoko* fail to acknowledge the existence of both pre- and post-genocide traumas. This is where Rwandan literature becomes important, as it challenges non-indigenous depictions of the trauma experienced collectively and individually by the Rwandan people. Chigbo Arthur Anyaduba writes:

While African writing is replete with imaginations of genocide, there has not been due scholarly acknowledgement, let alone committed attempts to

fully take stock, of the patterns of thoughts and creativity that African writers and others have put into imagining the horrors of genocides occurring on the continent, especially since the mid-twentieth century. (423)

Yet, though Anyaduba claims that there is not much scholarship on the work of African writers with regard to genocides on the continent, this has changed in recent years as the subject has gained traction in the academic space. Scholars such as Thando Njovane, Oumar Chérif Diop and J. Roger Kurtz have begun examining creative works by African writers with regards to genocide in Rwanda and other African countries. Indeed, Anyaduba himself has recently published a book on the subject, *The Postcolonial African Genocide Novel: Quests for Meaningfulness* (2021). Moreover, although Anyaduba focuses on fictional narratives of genocide in Rwanda and Nigeria, his argument can be extended to include semi-autobiographical novels and memoirs, as I do in this thesis with reference to the Rwandan context. Such work bears further analysis not only because it written, in many cases, by Rwandan survivors of the genocide, but also because of the array of narrative techniques employed by the authors. Naturally, these differences in form and structure are based on the preferences and choices of the individual authors. However, I would argue that they are also influenced by the reason the book has been written. Kayihura's memoir *Inside the Hotel Rwanda*, for instance, is a contestation of the story of Paul Rusesabagina and the refugees of the Hotel Mille Collines as presented in George's film *Hotel Rwanda*. As such, Kayihura's narrative, although a memoir, constantly points out discrepancies between his and George's narratives. He also ends his book with a number of chapters focused on Rusesabagina's life post-genocide, which challenge George's narrative in greater detail. In contrast to this method, Yolande Mukagasana and Immaculée Ilibagiza have both chosen to use the traditional memoir format, telling their stories chronologically and in detail, with instances of reflection and self-awareness also evident. Mukasonga, meanwhile, has taken an interesting route by penning her story twice, once as a memoir and once as a semi-autobiographical novel. The points of convergence in her two works, *Cockroaches* and *Our Lady of the Nile* respectively, are clearly visible. By choosing to relay her narrative twice, and in two different genres, Mukasonga creates a situation in which her story can be read singly or together. The same can be said of George's film *Hotel Rwanda* and Kayihura's *Inside the Hotel Rwanda*. All of the primary texts used in my thesis represent to a greater or lesser degree the individual and collective nature of the Rwandan genocide as well as, in the cases of Mukasonga and Gilbert Gatore, the violence prior to it and the trauma resulting from it. The following chapters are ordered more or less chronologically, in that they begin with Mukasonga's

accounts of the anti-Tutsi attacks of the 1960s and 1970s, followed by George's and Kayihura's accounts of *itsembabwoko* itself, and ending with Gatore's novel on its after-effects.

Chapter 2

Public trauma, Personal Mourning in Scholastique Mukasonga's Writing

“If a wound is great you cannot turn it into something that is spoken, it can barely be written.” – Michael Ondaatje (*Warlight* 275)

Only a handful of books dealing with the trauma of *itsebabwoko* have been published by Rwandan authors. Those that are available are largely non-fiction – with a particular focus on memoirs – and the majority are written by Francophone-African authors living outside of Rwanda. Of these authors, perhaps the most prolific is Scholastique Mukasonga (Bhattacharya 84), who has published two memoirs – *Cockroaches* (2016) and *The Barefoot Woman* (2018) – and a semi-autobiographical novel, *Our Lady of the Nile* (2014) (hereafter *Our Lady*). Mukasonga's memoirs focus primarily on life for Tutsis in post-independence Rwanda in ways which anticipate *itsebabwoko* – as is foregrounded by the title of *Cockroaches*, the derogatory term used for Tutsis prior to and during the genocide. Her novel also draws on events narrated in these memoirs, expanding on the experiences of Tutsi learners in majority Hutu schools and highlighting the fact that anti-Tutsi ideologies were present at all levels of society. Given that all three narratives are concerned with the same subject matter and are linked by their various representations of trauma, I shall refer to them collectively as the ‘genocide trilogy’, a term not used by Mukasonga herself but which seems apt given the interconnectedness of the themes found in all three books. All three texts were originally published in French before being translated into English by Archipelago Books.¹⁴ Unusually, however, Mukasonga did not publish her memoirs sequentially, releasing *Cockroaches*, which details her teenage years in Rwanda and her subsequent escape to Burundi, two years before *The Barefoot Woman*, which focuses on her childhood years and her mother's death during the genocide. This was likely a deliberate decision on Mukasonga's part, due to the great difficulty she experiences in speaking about her mother's death. *Our Lady* – part novel, part autobiography – is set in a prestigious girls' school in 1973, and follows the uneasy relationship between Hutu and Tutsi students, and the disastrous consequences of these tensions. Some of its events – and indeed the school itself – are based on Mukasonga's own experiences at the Lycée Notre-Dame-des-Citeaux in Kigali (Bhattacharya 85).

¹⁴ The original French titles of these works are as follows: *Inyenzi ou les Cafards* (2006), *La Femme aux pieds nus* (2008) and *Notre Dame du Nil* (2012).

While Mukasonga herself was not in Rwanda during the genocide, she lost thirty-seven family members to the violence, including her parents and a number of her siblings (Hitchcott 131). However, her writing does not dwell on these losses: it is only in the final chapters of *Cockroaches* that we are provided with any details of their murders and even this information is scarce. Although this is partially because Mukasonga herself does not know much about their deaths, it is predominantly due to the fact that she has chosen to focus on the anti-Tutsi violence that took place during the 1960s, rather than in 1994. As one of the very few Rwandan authors to write about this era, she provides valuable insight into the emergence of anti-Tutsi sentiments in the decades following Rwanda's independence. Of particular importance, therefore, are the similarities between this earlier violence and that enacted three decades later. The massacres, forced exile and quota systems imposed on Tutsis, beginning under the Kayibanda government in the 1960s, are largely neglected by others narrating the horrors experienced by the country's Tutsi minority during *itsembabwoko*. Films such as *Hotel Rwanda*, *Shooting Dogs* and *Kinyarwanda*, for example, focus exclusively on the one hundred days of *itsembabwoko*. By framing the narrative in this way, they distortedly suggest that the massacre of Tutsis was confined to the period between April 6 and July 15, 1994. According to this view, the genocide constitutes an aberration in Rwanda's past, a terrible but isolated moment of blood-letting in the country's history. As noted before, such a framing of *itsembabwoko* aligns with the (largely Western) idea of trauma as a sudden, calamitous event which falls outside a society's otherwise ordered experience (Caruth 181). Although it cannot be denied that *itsembabwoko* was a horrific period in Rwandan history, as Mukasonga's work shows, it was also neither entirely unexpected nor was it an isolated event. By choosing to focus on the violence in the decades preceding *itsembabwoko*, Mukasonga places the genocide in its broader political and historical contexts, challenging Western narratives which portray it in a vacuum. This contextualisation situates Rwanda's traumatic past within a postcolonial framework in which recent traumas may be traced back to an originary trauma, in this case Rwanda's divisive colonial past and its legacy. Such a contextualisation falls in line with the scholarship on the genocide that acknowledges the previous bouts of violence that preceded *itsembabwoko*. As Thando Njovane writes, for example, the country experienced outbreaks of anti-Tutsi violence in 1951, 1979 and 1990 (41). Leonhard Praeg, meanwhile, writes: "Once the conflict turned into violent revolution, the violence never ceased and a series of attacks and reprisals was sustained throughout the following decades" (26). Mukasonga herself documents a number of violent incidents in her memoirs as well.

In section one of this chapter, I discuss Mukasonga's memoirs *Cockroaches* and *The Barefoot Woman*, both of which deal with her childhood growing up as an exile in her own country. Section two is an exploration of her third book, the quasi-autobiographical *Our Lady*, alongside a comparative examination of Atiq Rahimi's 2019 film of the same name. Mukasonga's 'genocide trilogy' is linked by a number of themes present in all three books. The most obvious of these is trauma, which is often inextricably intertwined with a stark sense of grief. It is not just the personal trauma of Mukasonga's own loss that we are presented with, but also the collective trauma of a country in mourning. In many ways, Mukasonga's story is representative of the stories of thousands of other Rwandans who continue to live in the shadow of the genocide. While *Our Lady* does contain trauma, it is perhaps less obvious than in the other two texts and the same can be said for violence. For example, in her memoirs, Mukasonga openly discusses the violence that she witnessed as a child and a teenager, whereas in *Our Lady* the violence only really surfaces at the end of the novel and even then it is described in guarded terms. Here is one example of a divergence between Mukasonga's novel and Rahimi's film. While the novel shies away from violence, Rahimi embraces it from an artistic standpoint, portraying the devastation wrought by the soldiers with a poignancy that makes it more bearable to witness (if such a thing is possible). Also evident in Mukasonga's three books are the joint themes of dreaming and haunting. As with many trauma survivors, Mukasonga experiences dreams and flashbacks, and her imagination also causes her to envisage the way(s) in which her family members – especially her mother – may have died. These projections form part of the haunting she experiences sometimes in her dreams and sometimes through her writing itself. Once again, the theme is apparent in her novel and Rahimi's film, although the two arguably differ in their respective emphases, since Rahimi's film takes a more literal approach to portraying dreams and their haunting nature, while Mukasonga takes a more symbolic approach to both.

Storytelling also forms an important part of Mukasonga's oeuvre. She recalls the stories from her childhood told to her and her siblings regularly by their mother. It is clear that Mukasonga has chosen these stories carefully, as there are often links to the violence of present-day Rwanda in these older traditional stories. For Mukasonga, storytelling is hugely significant not only because she is a writer, but also, and more importantly, because they form a part of her heritage and of Rwanda's history. In an interview with Julien Le Gros shortly after the publication of her collection of short stories, *What the Hills Whisper* (2014), Mukasonga explains that Rwanda "is not just a country of genocide. It is a magnificent country, with another History, which has not always been that of division" (par. 4). She adds

that she has used the stories in the collection as a means of turning to her role as a traditional storyteller, a role that her mother fulfilled for Mukasonga and her siblings during their childhood (Le Gros par. 4). In doing so, she evokes the narratives of pre-colonial Rwanda as a means of highlighting the Rwandan people's shared history, a move that Nicki Hitchcott argues is a conscious attempt to stop writing about the genocide (131). Indeed, Mukasonga herself views her return to traditional Rwandan narratives as a contribution towards the reconstruction of a united Rwanda (Le Gros par. 3). And yet she is not able to fully escape writing stories of the genocide as is evident in her short story "Grief" from her book *Igifu* (2010). While not a primary text, I will bring "Grief" into my discussion where relevant as it ties together *Cockroaches* and *The Barefoot Woman* quite neatly. The final theme which I will consider in this chapter is that of premeditation. Mukasonga deals with this rather overtly in *Our Lady* and it gives us a fuller understanding of how raids and massacres were planned both before and during the genocide. In her memoirs, meanwhile, premeditation is seen in the organised nature of the militia attacks on her village. It is clear that their actions are not spontaneous outbreaks of violence, but rather are carefully planned before being enacted. Such organisation and premeditation are seen as a hallmark of the genocide, reminding us that the events of 1994 are situated within a broader context of trauma and brutality in Rwanda. While Mukasonga consciously moves away from *itsembabwoko* after the publication of *Our Lady*, in favour of a focus on Rwanda's common cultural history, her 'genocide trilogy' provides a unique and detailed account of the thirty-five years of inter-ethnic violence Rwanda experienced in the build-up to 1994. Such an extensive narrative, as suggested earlier, belies the popular belief that *itsembabwoko* constitutes the sole trauma of the Rwandan people.¹⁵ This is where the importance of Mukasonga's works lie as they help us to trace the country's trauma through the lens of her own grief. My aim, here, then, is to examine /Mukasonga's personal narrative of Rwanda's violence in the hopes of broadening our perspectives on what is already known about the 1994 genocide.

2.1 Growing up Tutsi: *Cockroaches* and *The Barefoot Woman*

Mukasonga's two memoirs, *Cockroaches* and *The Barefoot Woman*, focus predominantly on her early life in Rwanda in the 1960s. *Cockroaches* documents her teenage years, tracing her education to her exile in Burundi and her return to Bugesera to mourn her family. *The*

¹⁵ As noted earlier, this is not the view of scholars on the subject, but for many non-Rwandans who have only Western cinematic narratives to use as a reference point, this can be the case.

Barefoot Woman, meanwhile, provides details of her childhood growing up in a community knit together by tightly woven relationships between women. More than that, however, the latter is a tribute to her mother, Stefania. Mukasonga was not able to bury her mother as she had promised to do. Instead, she uses her memoir as a symbolic – if inadequate – burial. As she writes in the opening pages to *The Barefoot Woman*:

Mama, I wasn't there to cover your body, and all I have left is words – words in a language you didn't understand – to do as you asked. And I'm all alone with my feeble words, and on the pages of my notebook, over and over, my sentences weave a shroud for your missing body. (5)

Mukasonga's lament over the inadequacy of this metaphorical shroud – or *pagne*¹⁶ – sets the tone for the rest of the book. At once a “paean to motherhood” (Popescu par. 1) and a celebration of the ways in which women support each other, the book is nevertheless permeated by a sense of profound loss and unquenchable grief. Such mourning is present in *Cockroaches* as well. There are moments in which Mukasonga notes the fate of a particular friend or family member, but more importantly she uses her memoir to pay tribute to all of those who perished from her community. The book is dedicated to “everyone who died at Nyamata in the genocide” (*Cockroaches* n.p.), and ends with Mukasonga revisiting her village ten years after the genocide. As she drives through the village, she remembers the people who occupied a specific house or owned a particular shop. Names are important to Mukasonga, and she uses them as a means not only of remembering those who died, but also of making the genocide more personal for the reader. Rather than being overwhelmed with numbers and statistics or the dry explanations of historians, she brings our attention to the individuals whose lives she does not want forgotten. Although she devotes a chapter to speaking about her lost family, she uses the last chapter of *Cockroaches* to list people she remembers from her village, adding an anecdote of each person. She writes, for example, of Joséphine Kabenene, “the most elegant girl in the village, but also the proudest” (*Cockroaches* 159). Joséphine is remembered for her dancing skills: “When she agreed to dance at a wedding, people came running from far away to watch her shake her beautiful undulating hair. They applauded when she lifted her pretty arms to evoke an inyambo cow's perfect horns” (*Cockroaches* 159). Earlier in the book, she describes her mother's garden:

Sometimes she spent a whole afternoon on the little patch of land she set aside for the plants no one grew anymore. For her they were like the survivors of a happier time, and she seemed to draw a new energy from them. She grew them not for daily consumption but as a way of bearing witness to what was in

¹⁶ A *pagne* is a piece of material or cloth with which the deceased's body is covered.

danger of disappearing, what did indeed disappear in the cataclysm of the genocide. (*Cockroaches* 61).

Mukasonga thus uses her memoirs to write about those that might otherwise be forgotten. Despite not having witnessed the genocide herself, she pays tribute to those who did, reciting their names as a means of ensuring that they do not fade from sight. She describes Berkimasse the tailor; his sister-in-law Sisiliya; Rutereza; Nastasiya; Gakwaya; Suzanne and others. Each of these neighbours is associated with a specific memory or character trait, rather than simply being faceless names. This highlights the closeness of the community as well as Mukasonga's determination to keep each person alive as an individual instead of a statistic.

Similarly, she uses her books – particularly *The Barefoot Woman* – to keep her mother's stories alive. In so doing, she achieves a number of goals. Firstly, she keeps alive the traditional stories of Rwanda, ensuring they can still be passed down to another generation despite the massacre of thousands of people who might otherwise have lived to tell the stories to their own children. As with *What the Hills Whisper*, these stories are a means of re-knitting the Rwandan people, of reminding them of their common heritage. Unlike *What the Hills Whisper*, however, the stories in *The Barefoot Woman* are often darker, a reminder not so much of a shared history, but of a shared loss. Secondly, by sharing her mother's stories as well as memories from her own childhood – especially of the closeness of women in Rwandan society – Mukasonga has found another way in which to keep alive the memories of those the genocide has taken. Although largely a personal tribute to her mother, *The Barefoot Woman* therefore also provides a window into Rwandan society and the roles which women played. At the centre of the women of her village is her mother, Stefania. Thus, by writing of women's traditions, Mukasonga highlights the closeness of female relationships while simultaneously paying homage to the women of her village and – ultimately – to her mother. By placing her mother at the centre of the women she knew, she further emphasises Stefania's importance to the community, their family and to herself. Doing so somewhat alleviates the pain of Stefania's death and helps the reader to understand just how important a figure she was in Mukasonga's life. Thirdly, the focus on stories and storytelling in *The Barefoot Woman* symbolises Mukasonga inheriting her mother's role while still telling her own story. Her books record the history of Rwanda's Tutsis from 1960 up to the genocide and in doing so record not only her own story, but also the story of a country fractured by cycles of violence and trauma. Her “bare-stripped voice of unforgiving specificity” (Sarti par. 2) is able to tell her particular story while projecting it onto the lives of all survivors. Her

memoirs are able to contain a public trauma wrapped in a personal grief because the two are inextricably intertwined – the story of one survivor is the story of all survivors. Mukasonga's prose is largely unadorned by detail, making it almost possible to take her story wholesale and, with a few changes of names and places, arrive at the story of another survivor. Once we realise this, it becomes easy to see the collective trauma buried in Mukasonga's books. Similarly, once we realise the similarities between the pogroms of the 1960s and the genocide of 1994, we must acknowledge the inadequacy of the Yale school of trauma theory to explain the trauma of Rwanda and other postcolonial African countries. This inadequacy is premised on the fact that Western trauma theory largely ignores the continuous nature of trauma in the postcolonial setting. As a result, it is necessary to turn to postcolonial trauma theorists like Craps to better understand the persistent trauma present at both an individual and a communal level. Mukasonga's memoirs, therefore, serve to emphasise the interconnectedness of Rwanda's various traumas and the invisible strings tying one survivor to another, until a network of country-wide narratives becomes clear.

2.1.1 Remembering Gitagata

Born in 1956, Mukasonga grew up in a newly independent Rwanda (the country gained full independence in 1962) under Kayibanda's First Republic. As Rwanda's first democratically elected president,¹⁷ it was Kayibanda's regime that established Tutsis as second-class citizens, and subjected them to humiliation, exile, arrest and murder. In *Cockroaches*, Mukasonga documents some of the first anti-Tutsi actions of the new Hutu government:

Thousands of Tutsis had been massacred, more than one hundred fifty thousand had fled to neighbouring countries, and those who stayed behind in Rwanda would be forced to live as outcasts. (39)

Among those made to live as pariahs was Mukasonga's own family. Her narration of their forced removal foreshadows the later events of *itsebabwoko*, in describing hundreds of Tutsis crammed into a convoy of trucks that would take them to their new home in Bugesera. As the convoy departed, it was surrounded by a shouting crowd of Hutus that spat at the Tutsi exiles and waved machetes (*Cockroaches* 19). The machete would, of course, later become a symbol of the genocide and the main weapon in the eradication of Rwanda's Tutsis. One of the most menacing visual representations of the role the machete played is a scene from Raoul Peck's *Sometimes in April* in which an *Interahamwe* militiaman uses a machete to

¹⁷ A term used loosely, given that Tutsis were forced to vote for him (*Cockroaches* 40).

chop off the head of a straw dummy in one slice (00:16:55 – 00:17:00). As Mamdani observes: “The Rwandan genocide was very much an intimate affair” (6). The highly personal nature of the 1994 massacres does not escape Mukasonga. In 2004 she returned to her childhood home in Gitagata and found a Hutu family still living near her parents’ old house. The family had been their neighbours prior to *itsebabwoko*. When confronted by Mukasonga, the man first denied knowing her family, then later admitted he did: “Yes, that’s Cosma’s [Mukasonga’s father] daughter, now that I see her, I can certainly ask her forgiveness...” (*Cockroaches* 163). The comment leaves Mukasonga wondering whether he was perhaps responsible for her parents’ deaths or at least played a role in them (*Cockroaches* 163). The comment is ambiguous, however, and it may be that the man merely wished to ask Mukasonga to forgive him for continuing to live near to what was once her family home. Or perhaps he was apologising for being alive while her parents – and much of the rest of the village – were not. He might even have been asking her forgiveness for not helping to keep her family alive. Whatever the case may be, it is a painful return for Mukasonga, particularly given her lack of knowledge about what happened to her family, and her inability to bury them properly.

Cockroaches also goes back in time to describe how Mukasonga was born in Gikongoro province in the southwest of Rwanda before her family moved to Butare when she was two years old. In 1959, however, the first anti-Tutsi pogroms began. Invoking the language of the Holocaust, Mukasonga writes: “The machinery of the genocide had been set into motion. It would never stop. Until the final solution, it would never stop” (*Cockroaches* 15). She recounts how one day in Butare she and her mother were forced to hide in the banana grove near their house as a mob made its way into the village, yelling and waving machetes, spears, bows, clubs, and torches (*Cockroaches* 15). The crowd broke down the walls of the brick house the family was busy building and set fire to their straw hut and stables: “They didn’t take anything, they only wanted to destroy, to wipe out all sign of us, annihilate us” (*Cockroaches* 16). Mukasonga’s observations here are a preview of what 1994 would bring, but they also provide insight into the kind of violence experienced by Rwanda’s Tutsis in the early days of Rwandan independence. Such an attack, although localised, would be replicated across the country, growing in magnitude until the onset of the “final solution” – *itsebabwoko* – itself. Mukasonga is not the only author to compare *itsebabwoko* to the Holocaust, however. Courtemanche does so too in his novel *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, as cited in the previous chapter. Mamdani also compares the genocide to the murder of the Jews at the hands of the Nazi party. These comparisons often acknowledge the difference in

the methods of killing chosen by the Nazi and Hutu extremists respectively. While both events sought to eradicate an entire group of people, the manner in which the killings occurred were somewhat different. Mamdani and Courtemanche both acknowledge this when they write of the brutality of the attacks. Referencing the differences in the way in which Hutu moderates and sympathisers were killed compared to that of the Tutsis, Mamdani writes:

Whereas the Hutu were killed as individuals, the Tutsi were killed as a group, recalling German designs to extinguish the country's Jewish population. This explicit goal is why the killings of the Tutsi between March and July of 1994 must be termed "genocide". This single fact underlines a crucial similarity between the Rwandan genocide and the Nazi Holocaust. (5)

However, he goes on to acknowledge the differences between *itsembabwoko* and the Holocaust:

Unlike the Nazi Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide was not carried out from a distance, in remote concentration camps beyond national borders, in industrial killing camps operated by agents who often did no more than drop Zyklon B crystals into gas chambers from above. The Rwandan genocide was executed with the slash of machetes rather than the drop of crystals, with all the gruesome detail of a street murder rather than the bureaucratic efficiency of a mass extermination. (5)

Mamdani's point here is that the Holocaust was a more industrial, clinical affair than the Rwandan genocide, which required the many to kill the few, often in ways that involved groups of perpetrators killing those who were part of their communities (6). As Mamdani notes: "Whereas Nazis made every attempt to separate victims from perpetrators, the Rwandan genocide was very much an intimate affair" (6).¹⁸ For example, during the Holocaust, Jews were rounded up into concentration camps where they were seen only by a select few camp guards. During *itsembabwoko*, meanwhile, the perpetrators often knew their victims personally and killed them publicly. As Mukasonga's writings show, this was also the case with regards to the violence of the 1960s. Of course, Mukasonga's observations come in the wake of the genocide. She would not have known, as a child, the extent to which the early example of violence cited above represented the repetitive nature of such events – a reality that, as an adult, she could not fail to be aware of. Even in internal exile in Bugesera, Mukasonga continued to experience the terror of Hutu raids on Tutsi villages. In

¹⁸ This is not to say that the murder of Jews during the Holocaust was not terrible, but rather serves to emphasise the physical brutality needed to slaughter people often personally known to the killers. While the Holocaust allowed the murderers to kill from a distance, the Rwandan genocide required perpetrators to actually look their victims in the eyes as they hacked them to death.

Cockroaches, for example, she describes how “a house was no sanctuary either” (64). Hutu soldiers would often burst in without warning, shoving the occupants aside as they searched for correspondence with Tutsis living outside of Rwanda or pictures of Kigiri, the last Tutsi king whose reign ended in 1962. This activity was repeated from house to house until the whole village had had their homes turned upside down (*Cockroaches* 65). These raids happened so frequently that, for Mukasonga, they have all blurred into one single scene of horror, one that returns to her in her nightmares even now (*The Barefoot Woman* 8). She remains haunted by the sound of the soldiers marching into their village in Butare, the first time she witnessed a raid:

And then we heard noises, shouts, a hum like a swarm of monstrous bees, a growl filling the air. I can still hear the growl today, like a menace swelling behind me. Sometimes I hear that growl in France, in the street; I don’t dare turn around, I walk faster, isn’t it that same roar, forever following me?
(*Cockroaches* 15)

Each raid followed the same pattern. Once the soldiers had finished their search, the house was left in shambles – spilled beans, squashed sweet potatoes, mangled plates, overturned jugs and muddled bedding (*The Barefoot Woman* 10; *Cockroaches* 65). Mukasonga describes the aftermath of one raid thus:

The silence makes me open my eyes again. My father is helping a wincing André to his feet. My mother and Alexia are cleaning up the spilled beans. Now, from next door, comes the same sound of boots, the same shrieks, the same sobs, the same crash of breaking jugs. (*The Barefoot Woman* 10)

Such sounds act as a warning signal, letting each house know how close the soldiers were to them, how much time they had to hide their children. Mukasonga’s mother was particularly careful about this. She listened closely for the sound of the soldiers and if she heard them, she would send the children to hide in the bushes surrounding their fields. Other times she sent them to hide under mounds of grass specially built for that purpose or else into nearby anteater burrows, their entrances camouflaged by grass and branches (*The Barefoot Woman* 11). As it later transpires, Stefania’s attempts to save her children were ultimately futile, since only two of her children survived the massacres of 1994: Mukasonga and her older brother André, both of whom were not in Rwanda at the time of the genocide. Another of Mukasonga’s brothers, Antoine, had a large family with seven boys. Stefania was overjoyed, sure that at least some of them would survive to carry on the family name. But, says Mukasonga, simply: “She was wrong” (*The Barefoot Woman* 112). This simplicity of language when speaking about those who died is characteristic of Mukasonga’s writing. In

another instance, she comments on the fate of Froduald, the man who guided her and André to the Burundian border. Despite the dangers of crossing the border, or helping others to cross, Froduald did not meet his death on this occasion: “He wouldn’t be killed that morning. He would be killed twenty years later” (*Cockroaches* 103). Rarely does Mukasonga go into detail about a death or her feelings about it. One of the occasions on which she is more openly emotional comes at the end of *Cockroaches*, when she speaks about Antoine’s death: “When I think of Antoine, what I feel is not only grief. I feel anger rising up in me” (152). She continues:

My mother was wrong. Antoine, his wife Jeanne, his nine children, they were all killed. And nothing is left of them, not so much as a name carved into a cross, on a grave. And I walk alone through the tangled thicket that was once their home. And anger wells up in me. Why should that life have been ruined for us? Why should that life have been sacrificed in vain? Antoine, Jeanne, the nine children, nothing left.
I weep in the shadow of the tall trees. (*Cockroaches* 154)

Mukasonga’s use of the phrase “tall trees” here is not accidental. She repeats it when she first speaks about revisiting Antoine’s house on her return to Gitagata, her village in Bugesera:

In the bush, now brown with the dry season, what was once Antoine’s yard is easy to make out. It’s the only one with big trees whose leaves are still green, looking strangely exotic amid the thorny undergrowth. He planted them with seeds he brought home from the Karama Agricultural Institute. He loved them. He took special care of them. I kneel at their feet. *I weep at the feet of the tall trees.* (*Cockroaches* 152, emphasis added)

On the one hand, Mukasonga is literally crying at the feet of the trees her brother had planted. On the other, however, her words also act as a metaphor for mourning the loss of her whole village. During the genocide, as indicated earlier, Tutsis were often referred to as tall trees or tall grass because of their height. Thus, Mukasonga is symbolically mourning at the feet of the Tutsis of her village, including her family. Significantly, Antoine’s trees are the only greenery to be seen in the village, which suggests that they also symbolise the continued existence, through memory, of the people of Gitagata. It is not only Mukasonga who remembers the existence of those long dead: nature has also left a sign of their presence in spite of all attempts to eradicate them.

Much of Mukasonga’s trauma naturally comes from the losses she has endured. These are often revealed in lists such as the one she uses as the dedication for *Cockroaches*. In it, she writes: “For everyone who died at Nyamata in the genocide” (n.p.), before listing her family members who lost their lives: her father Cosma, her mother Stefania, her siblings Antoine, Alexia, Jeanne, Judith and Julienne, and their spouses and children (n.p.). Later, she

writes: “André and I could only call the roll of our dead” (*Cockroaches* 121). She adds: “I counted them up over and over again. There were thirty-seven” (*Cockroaches* 122).

Similarly, the unnamed protagonist in the short story “Grief” has a list of her dead, albeit a physical one:

She pulled out a sheet of square-ruled paper, a page from a schoolchild’s notebook. She didn’t need to read the few sentences that served as an introduction to a long list of names: her father, her mother, her brothers, her sisters, her uncles, her aunts, her nephews, her nieces... This was now the list her dead, of everyone who had died far away from her, without her, and there was nothing she could do for them, not even die with them. (3)

As with *Our Lady*, there is no clear indication that this story is about anyone other than, in this case, an unknown woman mourning her dead, but the similarities between it and the events of Mukasonga’s own life make it instantly recognisable as being semi-autobiographical. There is a special poignancy in the idea of the survivor being unable to die with the dead, since it not only invokes the idea of living without one’s loved ones, but also a sense of guilt at not being there for them, or somehow helping them. Just as Mukasonga was unable to bury her mother properly, so she could not be with her family when they died. There is nothing she can do for them except write about them in an effort to keep their memories alive. She views this as a futile effort, particularly because, as she tells her mother’s memory, she must write in a language they did not even speak.

2.1.2 The Violence of Exile

Mukasonga speaks of the systematic eradication of the Tutsis in her memoirs. In *Cockroaches*, for example, she documents the way in which Hutu soldiers would come into the village and round up certain men who were then taken away, never to be seen again. Such disappearances were linked to the guerrilla attacks sometimes launched by Tutsi exiles in Burundi. Wanting to prevent Tutsi men in internal exile from helping to facilitate these raids, the Hutu government sanctioned the kidnapping of men from areas like Bugesera. Such behaviour brings to mind the lists created during *itsembabwoko* which were used by the military and *Interahamwe* to target those they considered particularly dangerous to the regime. Soldiers in the nearby town of Nyamata began arresting many people, starting with shopkeepers and teachers (*Cockroaches* 44). They were taken to a prison in Ruhengeri and never returned (*Cockroaches* 45). In one particularly heart-rending example of these mass arrests, soldiers took a little boy with them because he refused to leave his father. Mukasonga recounts the story in *Cockroaches*:

One shopkeeper had a business in Nyamata like the others, but he lived in Gitwe. His name was Tito, and he came from Butare. The soldiers showed up to take him away [...] People who ventured outside told us the soldiers had searched and sacked the house like all the others, but they'd also dragged Tito away to their truck. His son Apollinaire, who must have been four years old ran up and clung to his father. Felicita [Apollinaire's mother] shouted to him to let go and come back to her. But Apollinaire wouldn't listen: he kept his little arms wrapped around his father's legs. Then the soldier said – and the whole village heard – “Well, if he wants to go with his father, let's take him too. After all, he's the son of an Inyenzi [cockroach], he's a baby snake, a baby cockroach. One day he'll be a big snake himself, a real cockroach, an Inyenzi.” The soldiers threw Tito and his son into the truck, and we never saw them again. (45)

The eradication of Tutsi men in the Bugesera area did not stop at forced disappearances. One of the most significant examples of bloodshed occurred a year after independence and, unbeknownst to the population, provided the best indication of what would happen thirty-one years later. Between December 1963 and February 1964, Rwanda saw one of the most brutal repressions of Tutsi insurgents prior to *itsebabwoko*. Known as the Bugesera invasion (Mamdani 129), the bloodshed was initiated after a group of Tutsi insurgents launched an attack from Burundi (*Cockroaches* 45). The government's reprisal was especially gruesome in Gikongoro province. Mukasonga describes January and February of 1964 as “a real foretaste of the genocide”, and references a rumour her mother heard: “[T]he Rukarara [river] ran red with blood” (*Cockroaches* 45-46). Implicitly, here, she once again evokes images of the genocide, the allusion to the blood-red Rukarara conjuring up images of bloated corpses floating down the Nyabarongo river during *itsebabwoko*. Indeed, rivers and lakes are a recurring theme in Mukasonga's texts, usually linked with death, and exemplify the intersection of personal and collective trauma. In another anecdote from *Cockroaches*, she relates the terrible events of a military raid in Nyamata in 1967:

Through the holes in the sheet metal, we saw something that left us petrified with fear: a huge crowd of soldiers heading toward Lake Cyohoha, dragging bodies that looked like broken marionettes, among which I recognised some neighbours of ours, Rwabukumba and his brother. (68)

A few days later, Mukasonga went to collect water with a friend and discovered that a group of armed boys was living on the banks of the lake. She writes:

Many of those boys were posted along the shoreline, as if standing guard. When we walked into the water to fill our calabashes, we saw what they guarding: the tied-up bodies of victims slowly dying in the shallows of the lake, little waves washing over them now and then. (*Cockroaches* 69)

She adds that the reason the boys were present was to prevent families from retrieving the bodies. As a result, the community “found little pieces of skin and rotting body parts in our calabashes when we fetched water” (*Cockroaches* 69). Rivers as sites of death are not confined to pre-genocide Rwanda. In *The Barefoot Woman*, Mukasonga recounts a traditional song that her mother often used as a preface to her stories:

Often it was the story of a poor little cowherd who lost his cows. They escaped, they crossed the river, now they’re gazing on foreign grass. The cowherd set off to look for them in a canoe, but, I don’t know why, the song says the river will swallow him up, along with his herd. (114)

Although this tale may be viewed simply as an example of Rwanda’s oral storytelling tradition, placed in the context of a narrative of anti-Tutsi violence – and eventually genocide – the song takes on a very different meaning. The reference to cows suggests that the cowherd is a young Tutsi boy, since it was Tutsis who traditionally owned cattle in pre-colonial Rwanda. Furthermore, the fact that “the river will swallow him up” is redolent of the way in which dead Tutsis were thrown into the Kagera river during *itsembabwoko*, causing their bloated corpses to wash up on the banks of neighbouring Uganda (January 83). Analysed in this light, the song becomes a veiled reference to – or perhaps premonition of – the fate of thousands of Tutsis during *itsembabwoko*. Peck also draws attention to this method of disposal in his film *Sometimes in April*. In a brief scene thirty minutes into the film, we see two people throwing what is clearly a corpse over the side of a bridge (00:37-00:39). Because the scene is shot from a distance, it is difficult to tell exactly who these two men may be, but it is likely that they are members of the *Interahamwe* as they do not appear to be wearing official military uniforms. This assumption is further supported by the fact that the previous frame shows a line of Rwandans at a roadblock, with Tutsis being pulled to one side (00:36-00:37). This frame is shot in close-up, but the railings in the background clearly resemble those of a bridge. Directly after the corpse is thrown over the railings, the camera pans out to show a crowd (possibly the same one as before) standing at a roadblock on a bridge (00:39-00:40). It seems likely that the bridge shown throughout the scene is the same one, but even if it is not, Peck highlights yet another example of the indignities faced by Tutsis during the genocide. Such deliberate cruelty stands in stark contrast to the relative normality of the story of the cowherd in *The Barefoot Woman*. However, the two narratives are linked by their references to Tutsis dying in a river. Mukasonga’s inclusion of this song in her memoirs is thus not simply another recollection of her mother’s stories. Rather, in light of Rwanda’s

decades of anti-Tutsi violence and the role rivers played in this history, it serves as a warning of the fate of many Tutsis both before and during the genocide.

Women, too, were targeted by those wishing to eradicate Tutsis, particularly by the Hutu soldiers and boys situated around the village. In *The Barefoot Woman*, Mukasonga recounts the rape of Viviane, one of the girls in her village. As Mukasonga tells it, Viviane had “committed the imprudence of going to fetch water at Lake Cyohoha alone, at an hour when the young men of the party were in the camp” (146). She was later found in some bushes, “bloodied and covered with bruises” (146). This incident is of dual significance for Mukasonga and the rest of the village. Naturally, the brutality of the act itself is indicative of the violence faced by the villagers on a daily basis. Not only did they have to deal with frequent raids, but they were often unable to perform even the most basic tasks in safety. Viviane’s rape brought to the fore yet another way in which Tutsis – this time women – were subject to humiliation by Hutus. As Mukasonga notes, rape was a mechanism by which women became prey to men “who have been inculcated with the idea that raping a young Tutsi woman is a revolutionary act, an irrevocable right for the people of the majority” (*The Barefoot Woman* 145). This ideology continued into the genocide of 1994 during which time Tutsi women were often held hostage and raped repeatedly by Hutu men, despite the so-called Hutu Ten Commandments forbidding sexual relations between the two groups. Rape was a way of eradicating Tutsis, since the patrilineal nature of Rwandan society meant that any children born of rape would be classified as Hutu, not Tutsi. Donatilla Mukamana and Petra Brysiewicz add that the use of rape as a tool of genocide was meant to “humiliate and degrade” Tutsi women (380). Moreover, genocidal rape affects not only the individual victim, but the community as a whole, because it unravels the “social fabric of family and community [...] weakening the people’s capacity to resist” (379). Quoting MADRE, Mukamana and Brysiewicz continue: “It is this ability to destroy the community that makes rape such a powerful weapon of war” (379). This leads to the second reason rape was of such significance for Mukasonga: it was a topic generally avoided in conversation, even during the 1960s when it became common (*The Barefoot Woman* 144). Like Mukamana and Brysiewicz, Mukasonga acknowledges the broader damage that rape caused, stating: “We had nothing in our traditions to help us deal with that family-shattering catastrophe” (*The Barefoot Woman* 144). Normally a woman who became pregnant as a result of rape was sent away from the family to give birth. As IDPs in exile and confined to a small area of the country, this was not possible, however. Thus, instead of being shunned, Viviane, who fell pregnant as a result of her rape, was assisted by her fellow women (*The Barefoot Woman*

147). The Rwandan genocide was the first instance in which rape was classified as an act of genocide under Article II of the United Nations' Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Schabas 162-163), and Jean-Paul Akayesu, the former mayor of Taba commune, was the first person in history to be found guilty of genocidal rape (Eltringham 28). However, as Mukasonga's memoirs make clear, rape was a widespread practice in force prior to the genocide.

2.2 *Our Lady of the Nile*: The Genocide in Mukasonga's Novel and Atiq Rahimi's Film Adaptation

While *Cockroaches* and *The Barefoot Woman* recount Mukasonga's personal experiences, her novel *Our Lady of the Nile* takes a more fictional approach to the events of the 1970s. Although a novel, the book does not entirely discount the real-life experiences of Mukasonga herself, however, based as it is on an attack that took place at her school during her time there. The novel tells the stories of Virginia and Veronica, two Tutsi students at a girls' school, Lycée Notre Dame du Nil. In the course of the school year, Gloriosa, a Hutu student, leads a band of young militiamen to the school to purge it of its Tutsi students (part of the quota allowed to attend secondary schools in Rwanda). In the course of the novel, we are exposed to the relationships that exist within the school, which serves as a microcosm of the Rwanda of the 1970s. Atiq Rahimi's 2019 film – named after Mukasonga's novel – tackles the narrative from a visual perspective and remains largely faithful to the original text.

In *Our Lady*, we are introduced to a number of Rwandan girls from various backgrounds. As noted above, Virginia and Veronica are two of the school's few Tutsi students. There is also Gloriosa, the daughter of a prominent Hutu man; Modesta who has a Hutu father and a Tutsi mother; and Immaculée, a Hutu moderate. Together the latter three girls represent the rest of the country's 'main' socio-political groups: Gloriosa represents the old Kayibanda regime, Modesta the mixed Hutu-Tutsi population and Immaculée the Hutu moderate. Finally, there is Goretti, whose father is a top military official and who represents the coming Habyarimana government. Gloriosa views her as a competitor to her reign over the school. Although a fictionalised version of Rwanda before the genocide, *Our Lady* is also a cautionary tale of what happens when ethnic hatred prevails. Throughout the narrative, Gloriosa looks for ways in which to humiliate her Tutsi classmates and elevate the importance of Hutu representation as the majority people. This results in her – along with the unwilling Modesta – attempting to change the nose of the statue of the eponymous Lady from a longer 'Tutsi' one to a shorter 'Hutu' one. When this fails – the two girls end up falling

from the plinth – Gloriosa blames Tutsi rebels, claiming that her and Modesta were attacked. This lie has a snowball effect, leading to Gloriosa being hailed as a hero. She uses her new fame to further shun the Tutsi students and, ultimately, leads an attack on the school with the help of some nearby militiamen. While the attack is largely successful, the novel ends with the downfall of Gloriosa, her leadership replaced by that of Goretti. The novel, therefore, narrates the events of Rwanda's independence: from the end of white rule (the Belgian teachers at the school have little power), to the rise of Kayibanda as the country's first president, the violence of the 1960s and, finally, Habyarimana's coup. The novel and film focus almost exclusively on the actions of the girls themselves, with the only white characters being the teachers at the school who are focused on raising the girls to be socially successful young women, and Monsieur de Fontenaille, an eccentric artist and "colonial holdover" (Lucas 29). The teachers, mostly nuns, do nothing when the attack begins, instead barricading themselves in a room (01:16:53-01:17:05). Once again, then, we see Mukasonga's novel as a form of social commentary, as the nuns represent a West that ignored the horrors of the genocide. Fontenaille, meanwhile, is obsessed with the origins of the Tutsi, claiming that they are descended from Egyptian royalty. He represents the original colonial ideas on race and ethnicity in Rwanda, completely oblivious to the danger that his hypotheses create. Veronica is particularly taken by his ideas and visits him often. When the attack happens, however, he is helpless, unable to protect her from the militia. Thus we see the inertia of those Western forces that remained in Rwanda during the genocide.

Mukasonga also addresses the issue of rape in her novel. With characteristic restraint she writes about Veronica's fate during the attack on the school:

They undressed her, and forced her with blows from their sticks to dance stark naked before the idol that resembled her, then they tied her to the throne. They put the hat on her head. They spread her legs. I won't tell you what they did with their sticks, nor how they finished her off. (241).

This is what Immaculée tells Virginia when she fetches her from her hiding place with the old woman, Nyamirongi. In Rahimi's film, it is further implied that Virginia herself is raped by one of the militants. As she hides in a room waiting for Immaculée to fetch her, a soldier sees her and forces his way into the room (01:17:59). Brandishing a large stick, he orders Virginia to take off her clothes and she falls backwards onto a pile of bedding (01:18:04-01:18:28). When we next see her, she is lying next to the body of the soldier, covered in blood (01:19:14-01:19:20). Although it is not clear whether Virginia has been raped – she is still fully clothed – the implication is that that was the soldier's intention. Such scenes force the

audience to acknowledge the extent of the brutality committed against the Tutsi population prior to the genocide – brutality which prefaced the horrors to come thirty years later.

Perhaps one of the most striking differences between *Our Lady* and Mukasonga's memoirs is the hopefulness with which the novel ends. After saving Virginia, Immaculée returns to tell her about the rest of the attack and the fate of their fellow students. As they part, Virginia asks if they will see each other again, and Immaculée responds: "Of course we'll see each other again. Rendezvous at the gorillas" (*Our Lady* 244). This is a reference to Immaculée's desire to work with Rwanda's endangered gorillas. More significantly, however, it offers the hope that the two girls will survive the trauma that they have endured and will one day be reunited. Naturally, this does not take into account the genocide, which neither of them could foresee. Perhaps this, then, is why the novel can end on such a positive note. Combined with Immaculée's actions in saving Virginia, this final sentence serves to instil hope in the audience at an outcome in which a Tutsi and a Hutu part as friends. Anyone reading the novel with little knowledge of the later genocide would have no sense of the irony of its ending. This felicitous conclusion also contrasts with that of Western films like *Hotel Rwanda*, which ends on a somewhat unrealistically happy note – the joyous reunion of Paul Rusesabagina with his nieces at a refugee camp, for example – Mukasonga's novel is quietly hopeful in a way that suggests a future happiness. This happiness does not come immediately, but rather is hinted at, thereby giving us the understanding that the girls need time to process their respective traumas and will only then be ready to meet again. In *Hotel Rwanda*, however, the ending is immediate and overwhelming. More importantly, it does not allow for the recognition of trauma and its continued effect on the characters. Instead, it provides the kind of hopeful ending many cinemagoers might expect from a Hollywood blockbuster. Such an ending seems rather unlikely in light of the traumatic events the characters have just experienced. Rahimi's film version of *Our Lady* takes a similar approach to that of Mukasonga's novel, ending with Immaculée and Virginia walking hand-in-hand away from the camera, discussing their futures (01:25:41-01:27:19). Each has come to a realisation: Immaculée that she would prefer the company of gorillas to that of people, Virginia that she will leave Rwanda and return at an indeterminate time in the future. Naturally, knowing about the later genocide, one wonders what becomes of them and their plans. Rahimi briefly acknowledges the trauma they suffer from and their fear for the future. As they sit beside a stream, Immaculée tells Virginia of the military coup that took place as the attack on the school occurred. Both girls admit that they are scared of what might happen next (01:25:05-01:25:16). Like *Our Lady*, Rahimi's film takes a gentle approach to what has hitherto been

horrifying. The understated nature of the film captures the tenderness with which Mukasonga writes: her characters are realistic, nuanced and sympathetic, more complex than the ‘good’ or ‘bad’ characterisation observable in films like *Hotel Rwanda* or even in books like *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*. There is no need for her to describe the horror in great detail because she chooses her words carefully and is able to capture the cruelty of the story’s events in a way that does not require direct explanations. There is possibly something more horrifying in this than in the overtly depicted violence of certain genocide films, because the audience is forced to imagine what happens off-camera. Instead of being inundated with terrible images, we are made to imagine what occurs. We therefore are able to impose our own fears onto the characters, which creates a greater sense of disturbance than might otherwise have been achieved.

Mukasonga’s language is unembellished throughout her writing, laying bare the raw emotions she – or, in the case of *Our Lady*, her characters – experience without fanfare. Such language use is, arguably, what enables her to impart such forceful images and emotions to her audience. This ability also allows her to create different emotions at the end of each of her books. Where *Our Lady* ends on a hopeful note, *Cockroaches* finishes with a vague sense of closure since, by listing the names of all those who have died, Mukasonga has at least partially fulfilled her goal of ensuring that they are not forgotten. *The Barefoot Woman*, meanwhile, leaves the reader feeling bereft. This latter book takes us full circle in terms of its themes. It opens with Mukasonga’s grief over not being able to say a proper farewell to her mother and ends with the words: “Do you have a *pagne* big enough to cover them all, every one of them...every one...every one?” (153). These words suggest that Mukasonga believes she has still not succeeded in fully completing the mourning rituals for her dead family – her book is a poor substitute for the *pagnes* with which they should be covered. She has still not found their bodies, and her mourning will continue. Here, again, we are made aware of the continuing nature of the trauma that genocide survivors experience. In *Cockroaches*, Mukasonga refers to her notebook in which she has recorded the names of her dead as a “paper grave” (165), once more highlighting the ineffectiveness of her writing at laying her family to rest. Of her genocide trilogy, then, it is only *Our Lady* that really leave us with a sense of peace having been reached. I believe it is because it is a fictional novel that it is able to do so. By writing an imagined tale, Mukasonga is able to generate the happy – or at least hopeful – ending that eludes her in reality. It is a means of metaphorically drawing the veil on her own grief and trauma. Ultimately, however, even this apparent closure is ephemeral due to the renewed outbreak of death and violence that will come with *itsembabwoko*.

As a microcosm of Rwandan society, *Our Lady* gives us insight into the types of relationships that existed between Hutus and Tutsis during the 1960s and early 1970s. It also includes a number of the themes present in Mukasonga's memoirs. One such theme is the idea that Tutsis migrated into Rwanda from elsewhere. For example, Monsieur de Fontenaille is convinced that the Tutsis are descendants of the "black Pharaohs" of Egypt (*Our Lady* 79). He claims that "during the long exodus, the Tutsi had lost their Memory" (75). He, however, knows the secret of their roots: "But he, Fontenaille, knew where the Tutsi came from, and who they were. How he came to know was a long story, the story of his life. It was his destiny, and he wasn't ashamed to say so" (*Our Lady* 75). In his obsession with finding the ethnic roots of the Tutsi, he uncovers a myriad of theories on their origin:

But where did they come from? The mystery of the Tutsi ate away at him. He'd gone and questioned the old bearded missionaries. He'd read everything there was to read on the subject. Nobody agreed on anything. One said the Tutsi came from Ethiopia, another that they were black Jews of some kind, or emigrant Copts from Alexandria, perhaps Romans who had gotten lost, maybe cousins of the Fula or the Maasai, Sumerian survivors from Babylon, some even said they'd come all the way from Tibet, true Aryans. Fontenaille swore to himself he'd find out the truth. (*Our Lady* 76)

In his search for the origins of the Tutsis, Fontenaille collects drawings of those girls from the school who are willing to visit him at his house. On a later visit to Egypt, he comes across a goddess's temple as well as the stelae of the Candace queens and has an epiphany: "Those faces carved in stone were the same as those he had sketched" (77). He believes that the Egyptian pharaohs are the ancestors of the Tutsis. When Veronica and Virginia visit his replica of the temple of Isis, they recognise their faces as well as those of some of their Tutsi classmates in the drawings on the walls (*Our Lady* 79). Veronica, in particular, is awed by these likenesses and easily believes Fontenaille's explanation that she is the chosen one, the Great Goddess (*Our Lady* 79). From that point on, she takes to visiting Fontenaille regularly, even believing that taking shelter with him will protect her from the attack on the school.

Fontenaille's theory about where the Tutsis might come from is reflected in Mukasonga's memoirs, although her mother taught her that they were ultimately from Ethiopia, having passed through Egypt sometime before (118). Such theorising falls in line with colonial thinking on the Tutsis as non-indigenous people in Rwanda. Rahimi's film also focuses on the relationship between Veronica and Fontenaille, portraying her as captivated by his thinking because of the status she feels it gives her. Talking to Virginia on the way home for the holidays, Veronica says: "Fontenaille, he's an old pagan. He's not dangerous. He sees a film in his head, with goddesses and black pharaohs. He wants us to be his actresses. It

could be fun. I've always wanted to be in a film" (00:31:51-00:32:11). She goes on to pose for him on a throne he has made, dressed as an Egyptian noblewoman (00:47:28-00:48:00). There is a sinister quality to this, however, since, before he sketches her, Fontenaille encourages – almost forces – her to drink a glass of orange juice (00:46:26-00:46:51). As Veronica sits on the throne, her eyes are half-closed and her head lolls from side to side, suggesting that she is drugged. This is further supported by the dream she goes on to have, in which she follows a woman – presumably one of the Candace queens – into the forest, watching as two paint-covered figures murder a bull with a machete (00:48:40-00:49:00). Walking further on, she sees herself lying in the arms of the Virgin Mary (00:49:26-00:49:40). She is woken from this dream by Virginia, who explains that Goretti found her on the path to the school (00:49:43-00:49:54). Veronica, however, is unable to recall what happened. Recounting the episode to Virginia, she says: "I can't recall what happened to me. It was like I had no more free will, like I no longer belonged to myself. There was something, someone, in me, stronger than me" (*Our Lady* 84). Veronica's dream is significant, as it foreshadows the violence that will befall not just the girls, but Tutsis as a whole in the coming years. The killing of the bull represents the murder of Tutsis by their Hutu compatriots while Veronica's limp body in the arms of the Virgin suggests that she will die soon – as indeed she does. Although a moment of foreshadowing, Rahimi's choice of symbolism and the half-drugged state of Veronica gives the scene a haunting quality, something that pervades Mukasonga's writing. At the end of *The Barefoot Woman*, for example, she is plagued by a dream in which she ascends a hill with girls from her school. They are going to pick white flowers to use in the upcoming Feast of Corpus Christi (152). As they run up the hill, the adult Mukasonga calls for them to come back: "Don't go up that hill, there's nothing but sharp stones; that's Rebero, that's where the people were killed", she says (*The Barefoot Woman* 152). As the flowers sway in the breeze, they make a "grating sound, a grinding sound, a clicking or crackling like dry wood" (*The Barefoot Woman* 152), and the girls come running back down the hill with white sticks in their hands – but they are not the flowers Mukasonga expected. Instead, they are the bones of the dead: "At the foot of the altar of Jesus, at the foot of the statue of Mary, I see piles of bones: the skeletons of the men, women and children of Nyamata lie strewn over the floor of the church" (*The Barefoot Woman* 153). Mukasonga is thus haunted by visions of death, except here they are not premonitions of things to come, but rather an imagining after the fact. Death, it is clear, haunts Mukasonga and her work no matter which genre it falls into.

Among the girls at the Lycée, it is not only Veronica who suffers from dreams of blood. Modesta, a girl with a Hutu father but a Tutsi mother, is also tormented by blood-filled dreams. For her, it is a recurring nightmare that tortures her. In a chapter titled “The Blood of Shame”, we learn that Modesta often dreams that she begins to bleed in class (*Our Lady* 88). The blood is “a long stream flowing under her seat and beneath the other desks” (88). As the other pupils scream, Modesta is sent to Sister Gerda, who “knows what to do with girls who bleed anywhere and everywhere” (*Our Lady* 88). Once in Sister Gerda’s office, Modesta is berated for her bleeding: “Look at that! It’s what I’ve always said: that’s what it means to be a woman. And you all want to become women. It’s your own fault! And now there’s all that blood. It’s never ending!” (*Our Lady* 88). While part of the meaning of the dream lies in Modesta’s fear of becoming a woman – that is, of beginning her menstrual cycle – it is likely that the continuous flow of blood also represents the possibility of her own blood being spilled because of her mother’s ethnicity. She is aware that her mixed status puts her at risk of being treated as a Tutsi, an enemy of the Hutu majority. Her dream, therefore, can be interpreted as a prelude not only to the killing of the girls, but also that of Hutu moderates and those of mixed backgrounds that occurred under both the Kayibanda and Habyarimana regimes. Indeed, it is an omen of her own death which comes during the attack on the school. Modesta is shielded from most of the discrimination with which the Tutsi students are treated because of her friendship with Gloriosa. However, in order to maintain this tenuous protection, she is expected to do what Gloriosa dictates, including beating a Tutsi student to prove her loyalty. In Rahimi’s film, we see Modesta armed with a stick, being told by Gloriosa to beat a girl who lies bleeding on the ground. Almost in tears, Modesta throws down the stick and runs away. Gloriosa chases after her (01:22:26-01:22:50). The next time we encounter Modesta, she is strung up on a makeshift cross, bloodied and clearly dying (01:23:05-01:23:10). The implication here is that she has been murdered for her refusal to follow orders. Although there is no proof, it is likely that her death came at the orders of Gloriosa. These scenes, as well as others which depict the violence at the school, are made all the more poignant by Rahimi’s decision to show them in silence. There is no background music, no dialogue and the scenes play out as though they were being filmed by a witness with a handheld camera. The audience is forced to confront the full horror of the bloodshed – we become the silent witness behind the camera, suggesting again the lack of interference by Western powers in either the genocide or of the anti-Tutsi violence of the 1960s and 1970s.

Modesta’s act of defiance is an important one as it highlights the reality that not all Hutus were intent on murdering their Tutsi countrymen. It also signifies the shift in power

dynamics that comes with the coup and Goretti's take-over of power from Gloriosa. Furthermore, it forms a contrast to Modesta's previous relationship with Gloriosa. In a scene earlier in the film, Gloriosa refers to Veronica and Virginia as "those two cockroaches" (00:26:47). When her mother berates her, Gloriosa states that she is sick of them, that they should not be at the institute. She then looks to a clearly uncomfortable Modesta for confirmation. Modesta nods slightly (00:26:50-00:27:01). Modesta is further pulled into Gloriosa's plans when the latter forces her to accompany her when she sneaks to the statue of the Lady of the Nile to confer on her a new nose, a "majority nose" (00:56:05-00:57:05). The two girls lose their balance and fall into the mud. It is then that Gloriosa comes up with the plan that sets the rest of the events in motion. Knowing that they will be late for school, she orders Modesta to hit her, saying that they will claim they were attacked by Tutsi bandits (00:57:44-00:58:34). Modesta is hesitant to do so and Gloriosa tells her: "If you want to be my friend, do as I say" (00:58:05). Again, Modesta refuses, and Gloriosa proceeds to claim she is not worthy of her Hutu blood, calling her a cockroach (00:58:13-00:58:22). This interaction emphasises the conditional nature of Gloriosa's supposed friendship with Modesta: she will only tolerate her if she follows orders. Modesta, it seems, is willing to do so despite her conscience in order to be protected from the discrimination suffered by the school's Tutsi students. Her death, however, reveals her true feelings and represents her refusal to condone Gloriosa's hateful rhetoric. Although tragic, it stands in for the many Rwandans of mixed heritage who were also killed in the anti-Tutsi violence.

As both a novel and a film, *Our Lady* creates a way for non-Rwandan audiences to understand the socio-political factors which defined Rwandan society in the 1960s and 1970s. The events of the novel are based on a similar attack on Mukasonga's own school, giving them a sense of realism or authenticity which otherwise might be missing. Mukasonga and Rahimi also make good use of the power of suggestion when it comes to representing the violence that takes place in the narrative, allowing the audience to focus on the events leading up to the attack on the school, as well as on the relationships among the characters. These relationships are of particular importance as they reveal the hierarchical nature of Rwandan society, together with the discrimination to which Tutsis were subjected. In this, Gloriosa is an especially well-written character. Writing for "Music and Literature", Madeleine LaRue writes of Gloriosa: "If as a character she seems less complex, less interesting than her fellow students, this is likely intentional" (par. 9). While it is certainly true that Gloriosa undergoes no character development, unlike Modesta, and shows no interest in her future, unlike Virginia and Immaculée, this is because she is "she is empty inside, made of nothing but her

hatred for the Tutsi” (LaRue, par. 9). Her lack of roundedness as a character should not, however, be held against Mukasonga, since what the latter seeks to show through the character of Gloriosa is the all-consuming hatred that many Hutu – particularly those in power – felt towards Tutsis. Were Gloriosa not to be portrayed as a self-righteous bigot (LaRue, par. 9), then her actions would be less understandable. It seems clear that we are not meant to feel sympathy for her. Rather, we must recognise in her the power of hatred and the extent to which some are willing to go to eradicate those they deem alien. Gloriosa’s lack of complexity is off-set by Modesta’s confusion over her place in society, and by Virginia’s and Veronica’s obvious lower status as part of the school’s Tutsi quota. Our sympathy for these three girls therefore stands in stark contrast to the revulsion we might feel for Gloriosa. Even if we view Gloriosa as a victim of her father’s hateful rhetoric, it is difficult to feel sympathy for her given her actions. It is the decision to use the school as a microcosm of Rwandan society that gives *Our Lady* much of its power, since Mukasonga’s choice of setting shocks her audience into a sense of horror and condemnation at such violent events. We are forced to face the fact that such brutality was carried out by Hutus of all ages and, more importantly, that the genocide was not just a once-off aberration in Rwanda’s history. We are made to confront the reality of prolonged anti-Tutsi sentiment and the horrors it engendered, and to bear witness to it while also acknowledging the fact that, as outsiders we did nothing to stop it.¹⁹ What sets *Our Lady* apart from *Cockroaches* and *The Barefoot Woman* is not only the genre into which it falls, but also the fact that it is a clear political commentary on the state of Rwanda in the 1970s – a period in which, arguably, the signs of impending genocide became clearer.

¹⁹ Where I have used the terms “we” or “ours” in this thesis it is because of where I myself am located and the assumption that many readers or viewers of Rwandan genocide narratives are not themselves Rwandan.

Chapter 3

Hollywood, Bias and the (Subjective) Truth

While memoirs and novels on the Rwandan genocide may be difficult to locate,²¹ films are more readily accessible, particularly those which have found their way into the Hollywood archive – like *Hotel Rwanda* (Terry George, 2004), *Sometimes in April* (Raoul Peck, 2005), *Shooting Dogs* (Michael Caton-Jones, 2005) and *A Sunday in Kigali* (Robert Favreau, 2006). All of these are directed by non-Rwandan – indeed non-African – directors, and vary in their depictions of *itsebabwoko*. Although Peck's and Caton-Jones's films are fairly well-known, it is George's *Hotel Rwanda* that is probably most associated with the genocide in the popular imaginary, especially in America. Filmed in Kigali, Rwanda, and Johannesburg, South Africa, and starring Don Cheadle, it claims to tell the story of Paul Rusesabagina, a manager at the luxury Hotel des Mille Collines. The film was nominated for a number of awards and enjoyed reasonable box office success. In terms of its narrative, Rusesabagina abruptly finds himself in charge of the Hotel des Mille Collines as its Western managers flee the impending violence. Initially intending to take his family to the hotel before moving them somewhere safe, Rusesabagina suddenly finds himself running a hotel filled with hundreds of Tutsi refugees who hope that the United Nations peacekeepers guarding the hotel will keep them safe. The United Nations group, however, is not authorised to fight the Hutu extremists, and so finds itself forced to retreat. Moreover, the UN forces find it difficult to keep military officials and the *Interahamwe* from entering the hotel compound. Led by Colonel Oliver (the film's version of actual leader General Roméo Dallaire), the UN forces are largely portrayed as inept and impotent in the face of the increasing bloodshed sweeping through Kigali and the rest of Rwanda. The film presents the story of one man's defiance of a genocidal regime and brutal militia. Rusesabagina uses his connections with prominent Hutu officials and *Interahamwe* leaders to keep 'his' refugees safe in what has essentially become a *de facto* camp for internally displaced peoples. He risks his life daily in order to protect those staying in the hotel, resorting to bribery when he runs out of favours. As RPF tanks finally roll into Kigali, having won the war and so ended the genocide, Rusesabagina and the refugees emerge from the hotel and are put on vehicles to take them to a formal refugee camp. Here, in a typical Hollywood happy ending, Rusesabagina is rewarded for his altruism by being reunited with his nieces before boarding a bus bound for the airport, from where he and his

²¹ This includes Paul Rusesabagina's own autobiography, *An Ordinary Man* (2006). Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain a copy in South Africa.

family will fly to Belgium. Although the violence the Rusesabaginas have escaped is not the main focus of the film, it is clear that they are some of the lucky ones, and that they have escaped the brutal deaths hundreds of thousands of their countrymen have not.

While *Hotel Rwanda* has been lauded by several genocide survivors (Kayihura xxxi) for bringing *itsembabwoko* to the attention of an international audience, it has also faced a great deal of criticism, particularly for its lionisation of Rusesabagina himself. One such critic is author Edouard Kayihura, himself a former refugee at the Hotel des Mille Collines. His memoir *Inside the Hotel Rwanda: The Surprising True Story... and Why It Matters Today* (hereafter *Inside*) paints a very different portrait of Rusesabagina. Rather than the affable, self-sacrificing manager of George's film, the Rusesabagina depicted in Kayihura's memoir is little more than a war profiteer who uses his power and influence to exploit those seeking refuge in the hotel. Kayihura does not only focus on Rusesabagina's behaviour during the genocide, but also follows his movements after his emigration to Belgium. It is in this second half of the book that we truly get a sense of Kayihura's dislike – even hatred – of Rusesabagina. Unlike the first part of his memoir, in which he narrates his own experiences during the genocide and methodically highlights the contradictions between *Hotel Rwanda* and reality as he experienced it, the second section reads more like a personal attack on Rusesabagina – and a vitriolic one at that. Unfortunately for Kayihura, his overt biases – anti-Rusesabagina, pro-Kagame/RPF – undermine the integrity of his personal narrative. Indeed, if it were not for the fact that a number of other survivors have backed his version of events, one might be tempted to dismiss his entire book as nothing more than anti-Rusesabagina rhetoric. Despite this, Kayihura's account of his stay at the Hotel des Mille Collines provides an important counterpoint to George's Hollywood-type hero – and highlights the way in which films are inherently subjective. This subjectivity extends to memoirs as a narrative genre, since all the events depicted are filtered through the perspective of one person and are therefore, by their very nature, subjective. Writing on films of the genocide, Alexander Dauge-Roth states: "The moment these cinematic representations offer a vision of the past, they also mask and exclude certain facets of the history to which they bear witness" (171). I would argue that such a statement applies to the written word as well. As a result, both George's and Kayihura's works should be interpreted through the lens of their respective creator's explicit intentions – intentions which ultimately inform the subjectivity of the two narratives.

3.1 *Hotel Rwanda*: Rusesabagina the Hero

Although *Hotel Rwanda* has for some become synonymous with the Rwandan genocide, the film itself came about quite by chance. According to the film's co-writer Keir Pearson, he first heard about Paul Rusesabagina and the Hotel des Mille Collines from a friend who had been living in Tanzania at the time of the genocide (Vaughn, par. 2). This friend – novelist John Robinson – told Pearson that he had heard of the hotel and its refugees via a Radio France International broadcast given by one of the refugees in the hotel.²² While it is unclear whether the report mentioned Rusesabagina by name, what *is* clear is that Robinson's remarks led directly to the film's production since, after hearing the story from Robinson, Pearson began his own research into the hotel and Rusesabagina. Writing in *The Boston Globe*, he states:

I pressed ahead and spent the next year interviewing Rwandan genocide survivors and experts in the United States, and eventually tracked Paul down in Belgium, where he was living with his family and working as a taxi driver. I called him, and he agreed to meet. (par. 7)

In 2001, director Terry George agreed to back the film and he, Pearson and Rusesabagina “spent days poring over the script, checking facts and filling in more details” (Pearson, par. 16). *Hotel Rwanda* was finally released in January 2004.

Since its release, the film has elicited a mixed response with decent box-office ratings tempered by criticism from survivors of the real ‘Hotel Rwanda’. Much of this criticism is directed at the framing of the narrative and its portrayal of Rusesabagina in particular. Some survivors, including Kayihura, have criticised Pearson and George for their lack of research into what actually happened at the Hotel des Mille Collines, while others have pointed to the fact that the film fails to tell the full story of *itsembabwoko* (Kayihura xxxi – xxxii). Such concerns may be easily dismissed by reiterating that the film is merely *based* on a true story and does not purport to be wholly factual. To focus more on personal melodrama than on fact, however, is to once again erase the voices of genocide survivors, particularly those of the actual refugees who hid in the hotel. A further issue with the film is that it relies mostly on Rusesabagina as its main source of information. In doing so, George and Pearson have allowed him to influence the narrative to a significant extent. As filmmakers, they set out to make *Hotel Rwanda* with a specific intention in mind, namely to tell Rusesabagina's story and draw attention to the horror of the Rwandan genocide more generally (Pearson par. 4).

²² This was most likely a broadcast delivered by Thomas Kamilindi. Kamilindi worked at Radio Rwanda and was also a correspondent for Radio France International. Kayihura recalls his report in *Inside* (p. 107).

Pearson also hoped that the audience, having seen the inaction of the West in the face of *itsembabwoko*, might be galvanised into taking some form of action against the genocide in Darfur which was occurring at that time (Pearson par. 3). While there is nothing inherently wrong with having a particular aim in mind when making a film or writing a book – most narratives are created with a particular purpose or intention in mind after all – the problem with films like *Hotel Rwanda* which claim to be based on a true story is the blurring of lines between fact and fiction. Most films that mix reality and fiction begin with a disclaimer that the film is only based on true events, thus cautioning the audience in their acceptance of the narrative as historically accurate.²³ However, it can be difficult for viewers to tease out fact from fiction, especially when the events in question are ones that they are not familiar with. This is the case with *Hotel Rwanda*. Pearson himself admits to having a limited knowledge of the genocide before he heard Rusesabagina's story. In an article for the *Harvard Review*, Emer Vaughn writes: "The Rwandan genocide was not an issue for Pearson until Rusesabagina's story brought the events to life for him" (par. 2). Pearson reinforces this point, noting that he was not aware of the fact that United Nations troops were stationed in Rwanda, and that there seemed, instead, to be a deliberate decision by the UN to "bury the story and do nothing" (par. 2). It was this sense of injustice that led him to write the script in the first place, particularly in light of the fact that similar events were happening in Darfur at the time (Vaughn, par. 1). He hoped that by telling the story of Rwanda's genocide, the film would draw attention to the genocide in Sudan (Vaughn, par. 1). In this respect, *Hotel Rwanda* has failed since, by choosing to focus mostly on Rusesabagina, Pearson neglects to tell the story of the real victims of the Rwandan genocide – namely, the nearly one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus who were massacred. If his aim was to use *itsembabwoko* as a film that bears witness to the implications of ignoring genocide in Africa, his decision to frame *Hotel Rwanda* as one man's triumph over evil omits the very horror which he is trying to highlight.²⁴

Pearson appears to be aware of this failure, but defends himself by explaining that, despite the numerous documentaries about the Rwandan genocide produced after 1999, some of which were already in circulation at the time of the filming of *Hotel Rwanda*, many Americans still seemed unaware it had occurred. Writing in *The Boston Globe*, he states: "Feature films [...] have the ability to reach a mass worldwide audience" (par. 6). The

²³ *Hotel Rwanda* does not do so, further problematising its narrative integrity because audiences may take it at face value rather than being aware that some events are examples of artistic license and not reality.

²⁴ I refer to this in the particular context of the film's representation of Rusesabagina.

implication here is that if *Hotel Rwanda* could bring the story of *itsembabwoko* to a wider audience, then perhaps that same audience would speak out against the genocide in Darfur and so make it impossible for the UN – or Western countries in general – to ignore the plight of the Sudanese people. Although this is an admirable intention, Pearson’s focus on mass-marketability is an uncomfortable one, particularly in the context of telling trauma narratives or representing genocide on film. Trauma, by its very nature, is unspeakable and yet the author or filmmaker must grapple with the attempt make it expressible or viewable. Indeed, Pearson found himself confronting this very question, since he wondered how the film could “do justice to both the heroism of Paul’s story and the overwhelming horror of the Rwandan genocide” (par. 4). Ultimately, he decided to use the feature film format because of its ability to reach a larger audience (par. 5). He continues: “I also felt that Paul’s story was well suited for feature films, not only because of its ‘one man can make a difference’ message, but also because heroic stories are appealing to movie audiences – and movie studios” (par. 5). Thus, if part of his intention was to bring attention to the genocide, then he would have had to package it in such a way that would appeal to film studios and producers. By choosing to frame *Hotel Rwanda* through Rusesabagina’s narrative, Pearson may have found backing for the film, but he also skewed the story to suit a particular audience at the expense of telling the stories of those inside the hotel. Although this may have been a calculated – even necessary – decision, his framing of the narrative is an unfortunate side-effect of big-budget Hollywood blockbusters.

After *Hotel Rwanda* was released, an unnamed survivor from the Hotel des Mille Collines confronted Pearson. He had interviewed her prior to writing the film’s script and her story is a traumatic one since, in order to survive, she had bought the protection of the leader of the local *Interahamwe*, a man who then raped her repeatedly for two months. Remarkably, when the RPF closed in on the neighbourhood, the man took her and her young son to the Hotel des Mille Collines and, as a result, she survived the genocide (Pearson, par. 21-22). Ironically, in revealing this, Pearson undermines the very message he has tried to portray in the film, since this woman’s story reveals the existence of others who enabled Tutsis to survive death during the genocide, albeit at the expense of being brutalised in other ways. The idea of Rusesabagina as ‘one man against the world’ is thus shown to be inaccurate. Those who ended up at the Mille Collines – including Kayihura – were helped by others both inside and outside the hotel compound. The abovementioned woman specifically interrogated Pearson as to why he was making a film about the hotel: “We all survived there”, she said (par. 26). She believed, by contrast, that the true story of *itsembabwoko* was the one million

people who did not survive – those who were cut down in life and who were now in danger of being forgotten in death (Pearson, par. 26). Pearson told her:

Paul's story would draw people into the theaters, and they would walk out knowing how many people had been killed in the genocide. Surely, they would ask questions and want to know more about why it happened. (par. 27)

The woman, however, insisted that he should be telling the story of the victims of the genocide, not that of the survivors of the Hotel des Mille Collines. Pearson further explains that he believed Rusesabagina's story served as a lesson – particularly to Western leaders – to act sooner in the face of a genocide. This lesson is predicated on the fact that the UN and West in general failed to step in and end the genocide in Rwanda (par. 27). Ultimately, however, he felt that the film's subject matter required a heroic story (Pearson, par. 27). This statement is significant, as it reveals George's and Pearson's primary intentions behind the making of *Hotel Rwanda*. If Pearson hoped to create awareness of the genocide in the West, then *Hotel Rwanda* can be considered a success. Even Kayihura, who has largely lambasted the film for its inaccuracies, appreciates it for bringing Rwanda's story to a Western audience (xxxix). However, it is difficult to deny that *Hotel Rwanda* provides a somewhat narrow a view of the genocide, and that its focus on Rusesabagina comes at the expense of the real victims of 1994. The film does not manage to convey the full scale of the genocide, in that it focuses mostly on Rusesabagina's personal narrative, albeit with some glimpses of the horrors occurring outside of the hotel compound.

As noted previously, Pearson deliberately chose to make *Hotel Rwanda* a feature film rather than a documentary because films have a greater reach and appeal more to a mainstream audience. The story is a straightforward one that pits good against evil: Tutsi (and good Hutu) against (bad) Hutu extremists. According to the film, Paul Rusesabagina is a hotel manager at the prestigious Hotel des Mille Collines in Kigali. The hotel is part of the Belgian-owned Sabena group and Rusesabagina spends his days assisting foreign tourists and some of Rwanda's biggest political players. The latter includes Major General Augustin Bizimungu, who served as the chief of staff for the Rwandan Armed Forces at the time of the genocide (United Nations, par.1). Rusesabagina is also friendly with Georges Rutaganda the hotel's food supplier and vice-president of the *Interahamwe*. As the threat of genocide looms over Rwanda, Rusesabagina's Tutsi in-laws, encourage him to let his wife Tatiana – a Tutsi leave with them (00:16:26-00:16:31). Rusesabagina, a Hutu, refuses, but does eventually decide to arrange for his family to come to the hotel where he will be better able to protect them. However, he is forced – against his better judgement – to take some of his neighbours

as well when they are threatened by the local militia. As the civil war intensifies, the hotel's foreign guests depart and more Tutsis (and some moderate Hutus) seek shelter in it as they have heard that it is a safe place. An increasingly frazzled Rusesabagina realises he cannot abandon the refugees and calls in favours from various government and military officials in a desperate attempt to save his new 'guests'. He is ultimately able to achieve this objective, despite the odds and the increasing threats he faces when his ability to bribe the necessary people runs out. The film ends with the rescue of all the occupants of the hotel, and the plot is uncomplicated and chronological, playing on the universally accessible ideas of family, love, bravery and self-sacrifice. Such a simple storyline, underpinned as it is by easily relatable themes, makes the film perfectly suited to a mainstream audience, one that may not necessarily be familiar with the genocide. Clearly, Pearson has succeeded in making the story of the genocide mass-marketable. This is helped along by his decision to largely exclude graphically violent scenes (par.18), a decision which enables viewers to imagine for themselves the kinds of horrors that occurred. They are, however, guided in their thinking by scenes of roadblocks manned by machete-wielding men, armed and aggressive soldiers, and the frequent sounds of explosions in the background.

The film's director, George, has also built on Pearson's simple narrative structure by portraying Rusesabagina's story as a redemptive arc. As George tells the story, Rusesabagina develops from a self-interested individual focused only on saving his family into a selfless protector willing to sacrifice himself in order to save the one thousand two hundred Rwandans in his hotel. He thus appears to redeem himself through this characterisation. In order to fully manifest his redemptive arc therefore, Rusesabagina must undergo a major crisis in order to redeem or transform himself from selfish to selfless. In *Hotel Rwanda*, this crisis comes in the form of his dawning realisation of the full extent of the genocidal violence being perpetrated outside the walls of the Hotel des Mille Collines. As a Hutu, Rusesabagina is not exposed to the full brunt of the violence in Rwanda, both during the genocide and in the months leading up to it. While he might be stopped at a roadblock and asked to show his identity card, he will be waved through because it has the 'right' ethnic identity on it. He also possesses some of the stereotypical traits associated with Hutus, such as darker skin and a flatter nose (Gourevitch 50).²⁵ It also helps that he is relatively well-known in the districts through which he regularly travels. As a result, it is unlikely that he will even be pulled over

²⁵ In the film, however, the central actors were not Rwandan themselves. The role of Rusesabagina himself, for example, was played by Don Cheadle.

at a roadblock or be exposed to any of the physical violence enacted on his Tutsi peers. These circumstances cause Rusesabagina to be largely shielded from the cruelty of the military soldiers and the *Interahamwe* militias. Unlike his wife, her family, and even Dube, an employee at the hotel, he does not experience first-hand the terror that comes with being a Tutsi. Even if he is placed in a potentially dangerous situation, he need only smile and proclaim his Hutu identity or mention the name of a top government official to be sent on his way without much resistance.²⁶ We see an example of Rusesabagina's ability to escape potentially threatening situations early on in the film, when he and Dube drive through Kigali to get supplies for the (still foreign national) guests. As they make their way back to the Hotel des Mille Collines, they run into a crowd of Hutu Power and *Interahamwe* supporters (00:04:55 - 00:05:51). They are pulled over and Dube, a Tutsi, turns his face away from the window, trying to duck down. Seeing this, Rusesabagina says: "No, no, sit up, Dube. Sit up" (00:05:22). Dube explains that some of the men in the crowd are his neighbours, so they know that he is a Tutsi. Rusesabagina responds by telling Dube not to attract attention to himself. Again, he encourages the terrified man: "Just smile as if they are friends" (00:05:31). Dube reluctantly sits up and tries to follow Rusesabagina's advice, but is recognised by a man walking past the window who loudly proclaims Dube's Tutsi status. For a moment it seems that the situation might turn ugly, and we envision Dube being pulled from the van and beaten by the militiamen. This outcome is averted, however, when Rusesabagina pulls out the *Interahamwe* shirt Georges Rutaganda – the hotel's food supplier – had previously given him. Over the shouts, Rusesabagina tells the militiaman: "No, no. Hutu Power. Hutu Power, Hutu Power!" (00:05:41). The two men are allowed to drive off, much to their relief.

Driving away from Rutaganda's shop, Dube tells Rusesabagina: "Georges Rutaganda is a bad man. I've heard him on the radio telling the Hutus to kill all the Tutsis" (00:04:40). Rusesabagina shakes his head, replying: "Rutaganda and his people, they are fools, Dube. Their time is soon over" (00:04:47) – but, as the film soon makes clear, their time is in fact only just beginning. What *Hotel Rwanda* fails to acknowledge, however, is the civil war that raged in Rwanda for three years before the genocide even began. The genocide was a reaction to this ongoing war between the Hutu army and Tutsi guerrilla forces, and the 1993 Arusha Peace Accords. Unlike the small but periodic incursions of the 1960s and 1970s, the 1990 operation was carried out by well-equipped and well-trained Tutsi troops who had spent years

²⁶ In George's film, these connections allow Rusesabagina to help the refugees in the hotel to survive. Kayihura's account, however, raises questions around the validity of this version of events.

fighting in Uganda (Wrong 203). As then Ugandan ambassador to France, Winnie Byanyima, said: “It was a thorough operation, everyone knew what their role was” (qtd in Wrong 205). The RPF that invaded Rwanda in late 1990/early 1991 was well-equipped with weapons, ammunition and vehicles taken from Uganda’s National Resistance Army.²⁷ Even with some initial setbacks, the RPF was able to hold its own against the Rwandan army, thereby opening a space for Tutsis living in Rwanda to join the fight against decades of Hutu repression.

Hotel Rwanda, like many other non-African films on *itsebabwoko* such as *Sometimes in April* and *A Sunday in Kigali*, does not present its narrative in this broader context, however. The film opens with a black screen and the voice of a Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTL) presenter.²⁸ He is explaining his hatred for Tutsis, portraying them as invaders and colonial colluders (00:00:43 - 00:00:47). According to him, the Tutsis are responsible for the decades of oppression suffered by Rwanda’s Hutu populace. He exhorts his listeners to: “Stay alert. Watch your neighbours” (00:01:13). In this way, they – the Hutus – will eradicate the Tutsi rebels (or cockroaches as they are derogatorily called). Of interest here is George’s positioning of this sequence at the intersection of film and historical record, since the broadcast is possibly genuine. On the one hand, the film’s characters interact with the radio, as Dube does when he sings along to the song that plays. On the other, the broadcast contextualises the impending crisis with which the film deals. The viewer, therefore, engages with the opening sequence on two levels: one in which they are immersed in the film and one in which they are immersed in contemporary history. Indeed, this blurring of lines occurs in various ways throughout the film. For example, as Dube and Rusesabagina drive through Kigali, the camera is angled in Dube’s direction in such a way that it appears as though we, not Rusesabagina, are sitting in the seat next to him (00:02:19). Later in the film, when Rusesabagina stumbles over the bodies of dead Tutsis, we again experience the scene from two points of view: Rusesabagina’s and our own. For the most part we watch as Rusesabagina surveys the horrific sight – dozens of Tutsi corpses strewn haphazardly across the road, either killed elsewhere and dumped there by their killers or left where they were killed (01:14:59 - 01:16:09). There is a brief moment, however, when the camera pans away from Rusesabagina and points straight at the bodies, presenting the

²⁷ Many Tutsi refugees living in Uganda were part of Yoweri Museveni’s NRA forces and helped him take power in 1986. These refugees included Paul Kagame who was one of the leaders of the RPF’s 1990 incursion into Rwanda.

²⁸ RTL was a pro-Hutu radio station broadcasting from July 1993 to July 1994. It played a key role in spreading anti-Tutsi rhetoric as well as issuing a call to arms when the genocide began.

illusion that it is we (the audience) who are viewing the corpses. The camera pans slowly upwards, focusing first on individuals and then on the road ahead where other corpses lie (01:15:05 & 01:15:36 - 01:15:44). This is a crucial scene, to which I will return later in this chapter.

In *Engaging the Past: Mass Culture and the Production of Historical Knowledge*, Alison Landsberg refers to the positioning of the audience as though they were in the film as identification (20). She defines identification as the way in which the audience relates to a character in a film as an individual rather than as a player in a broader historical context. To achieve this, filmmakers use particular techniques, such as the point-of-view shot. As with the scenes described above, the point-of-view shot creates the illusion that audiences are viewing events through the eyes of the character. Landsberg describes this effect thus:

Point-of-view shots force the viewer to look at the world quite literally from another's perspective, the effect of which can be to bring the viewer into the diegesis, the film's action, as well as into the protagonist's mental and emotional life. *Cinema, in other words, authorises its viewers to inhabit subject positions to which they have no "natural" connection.*

(31-2, emphasis added)

Landsberg notes that identification may be an effective and affective tool in drawing viewers in and “making them care about and even feel that they have a stake in the temporally and often geographically distant events depicted” (32). The use of identification and the point-of-view shot in *Hotel Rwanda* works particularly well, in that it encourages the audience to sympathise with Rusesabagina and so share his horror at the unfolding genocide. Given that Pearson intended for the film to draw attention to *itsembabwoko* and its brutality, creating a relatable protagonist was necessary to encourage the audience's investment in the film and its characters. By occasionally inserting the audience into the film, George encourages a closer relationship to develop between Rusesabagina and the viewer. Of particular significance here, then, is the fact that the uninformed viewer's comprehension of the scale of the unfolding genocide progresses at the same rate as Rusesabagina's. In this respect, Rusesabagina acts as a guide in navigating the cruelty and fear engendered by *itsembabwoko*. While it is difficult to know the extent to which this was intentional, it does allow George (figuratively) to hold the audience's hands in order to guide them to the desired conclusion – namely that Rusesabagina is a sympathetic hero. George repeatedly reminds the audience, however, that they are not part of the film by shifting the perspective to a third-person shot that reveals Rusesabagina through an observer's gaze. This shift in perspective reveals that viewers are

watching someone else's story which they are only putatively allowed to enter, and that they are a passive, external viewers rather than an active participant in the narrative action.

George's use of identification is directly linked to his use of the reformatory narrative arc. As noted earlier, this model requires the protagonist – in this case Rusesabagina – to undergo some form of crisis. This occurs in the scene in which Rusesabagina and Grégoire, a hotel employee, return from a supply run. On the advice of Georges Rutaganda, the pair take a less travelled road back to the hotel, a route which allows them to avoid some of the roadblocks set up across the city. As they drive through the early morning mist, they suddenly find themselves jolting over a series of unexpected bumps. Convinced they have run off the road, Rusesabagina yells at Grégoire to stop. He climbs out of the van, and falls face down into a pile of corpses. Scrambling up in terror, he takes a few steps forward until the van's headlights reveal more bodies strewn across the road. Rusesabagina stares in horror as he tries to process what he is seeing. As the camera zooms out and pans further up the road, the mist lifts slowly to reveal an endless jumble of human corpses. It is this moment that brings into stark focus the reality of the anti-Tutsi massacres and makes it impossible to ignore the scale of the genocide and its barbarism. As we watch, a shaken Rusesabagina appears to vomit into his handkerchief, stumbles back to the van and shouts to Grégoire to "get us out of here" (01:16:00 – 01:16:07). The audience watches as Grégoire reverses back over the bodies he unwittingly drove over just a few minutes before. Aside from the emotions we feel at the sight of the bodies, this scene elicits a visceral reaction as well: it is as though we are in the car with the two men, wincing at each jolt, fully aware of what it is that they are driving over. Throughout this scene, George successfully manages to capture the horror of the genocide in a way that forces the viewer to cross the divide between observer and participant, since we both witness and take part in Rusesabagina's realisation. If the emotional effect of the bodies affects Rusesabagina to such an extent, we cannot help but wonder about its effect on the audience. The scene is so sudden and so jarring that it remains in our memory long after the film has ended, creating a sense of secondary or vicarious trauma as we too try to process both what we have seen and its implications for the broader Rwandan community during the genocide. E. Anne Kaplan discusses vicarious trauma in terms of the media, particularly visual media such as films. She notes that vicarious trauma may affect the audience through the arousal of anxiety, and trigger defences against further exposure to depictions of trauma. Given the traumatic nature of some of the images in *Hotel Rwanda*, it is entirely possible that some viewers may suffer a degree of secondary trauma after viewing the film.

Once Rusesabagina returns to the hotel, we see one of the rare moments of raw emotion he displays in the film, and it is clear that this scene, a reaction to coming upon the corpses, is meant to denote the acme of his spiritual journey. He has gone from relative ignorance to understanding – and, importantly, acknowledging – just how brutal the genocide is. He can no longer hide, literally and figuratively, inside the relative safety of the hotel compound. Rushing upstairs to his room, he locks himself in the bathroom and begins desperately scrubbing his hands, trying to remove the blood, before he rips off his tie and shirt and cowers against the wall in a gesture denoting a return to the protective foetal position – the same position adopted by Emma, in Élizabeth Combre’s *Broken Memory*, and by Mukasonga in. The imagery here is obvious: Rusesabagina’s feeling strangled by his tie and shirt collar acts as a metaphor for his being choked with emotion at what he has seen, and the foetal position constitutes a regression to a prelinguistic state, a regression brought on, in this case, by trauma. However, when Dube knocks on the door, Rusesabagina pulls himself together quickly. His switch from traumatised man to controlled hotel manager might be jarring for some viewers, since we are all too aware that he has just witnessed an unspeakable horror. Perhaps, though, this is George’s aim. Witnessing the hundreds of corpses strewn across the road not only brings to light the reality of the situation in Rwanda – both for Rusesabagina and the audience – but also provides a jarring moment of clarity. Thus, while Rusesabagina is attempting to process what he has seen, he is called back to his duty to protect the hotel’s refugees from a similar fate. He does not have the time to come to terms with the gruesome reality to which he is now privy. Instead, he must keep calm in order to spare the refugees from a similar fate – and shield from them the full extent of the brutality taking place outside the relative safety of the hotel.

The avoidance of a depiction of ongoing and irreversible trauma is arguably one of the film’s greatest weaknesses. Indeed, the only moment of prolonged trauma we witness in the film derives from Rusesabagina’s son. On the night that Rusesabagina and his family flee to the hotel, their son Roger sneaks over to his friend’s house (00:20:19-00:20:26). When his parents find him hiding in the hedge between the two houses he is covered in blood, and Rusebagina and Tatiana carry him home, where they frantically search for the source of the blood. After wiping him down with a cloth, their friend Odette tells the Rusesabaginas: “Do not worry. He is not cut. He is not hurt. This is not his blood” (00:20:43-00:21:36). The blood, it transpires, comes from Simon, Roger’s friend. Simon’s family was killed by Hutu soldiers and Roger witnessed the attack, an experience which leaves him so traumatised that the next day he flinches at his father’s touch (00:22:23). Later, when the Rusesabaginas are at

the hotel, Roger cowers under the bed as three armed soldiers enter the room. He is so frightened of re-emerging that Rusesabagina must gently roll him out (00:58:55-00:59:11). It is clear that the child equates soldiers with death and is afraid that they will kill him as they did Simon and his family. It also seems clear that Roger is experiencing post-traumatic stress, and that there is a likelihood that he might never recover from the psychological scarring to which he has been subjected – as is the case with many survivors of the genocide. Because *Hotel Rwanda* only goes as far as the RPF liberation of Kigali, there is little opportunity to explore the theme of the post-genocide trauma that is so inextricably tied up with *itsembabwoko*. In other words, it provides the audience with a sense of closure that survivors of the genocide likely do not feel. Ann-Marie Cook sums up these issues best:

Such endings are problematic because they impose a reassuring sense of closure and finality upon conflicts that, in actuality, did not end with the arrival of the RPF and, in many cases, remain unresolved today. (171)

Cook's statement reminds us that the trauma of the genocide did not end with the RPF's takeover of Rwanda.

Despite these shortcomings, *Hotel Rwanda* does focus on some of the horrors that have come to define the genocide. Aside from Rusesabagina's encounter with the corpses, there are also scenes of machete-wielding *Interahamwe* members (01:31:01-01:31:04); soldiers constantly invading the hotel space; and, rather disturbingly, a group of women caged outside of Rutaganda's warehouse (01:11:22-01:11:30). We do not know who these women are or why they are there, but, given the subject matter of the film, it seems safe to assume that they are Tutsis being used for sex by Hutu men – perhaps even Rutaganda himself. Landsberg also points out the unsettling and menacing nature of the film's aural cues, in particular focusing on the use of the media, such as radio and television, to create a threatening atmosphere (52). For example, she analyses the scene in which Rusesabagina drives home in the dark, the radio crackling static (00:17:24-00:17:44), and notes that the lack of light and the sibilant hiss of the radio sets him – and, by extension, the audience – on edge (51). Thus, the film does highlight some of the particular terrors that took place in 1994, although it fails to address the post-genocide trauma experienced by survivors.

Interestingly, Kayihura's account of his time at the Hotel des Mille Collines also suggests that the genocide ended with the arrival of the RPF in Kigali. He further notes the movement of refugees to formal camps based on their ethnicity in May of 1994, a month before the official end of the genocide (116). What both *Hotel Rwanda* and Kayihura fail to acknowledge, however, is the RPF's violence in the aftermath of *itsembabwoko*. Philip

Gourevitch notes one particularly brutal attack on a Hutu refugee camp in Kibeho which had been set up for internally displaced persons in the safe zone created by the French in the aftermath of the genocide. The RPF government wanted to reintegrate IDPs into the general Rwandan population, claiming that Rwanda was safe for everyone. Many Hutu refugees, however, did not wish to leave the camps. This was partly due to the rumours of RPF reprisals on Hutus:

The IDPs, however, were not eager to leave the camps [...] where rumours that the RPF was exterminating Hutus en masse were being circulated by the *génocidaires*, who maintained a powerful influence over the population.
(Gourevitch 188 – 189)

According to Mark Frohardt, quoted in Gourevitch, a high proportion of the violence in Rwanda in the immediate aftermath of the genocide occurred in the vicinity of the Kibeho camp, even before the attack on the camp itself (189). Kibeho also housed the largest population of *génocidaires* despite a sweep of these extremist elements in December 1994 (Gourevitch 190). When camp administrators did begin the process of registering Hutus for reintegration into the larger Rwandan population, violence ensued. In April 1995, a year after the genocide began, a contingent of Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) soldiers surrounded the camp, causing a significant number of the eighty thousand refugees to retreat up the hill.²⁹ On 19 April, some refugees “hurled rocks at the RPA, and some reportedly attempted to grab RPA weapons” (Gourevitch 190). Then, on 22 April, a stampede from within the camp caused the RPA cordon to break and Hutu refugees ran from the camp. In response:

RPA troops opened fire, shooting nonstop and indiscriminately into the crowd, and scores of soldiers set out in pursuit of those who had fled, shooting and lobbing grenades at them. The RPA barrage continued for hours: in addition to machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades and at least one mortar were fired into the camp. (Gourevitch 191)

The scene repeated itself later that night as more IDPs escaped the camp. The next day revealed thousands of bodies littering the remains of the camp. Final estimates put the number of dead between two thousand and four thousand. Many had been crushed to death in the stampedes, while others had been shot by the RPA or “hacked, bludgeoned, and even speared to death by the *Interahamwe* in their midst” (Gourevitch 193-4). Such incidents contradict both *Hotel Rwanda*’s and Kayihura’s suggestion that the violence and trauma of the genocide ended with the RPF’s ‘victory’ over the Hutu military and *génocidaires*. Significantly, they also emphasise Kayihura’s pro-RPF bias: by deciding not to include such

²⁹ The RPA is the armed wing of the RPF political party.

anecdotes in his book, he draws attention to his biases which buy into the Hutu/Tutsi, evil/good, perpetrator/victim dichotomy for the most part. Such thinking suggests that the vast majority of Hutus were perpetrators of genocidal violence, except for a few moderates who either helped their Tutsi friends and neighbours or were themselves targets of the Hutu Power movement. Kayihura does not include Rusesabagina among these ‘good’ Hutus – in fact, his writing depicts him as a war profiteer and, later, a genocide denier (192). This latter view does appear to hold some merit. In an interview with the journalist Keith Harmon Snow, Rusesabagina argues that the term “genocide” is one that has been applied by the UN Security Council and incorrectly at that (par. 17). However, when Snow asks if he would call the slaughter of 1994 politicide, since both Hutus and Tutsis were involved, Rusesabagina responds: “Not politicide [...] because to me it is a genocide. We should call it by its name” (par. 17). This contradiction is confusing, especially because it occurs in the same interview. A few questions later, however, Rusesabagina clarifies his stance when he agrees with Snow that 1994 was a genocide, but one perpetrated by the Tutsis (par. 17). He also states that the claims of genocide against the Tutsis were part of the RPF propaganda machine, and even goes so far as to explain that the message to kill Hutus was promoted on the Tutsi radio station Radio Muhabura (par. 17). This claim is interesting, as it mirrors the evidence that the Hutu station, Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (not associated with the hotel), broadcast not only anti-Tutsi propaganda, but also lists of high-priority targets.

Rusesabagina’s responses in this interview essentially admit to some form of genocide, but against the Hutus. He even claims that those Hutus doing the killing had unwittingly been infiltrated by Kagame’s forces and were committing murder without knowing who was really pulling the strings (par. 17). Given that Rusesabagina’s statements fly in the face of documented evidence of a genocide against Rwanda’s Tutsi minority, it is no wonder that Kayihura felt the need to write an insider’s account of the events at the Hotel des Mille Collines. His book provides a much more detailed account of the hardships faced by the refugees, many of which, he claims, stemmed from Rusesabagina’s actions. Writing in an article for *African Arguments*, Jos van Oijen sums up these contradictory narratives best: “The controversy surrounding *Hotel Rwanda* is perhaps best summed up thus: “*Hotel Rwanda* is not a historical record, but a fictionalised depiction of a story that many eyewitnesses dispute. And Paul Rusesabagina is not the character in a film but a complex and contested real-life figure” (par. 17). Perhaps it is unfair, then, to expect an entirely reliable account of what occurred at the Hotel des Mille Collines from what is, after all, a cinematic attempt to distil one hundred days of horror into less than two hours of viewing time.

3.2 *Inside the Hotel Rwanda*: Rusesabagina the Profiteer

While *Hotel Rwanda* lauds Rusesabagina for his selflessness in the face of danger, Edouard Kayihura has a much more cynical take on the hotel manager. Indeed, *Inside the Hotel Rwanda: The Surprising True Story...and Why it Matters Today* does not simply critique George's film, it accuses the director outright for misrepresenting virtually everything about Rusesabagina and his actions at the Hotel des Mille Collines. From the outset, Kayihura claims that Rusesabagina used his position to extort the hotel's refugees for his personal financial gain:

I knew Paul Rusesabagina. All the people who survived inside the Hotel des Mille Collines during the genocide knew Paul Rusesabagina. No one among us has ever thought of him as altruistic, let alone heroic. On the contrary, of all the people he would quite possibly be considered the *furthest* from a hero any of us could imagine. Rusesabagina had been a war profiteer, a friend to the architects of the genocide, a man willing to starve those without money while hoarding piles of food, drink, and riches for himself and his friends. (xxx)

This is such a radically different Rusesabagina to that of *Hotel Rwanda* that one wonders if Kayihura and George are referring to the same person. The former is not the only survivor from the Mille Collines who calls George's film into question, however. In the prefatory material to Kayihura's book, survivor Egide Karuranga writes:

Everyone who saw the movie *Hotel Rwanda* MUST read this book in which true survivors tell their story. While the movie indisputably raised awareness of genocide against Rwandan Tutsi, its distortion of facts created one of the most virulent platforms championing trivialization of that tragedy through theories of double genocide and related tactics. (in Kayihura, n.p.)

By contrast, Gerise Herndon, an English professor at Nebraska Wesleyan University, applauds Kayihura's memoir as a "multifaceted rejoinder to the mythology that emerged from Hollywood's fictionalized version of the 1994 genocide" (in Kayihura, n.p.). She adds: "Kayihura helps dispel the romanticized savior image spawned by *Hotel Rwanda* and inflated by Rusesabagina's publicity machine" (in Kayihura, n.p.). Much like the woman who told Pearson he was focusing on the wrong story, Herndon and a number of other reviewers of Kayihura's book believe that *Hotel Rwanda* prioritised Rusesabagina's narrative over that of the genocide's Tutsi victims and survivors, particularly those who hid in the hotel. Others applaud Kayihura for paying tribute to the people inside the hotel who helped their fellow refugees. Journalist and author David Whitehouse astutely observes:

Kayihura's survivor account demonstrates the gulf between media portrayals and reality, and shows how myth-making has done nothing to resolve the polarity of perceptions of the genocide. (in Kayihura, n.p.)

In an interview with AMFM Magazine's John Wisniewski, Kayihura himself states that he was compelled to write *Inside* in order to "correct the history to tell the real story behind the Movie Hotel Rwanda" (par. 3). The book is meant to counter Hollywood's mythologising which has irreparably damaged the historical record (Nienaber par. 4). And counter it, it does.

Kayihura, a Tutsi living in Kigali at the time of the genocide, ended up at the Hotel des Mille Collines after learning that his name was on one of the lists of Tutsis considered high-priority targets by the genocide's orchestrators (194). His journey to the hotel was a good example of how small acts of heroism and defiance by certain Hutus played a vital role in saving Tutsis during *itsebabwoko*. After Habyarimana's plane was shot down, Kayihura went home and got rid of any evidence identifying him as a Tutsi, flushing it down the toilet (15). The move was largely futile, however, since those living in his neighbourhood already knew he was a Tutsi. Furthermore, this neighbourhood was one of the most dangerous for Tutsis like Kayihura, as many *Interahamwe* militiamen lived there too (Kayihura 17). As he writes: "Living in a neighbourhood such as mine, you came to know very quickly who were your friends and who were enemies" (16). One such friend was Pascal Hitimana, who lived in the neighbourhood adjacent to Kayihura's. On 7 April 1994, Hesron Ndenga, a well-known Hutu Power supporter, walked down Kayihura's street calling for Hutus to wake up and cleanse the neighbourhood of *inyenzi* or cockroaches (16). Having been targeted by Ndenga before, Kayihura knew that he had to get to safety before his house was stormed by anti-Tutsi militiamen (16). He managed to make it to Hitimana's house, where he was forced to hide in a wall space whenever Hutu extremists came past (19). Simply by assisting his friend, Hitimana, like Rusesabagina in *Hotel Rwanda*, was in danger of being killed by Hutu extremists (Kayihura 19). Nevertheless, Hitimana did not hesitate to help Kayihura, not only by agreeing to hide him in his house, but also by helping him get to the safety of the Hotel des Mille Collines (Kayihura 29-33). Kayihura spent the full three months of the genocide hiding in the hotel, emerging only when the RPF took control of Kigali. He subsequently used his first-hand experience to write *Inside*, a memoir which comprehensively documents the conditions in the hotel during *itsebabwoko*. In doing so, he actively seeks to correct the record of Rusesabagina's role in saving over one thousand people, and documents his own experience as a refugee living in the hotel. Though the result reveals a number of similarities

between the film and real life, these similarities often do not extend beyond the fact that a certain event occurred.

There is, however, one similarity between *Inside* and *Hotel Rwanda* that does hold up to scrutiny and that is their respective references to a signal that would indicate the start of the massacres. This signal is referenced twice in *Hotel Rwanda*. The first mention comes in a conversation between Rusesabagina and his brother-in-law, Thomas, who tells Rusesabagina that his assistant has told him that there is a signal: “It is cut the tall trees. And when they hear the signal, the militia are to go to war” (00:15:59 – 00:16:25). Rusesabagina dismisses this news, but it is confirmed a few scenes later during an RTLM radio announcement of President Habyarimana’s plane crash:

Terrible news. Horrible news. Our great president is murdered by the Tutsi cockroaches. They tricked him to sign their phony peace agreement. Then they shot his plane from the sky. It is time to clear the brush, good Hutus of Rwanda. We must cut the tall trees. Cut the tall trees now!
(00:22:34- 00:22:58)

As if to confirm these orders are being followed, a neighbour yells out: “The soldiers are here!” (00:23:01). Kayihura, meanwhile, refers to Habyarimana’s plane crash as the “tipping point” for those who had been preparing for *itsembabwoko*, including those “spewing out hate on RTLM Radio” (14). Indeed, many analysts argue that Habyarimana’s death was the catalyst for the genocide, giving the Hutu Power movement a ‘reason’ for their anti-Tutsi offensive. Whether it was Tutsi rebels or elements within Habyarimana’s own party that shot down the plane is still under debate, although a French investigation concluded in 2012 that the missile came from Kanombe, a camp controlled by Hutu soldiers (Al Jazeera, par. 9).³⁰ What is clear, however, is that the impending genocide was an open secret. While Rwandans may not have anticipated the scale of the violence that was to occur, there was a general understanding that something was being planned.³¹ This was due in no small part to RTLM broadcasts which – as *Inside* and *Hotel Rwanda* both show – played a significant role in whipping up anti-Tutsi sentiment, publishing lists of Tutsis to be targeted and sending out the signal for the killing to begin. Such lists are similar to the targeting of Tutsi men by Hutu soldiers during the skirmishes of the 1960s and 1970s, once again highlighting the fact that the groundwork for the genocide had been laid decades earlier (Mukasonga 45). This history

³⁰ If this is true, then it supports claims that certain extremist elements in Habyarimana’s own party were unhappy with his signing of the Arusha Accords and were willing to go to any lengths to ensure ethnic cleansing occurred.

³¹ For example, Kayihura himself planned to escape to Butare Prefecture in the south, because he did not think the killing would reach that far (19).

of smaller attacks by Tutsi rebels countered by Hutu reprisals is likely what caused Kayihura and Rusesabagina to believe that the latest onslaught would not last long or be particularly widespread.

While *Hotel Rwanda* portrays Rusesabagina as solely working at the Hotel des Mille Collines, Kayihura explains that initially in fact he worked as manager at its sister hotel, the Hotel des Diplomates (58). The Diplomates was the initial headquarters of the provisional government that took power after Habyarimana's death. It included members of the Coalition for the Defence of the Republic (CDR), the very people who planned and managed *itsembabwoko* (Kayihura 54, 58). Rusesabagina was rumoured to be a high-ranking member of the Republican and Democratic Movement (MDR) political party, in particular of the extremist wing known as MDR Power (Kayihura 58). As such, Kayihura writes, he would have known much about the coming genocide (58). This is a stark contrast to the Rusesabagina we see in *Hotel Rwanda*. If we are to believe George's depiction of Rusesabagina, then, as noted previously, he had little idea that a genocide was imminent, let alone how brutal it would be. While some might write off Kayihura's claims as part of a personal vendetta against Rusesabagina, to do so would be irresponsible. Given that the film's narrative was based on what Pearson and George were told by Rusesabagina himself, a healthy dose of scepticism is in order. It is highly unlikely, after all, that Rusesabagina would admit to being close friends with those organising mass slaughter. Rusesabagina's political affiliations also shed a different light on his relationship with characters like Bizimungu and Rutaganda. In George's film, we are told that he uses these connections to call in favours in order to keep the Mille Collines refugees safe. This is particularly true of his relationship with Bizimungu. As Kayihura notes, however: "Being politically active in one of the genocide-supporting parties also helped one out financially and career-wise" (58). For Rusesabagina, then, his connections appear to have less to do with altruism and more with self-enrichment. Kayihura notes:

He oversaw the servicing of the very organisers of what was going on around us, outside the hotel, the murder in the streets. He stayed with them, he was friends with them before the killing began, he accompanied them, and he accepted their personal protection. (59)

Such claims create a different understanding of some scenes in *Hotel Rwanda*. For example, when Rusesabagina checks on Major General Bizimungu and Colonel Oliver, the former tells him that he has "left a little something" (presumably a monetary bribe) for him at the coat check (00:07:40-00:07:44). We then see Rusesabagina enter the storeroom, take down two

bottles of whisky and ask the employee at the coat check kiosk to put them in the Major General's briefcase (00:07:44-00:08:04). Clearly this is a regular occurrence and one of the 'services' Rusesabagina performs for those in power. According to *Hotel Rwanda*, it is such favours that later allow him to keep the refugees safe. However, looked at through the lens of Kayihura's assertions, we see instead a man taking government bribes for personal financial gain. Rather than using his influence with the Major General and other such officials to protect those in the Hotel des Mille Collines, he is continuing his friendships with powerful figures who have the leverage to ensure that he and his family are safe during the massacre to come. This is in fact suggested – perhaps unintentionally – in *Hotel Rwanda* too. In a scene in the hotel lounge, Rusesabagina treats Major General Bizimungu to a glass of Scotch, and Bizimungu observes: "Your white friends have abandoned you" (01:07:12-01:07:14). When Rusesabagina replies in the affirmative, Bizimungu responds: "Well don't worry. I will take care of you" (01:07:20-01:07:23). While the film no doubt intends us to interpret this exchange as stemming from gratitude for the favours Rusesabagina has previously bestowed on the Major General, it can also be read as a reassurance for a political ally and friend that Rusesabagina will not be left to fend for himself. It is a testament to Rusesabagina's pro-Hutu leanings – which are well-documented in the second half of *Inside* – and an acknowledgement that he has little to fear from the military or the *Interahamwe* as a result of his political leanings. In *Inside*, Kayihura further notes that Colonel Théoneste Bagosora – founder of the *Interahamwe* – was a regular visitor at the hotel (77), and he and Rusesabagina often sat together, talking and laughing as though "nothing was wrong with the world" (Kayihura 77). Again, such interactions are ambiguous and will likely be interpreted differently, depending on whether the audience is engaging with the film or the memoir. However, I would argue there is likely more truth in Kayihura's memoir, given that his account is backed up by other refugees (xxix – xxx) and is not based solely on the testimony of one person concerned with how his image will be projected internationally in a Hollywood feature film.

In *Hotel Rwanda*, Rusesabagina – in order to keep up the charade that the Mille Collines is still operating as a hotel – prints out an old list of clientele to hand over to a soldier demanding to know who is staying in the hotel (00:01:23-01:02:02). The soldier, realising that the list is outdated, threatens to kill everyone in the hotel, starting with Rusesabagina himself (01:02:04-01:02:36). The latter also delivers bills to each room as usual: although he does not expect their occupants to actually pay them (01:05:44-01:06:15), he does this in order to protect the refugees. The *Interahamwe*, he says, believes that the

Mille Collines is still running as a four-star hotel, and so they must keep up pretences (01:05:37-01:05:42). In reality, Kayihura explains that these bills were in fact expected to be paid directly to Rusesabagina himself (75). Those who did not have ready money had to sign slips from a visiting bank manager, who would then withdraw the requisite funds from their accounts and bring them to the hotel (Kayihura 88). Those unable to pay were threatened with eviction (Kayihura 88). This contradicts what Rusesabagina says in *Hotel Rwanda*: “If you cannot pay or think you will not be able to pay, please go to the banquet room and Dube will take care of you” (01:06:11-01:06:14). The audience is once again left to wonder which version is the ‘real’ Rusesabagina. It is impossible to ignore the pro-Rusesabagina bias in *Hotel Rwanda*, but we must also keep in mind that Kayihura’s account is coloured by his dislike of Rusesabagina. Therefore, although his narrative has the backing of other refugees, it is possible that some of what he writes misrepresents Rusesabagina’s actions to some extent, particularly given his clear dislike of the man.

Hitchcott has written about both *Hotel Rwanda* and survivors’ stories, focusing particularly on Alfred Ndahiro’s and Privat Rutazibwa’s *Hotel Rwanda: Or the Tutsi Genocide as Seen by Hollywood* (2008) which contains the testimonies of seventy-four survivors of the Hotel des Mille Collines (940). These stories again criticise *Hotel Rwanda* and agree with Kayihura’s account. For example, Kayihura explains the food situation at the hotel as yet another way in which Rusesabagina sought to profit from those seeking refuge. Although *Hotel Rwanda* does not dwell too much on how the hotel managed to continue feeding its ‘guests’, the implication is that Rusesabagina used his influence with Georges Rutaganda to continue getting food supplies for the Mille Collines (01:12:00-01:12:22). Kayihura, however, disputes this. According to his account, Rusesabagina hoarded the hotel’s food and water, charging anyone who requested some (69). He also charged refugees to use the kitchen, but only if they bought their food from him (Kayihura 70). Any food that came from the Red Cross was free, but Rusesabagina only allowed it to be cooked by the kitchen staff, and once again charged the refugees for it (Kayihura 70). Such claims are repeated by survivors interviewed by Ndahiro and Rutazibwa, making Kayihura’s and their versions a more likely account than that of the film (Hitchcott 940). Again, we see here not only an example of Rusesabagina’s war profiteering, but also of the misrepresentation of the situation at the Hotel des Mille Collines and of Rusesabagina himself.³² Kayihura explains that

³² It is difficult to know if such misrepresentations were a deliberate reinterpretation on the part of Pearson and George, or if they even knew that they were incorrect given that Rusesabagina was their main source for the film.

Rusesabagina's cooking policy meant that those who had food but could not pay to cook it in the hotel were forced to do so outside, which ultimately put them at a greater risk of

Interahamwe attacks:

We would have to go outside to cook something if we wanted to eat, because cooking in our rooms was dangerous and could start a fire. Yet going outside was also treacherous. Poolside was especially bad. We were exposing ourselves – the militias walking down the street could easily see us and throw a grenade at us. (69)

Kayihura then ultimately accuses Rusesabagina as using the kitchen as a “profit centre” (70). The water situation was even more dire. Once the water pressure and supply began to dwindle, the refugees were forced to use the swimming pool water in order to cook and bathe (Kayihura 69-70). There is a brief scene in *Hotel Rwanda* that shows people collecting water from the pool in buckets and pots (01:35:15-01:35:30), so the film does give some idea of what life was like for those living inside the hotel compound. Such information may very well have come from Rusesabagina himself, since he would have had little control over the water crisis given that the supply came from outside the hotel. What Kayihura does that the film does not, however, is describe in greater detail the physical effects of the chlorinated water on the hotel's occupants. He notes, for example, that once the hotel had run out of clean water, those inside had to resort to drinking water from the swimming pool (72-3). He writes: “The water tasted horrible and the heavy chlorination made us sick and even more dehydrated. But our best guess was that it was still better than drinking nothing at all” (73). What this difference does is once again highlight the fact that Pearson's and George's decision to focus almost solely on Rusesabagina's story means they do not portray much of the collective suffering and terror that was rampant at the Mille Collines, thereby giving their audience a somewhat skewed perception of just how dire the situation was in the hotel.

Another significant difference between *Hotel Rwanda* and *Inside* is the issue of telephones and electricity. In the film, we see working telephones being used by many of the hotel's ‘guests’ to phone foreign contacts and beg for their help. Rusesabagina makes an impassioned speech:

There will be no rescue, no intervention for us. We can only save ourselves. Many of you know influential people abroad. You must call these people. You must tell them what will happen to us. Say good-bye. But when you say good-bye, say it as though you are reaching through the phone and holding their hand. Let them know that if they let go of that hand, you will die. We must shame them into sending help. (01:04:50-01:05:30)

Listening to these exhortations, viewers feel a degree of shame themselves, as it is evident from Rusesabagina's speech that the international community appears to have had little interest in saving Rwanda's Tutsi victims. It is likely this is the shame that Pearson hoped would galvanise the audience into calling for an international intervention in the violence in Sudan. Rusesabagina's speech is a rousing one that gives the audience hope that the foreign contacts of the Tutsis in the hotel will send help. It is doubly disappointing, then, when this does not happen. Reading Kayihura's memoir, however, these hopes were never raised and so could never have been dashed. According to Kayihura, such appeals never occurred. Rather, the phone lines were cut, possibly by Rusesabagina himself (71). It was further rumoured that he had kept the phone line to his own office operational, but that no one would be allowed to use it except with his permission and under his supervision (71). Supposing that this is true and that Rusesabagina was indeed interested in profiting from the refugees, it is highly likely that he would have monitored any phone calls to ensure that no one was asking outsiders for help or telling them of their situation. Any outside intervention would result in fewer people for him to extort, or even the discovery of his actions. In complete contrast with Rusesabagina's speech in *Hotel Rwanda*, Kayihura explains what the lack of telephones meant for the refugees:

And then one day the phones ceased to function. Panic spread as everyone picked up their room phones and found the lines dead. Dear God, how would we be heard now? This would be the beginning of the end. Without phones to contact the world, the evil men with machetes and guns would simply bully their way in and slaughter us as they had slaughtered so many others already.
(70)

Although the UN soldiers still posted at the hotel had walkie-talkies, Kayihura did not know if they would be able to get aid in time were it necessary (70-1). His account of the lack of communication with the outside world thus emphasises just how isolated the Mille Collines community was. In such a state, and with Hutu Power and *Interahamwe* leaders often visiting Rusesabagina as close friends, it is no wonder that Kayihura feels that *Hotel Rwanda* does not adequately capture the fear or trauma that those hiding in the hotel experienced.

While it would be unfair to say that *Hotel Rwanda* completely misrepresents what occurred at the Hotel des Mille Collines in the one hundred days of the genocide, it must be acknowledged that it focuses more on a marketable Hollywood narrative than on the genocide itself. Much of this stems from the fact that the filmmakers decided to tell the

narrative of one person – Rusesabagina – and relied almost exclusively on his testimony.³³ Doing so has resulted in a skewed narrative, rather than an attempt to really bring to light the full scale of the horrors of *itsebabwoko* for a foreign audience. Ultimately, the critique of the film delivered by the old woman with whom Pearson spoke rings true: it fails to tell both the story of the victims of the genocide or that of the survivors in the hotel. Kayihura's memoir, meanwhile, is an eye-witness account of the events at the Mille Collines, and is validated independently by the accounts of other survivors. Despite the anti-Rusesabagina bias which is evident throughout the book, Kayihura's account is broader, covering not only his personal story, but those of other refugees as well. His intention is to set the record straight for those who have only *Hotel Rwanda* as their point of reference of the genocide. We cannot, however, ignore the clear anti-Rusesabagina bias that runs throughout his narrative. When he is covering the facts, his version is more credible, again because his claims are verified by other survivors. However, his opinion of Rusesabagina as a complete fraud must be kept in mind, as it is bound to colour his narrative and perhaps result in a degree of exaggeration in certain respects. Many news articles dealing with the story of the Hotel des Mille Collines try to focus on what 'really' happened there. Such attempts, however, are ultimately futile, because each person will have a slightly different narrative based on their subjective experience. Comparing *Hotel Rwanda* with *Inside* does not get us any closer to the truth. Rather, it provides us with two different accounts of the same event, told from two different perspectives with very different intentions and no small degree of personal bias. Instead of trying to uncover a single definitive version of events, audiences should be encouraged to engage with the texts for what they are: a narrative film and a personal memoir. In engaging with each text, one should bear in mind Robert Rosenstone's observation: "[T]hat words and images work to express and explain the world in somewhat different ways. That a film will never be able to do precisely what a book can, and vice versa. That history presented in these two different media would ultimately have to be judged by different criteria" (7). The same is true, then, for *Hotel Rwanda* and *Inside* – two very different narratives, created with two different intentions in mind.

³³ Although it must also be remembered that studio executives apply certain criteria before taking on a film project.

Chapter 4

Knowledge as Trauma: The Danger of Knowing in *The Past Ahead*

Like many Rwandan fictional and non-fictional accounts of the genocide, Gilbert Gatore's debut novel *The Past Ahead* (2008) was originally published in French before being translated into English in 2012.³⁴ The novel was nominated for the Prix Goncourt du Premier Roman in 2008. Although short – it totals less than two hundred pages – Gatore's debut novel is both harrowing and complex. In a brief interview with *Vogue Italia*, he states: "My book isn't a political tract – and it isn't another book about the poor little Rwandan" (Farah par. 2). Moreover, he neither names the country in which the novel is set, nor does he use descriptors such the terms "Hutu", "Tutsi" or "genocide" (Applegate 78). Given that Gatore himself is Rwandan, however, it is generally inferred that he is writing about Rwanda, and I will thus be referring to the country as such throughout this chapter. In light of this inference too, the fact that, of the two main protagonists, Isaro is set up as a victim – her parents were killed in the violence – and Niko as a perpetrator, it seems probable that she is a Tutsi while he is a Hutu. The tragic event they both experience, therefore, is likely the 1994 genocide. Again, I will make use of these terms for ease of understanding. Further evidence for these presumptions lies in the novel's description of an island named Nez which, translated from French, means nose. This island, according to local mythology, was created by local travelers throwing stones into the lake. Over time, "this gigantic cairn took the shape of a nose instead of looking like a normal heap of stones" (Gatore 66). Kizito, a taxi driver, further explains the significance of this to Isaro:

The result is that travelers today no longer throw anything in to keep it from getting still larger. They're happy to explain that the island is nothing but the replica of their own noses. As incredible as it may seem, it has resulted in bloody arguments, and hundreds of thousands of people have even been massacred. (68)

The locals' fixation on the shape of the island of Nez is particularly important, because it recalls the preoccupation with physical appearances that began during Rwanda's colonial era and played a major role during the genocide, where the shape of one's nose was used as a defining physical characteristic by which it was (supposedly) possible to tell a Tutsi from a Hutu. According to this stereotype, Hutus had flatter noses, while Tutsis had longer ones. Although centuries of intermarriage had made such physical characteristics void in terms of

³⁴ Its French title is *Le passé devant soi* and the novel was translated by Marjolijn de Jager.

defining a person's ethnic identity, Gatore's emphasis on the shape of the island shows that, during the genocide, such genetic nuances were ignored. It also further implies that Gatore's novel is set in Rwanda, an assumption given greater credence by the fact that the island's shape formed part of the tensions that resulted in the deaths of thousands. Of course, the island itself is not the direct cause of the genocide. Rather, it symbolises the use of physical stereotypes to determine who would live and who would die during that event. Once again, we see the lingering impact of colonial ideas on an independent Rwanda. The fact that people stopped adding stones to the nose to prevent it from growing taller suggests that it is also meant to represent the flatter Hutu nose, that is, the nose of the majority. This echoes Gloriosa's actions in Mukasonga's *Our Lady*, when she attempts to replace the statue of the Virgin Mary's long nose with a shorter, broader one. I would go one step further and argue that Gatore's focus on the shape of the island forms part of the novel's theme of identity. Applegate questions the role of ethnic identity in a country where "the categories 'Hutu' and 'Tutsi' have been codified and exploited by both colonial and postcolonial governments seeking to divide and control the population" (71). In post-genocide Rwanda, the categories of Hutu and Tutsi are generally synonymous with perpetrator and victim. Gatore, however, seeks to interrogate the victim-perpetrator binary, particularly through the character of Niko. Unlike the current Rwandan government, though, he does not elide the categories of Hutu and Tutsi in favour of a single Rwandan identity (Applegate 71). Instead, Gatore uses his novel to explore the trauma of both victim and perpetrator in the aftermath of the genocide, something Applegate argues is dismissed by ignoring ethnic categorisation (71).

The Past Ahead is a complex novel. It is not only polyvocal, but also contains a story-within-a-story. Thus, the reader is asked to grapple with two simultaneous narratives, each with its own protagonist and narrative style. One of the narratives is that of Isaro, a Rwandan orphan living in France; the other that of Niko, the protagonist in a book Isaro is writing. Gatore's novel opens with an adult Niko seeking refuge on an island (it is not clear if this is the island of Nez, although it seems likely) notable for the lack of visitors it receives. As we read, he comes upon a cave which he uses as a shelter. This is not simply any cave, however. It is one that, like Nez, is part of the country's mythology. Historically, it has been considered taboo to enter this particular cave as a monster is said to dwell in it (Gatore 4). Anyone who enters the cave will be sucked in by it and lost forever (5). As part of their coming-of-age ritual, boys are allowed to venture onto the island, climb to the top and stop at the cave

entrance to collect some of the water that flows from it (4-5). Niko has taken part in this ceremony but, instead of heeding the warning about not entering the cave, he ventures inside:

In spite of all these warnings Niko couldn't resist the urge to take a few steps inside the cave, or else curiosity and regret would have killed him. On that particular night, by the light of the torch they'd made for him to avert animals and demons, he'd moved forward into the darkness, holding his breath in terror. (5)

Although he enters only a few steps into the cave, Niko believes he sees a shadow in front of him and flees. Later, he wonders what this shadow was:

Perhaps it was only a cat or a rat that had terrified him. That hypothesis made him think again of his mad dash to the cave's entrance that now seemed painfully ridiculous. Was it to exorcise this shame that he returned to the cave?
(6)

While the memory of running away from the cave as a boy may have some bearing on Niko's current choice of hiding place, there are also practical reasons for choosing the cave. Firstly, he needs somewhere to shelter from the elements and, secondly, the taboo surrounding the cave means that he will also be safe from anyone seeking him out to mete out justice or vengeance.

From the point at which he moves into the cave, Niko's story slowly unfolds, switching between past and present. We learn that he was born mute and is therefore shunned by his family and community. It was his uncle Gaspard, the blacksmith, who took a young Niko under his wing, and taught him his trade (59). Many years later, Gaspard retired and Niko took over the workshop from him, a move that was greeted with mixed reactions by the community. Some accepted Niko as Gaspard's successor out of loyalty to Gaspard himself, but most disapproved (59-60). Such sentiments are indicative of Niko's ambiguous place in society, an ambiguity that extends to his role in the genocide. For example, his good looks initially draw people to him, but his hideous smile instantly repels them (61). He is neither a member of the community nor an outsider, because he is both acknowledged and ignored. Moreover, the villagers do not know how to interact with him due to his muteness, an affliction which they do not understand. While this state of affairs seems to be the only way Niko has experienced life, it gradually becomes evident that he suffers a great deal from loneliness: "As he grew older, Niko felt less and less like playing, and his daydreams were no longer an entertaining escape but rather the disconcerting echo of his loneliness" (59). Even as Gaspard's successor, he is shunned by the community, acknowledged only when they need him to make a pot or tool for them. And even then, they feel that there is something odd

about him, due partly to the eccentric inscriptions and images with which he decorates his work (60). One such inscription reads: “The owner of this machete is the one who holds its handle” (60). This statement is interesting, given its symbolic resonance with the genocidal violence that is imminent, since the machete was the primary weapon of slaughter during the genocide. The inscription thus suggests that anyone who holds this machete can be an agent of violence. On the pots he makes, Niko also etches images of men being roasted by goats. Like the inscription on the machete, these images suggest a latent propensity for violence in Niko. As can be expected, his work so unnerves those around him that many refuse to buy his wares. Unperturbed, however, he continues to inscribe violent imagery and idioms onto each of the pieces he creates. This portrayal of Niko as an artist of the macabre is likely an extension of his latent violent thoughts and a means of communicating them to those who reject him. Later, he has a dream in which he talks to a goat, a possible reference to his (unfulfilled) desire to communicate so as to become part of a (human) community. One day, a jug falls on his head, knocking him unconscious (63). When he wakes up, he finds he has been taken hostage by a militant group of men who happened to be passing his shop at the time. Along with other prisoners, he is made to prove himself and his loyalty to the group by killing another prisoner. If he fails to execute this man, then he too will be killed (80-81). Reasoning that the prisoner will die anyway, Niko kills him with a club. Thus, he comes to be part of those hunting down Tutsis, and an agent of violence himself. In other words, he becomes a member of a ‘community’ by using the ‘language’ of violence.

Up to this point in the novel, Niko has been presented as a social outcast, forced to live on the fringes of society as a result of his disability and unnerving smile. After he murders the prisoner, however, this representation shifts, since he becomes the leader of a murderous band of militiamen, known as the Intentionally Enraged, who hunt down innocent Tutsis:

What happened next surpasses any horror or cruelty that even the most depraved mind might picture. Niko’s group murdered as many people as it could, at first following the orders and signals of the leaders, and then simply in competition with each other – “I must have killed at least twenty today, and you?” – and, finally, out of habit. (84)

When the men become bored with the monotony of the murders, they begin to compete over the most gruesome manner of killing: “[S]liced to pieces, buried after being stoned nearly to death, strung up head down, and countless other ways” (84). As Isaro’s novel progresses, she comes to focus on the toll these killings eventually take on Niko. In the later chapters of the novel (both Isaro’s and Gatore’s), we learn that Niko has retreated to the island as a means of

running away from his crimes – physically at least. Psychologically, however, he continues to be haunted by them, despite his attempts to repress his memories. It is also likely that, by hiding in the cave, Niko seeks to avoid justice, something many *génocidaires* did in the aftermath of *itsebabwoko*, many of them fleeing to Uganda through the safety corridor (Operation Turquoise) administered by the French. Unable to escape his memories, however, Niko wastes away and eventually succumbs to death.

Isaro's story is more straightforward. Born in Rwanda to a Tutsi father and a Hutu mother, she is adopted by their French neighbours when her family is murdered. In France, she grows up in comfort, surrounded by a loving family and able to take advantage of privileges to which she would not otherwise have had access. When we first meet her, she is studying in Paris and has, for reasons she struggles to articulate, cut off all contact with her adoptive parents except for their continued financial support. Although we are not yet certain why she has made such a decision, there are hints that it is a result of their refusal to tell her what happened to her as a child, which in turn leaves her with the sense that her identity is not fully complete. As she states: "They had been considerate enough to let her keep her name, Isaro, and, together with her color, that was the only sign preventing her from assimilating into their family" (23). Here we see that, although treated as their own biological daughter, Isaro does not feel entirely comfortable in her adoptive family. There is something missing from her identity, something that she seems to have difficulty explaining to her parents or friends. It is this sense of incompleteness that serves as the catalyst for her subsequent journey to Rwanda.

The need to understand her Rwandan identity is sparked quite suddenly when, one morning, Isaro overhears a news broadcast about Rwanda and the major backlog of prisoners awaiting trial for acts committed during the genocide (11).³⁵ Gatore describes this sudden interruption of her routine thus:

She stared at the small clock-radio for a very long time, her gaze seemingly directed at a friend who had just betrayed her in the most shameful way. Until that moment she had managed to protect herself from the mere mention of the only word that was unbearable to her – the name of the country where she was born – and she couldn't understand why she had failed. She ended up turning the radio off, but the news item on the air that had assaulted her the way a criminal pounces on his prey wouldn't leave her. (11)

³⁵ Again, we are led to believe, by this description, that the unnamed country in the novel is Rwanda.

This unexpected reminder of her home country sends Isaro into a crisis. Gatore's choice of words – “betrayed”, “assaulted” – suggests that the reminder is a brutal one akin to the pain of a physical act of violence. It is a violation of her previously safe space, breaking open a buried childhood trauma she is unable to face. She isolates herself not only from her family, but also from everyone else in her life, and even attempts suicide in a futile endeavour to communicate her pain and sadness to those who love her:

She was looking to inflict upon the world and upon herself the spectacle of the odd behaviour that she had controlled and suppressed all too long. She tried to demonstrate her protest in the most obvious way possible [...] *Incarnating horror and having her unspeakable, embarrassing misery explode before the eyes of everyone* – that was what she was thinking about, holding a large glass of water and staring at the pills she'd lined up on the small, low table. (37, emphasis added)

Her attempt at suicide ultimately fails, but it is a prelude to what happens at the end of the novel. In her solitude, Isaro comes up with the idea to document the history of her country, an idea sparked by a play she has seen with her friend Victor, entitled *In Memory of Him*. She titles what she intends to be a “monumental book” similarly – *In Memory of...* (45), and her project is similarly monumental: she hopes to document the stories of everyone (victims, perpetrators, accomplices, bystanders and prisoners) who lived through the violence in her homeland.³⁶ In order to realise her project, she applies for a grant from an unnamed foundation and, despite some hesitation from a few members of the foundation's board, her application is successful. Impatient to begin, however, she flies to Rwanda before the grant has been finalised, which results in the withdrawal of the funds. On her way to the hotel on her first night in Rwanda, she encounters Kizito, a taxi driver who later becomes her lover. Taking him up on his offer to drive her around Kigali, she begins finding and interviewing people about their experiences. Kizito also tells her some of the traditional stories of Rwanda, including that of the island of Nez which serves as an inspiration for the island in her novel. She eventually moves in with him and conducts her work from his home, alternating between conducting interviews and transcribing them. At the same time that she is collecting these stories, she begins writing her novel about Niko.

As Isaro continues to collect the stories of those who lived through the genocide, she finds herself falling into a deep depression, clearly affected by the trauma to which she is

³⁶ It is unclear if Isaro means “everyone” literally or if she simply means as many people as possible from different groups. Either way, she has not taken into account the fact that in reality many Rwandans are often hesitant to speak about *itsembabwoko* even amongst themselves, let alone to strangers.

privy. Kizito sums this up best when he wonders why she is “inflicting work upon herself that [is] so clearly beginning to asphyxiate her” (113). This turn of phrase brings to mind the physical manifestations of trauma such as anxiety attacks and a sense of suffocation. Isaro is not only dealing with the trauma of others, however, she is also trying to come to terms with her own. While she still has not fully processed the event of her biological parents’ death, she is sufficiently aware of her emotions to refuse Kizito’s suggestion that they visit her childhood home:

She didn’t want to return to the place where she had escaped from death. Her pretext was that she had no time and the distance was too great, but when Kizito insisted on wanting to take her there, she had to confess she was afraid. (103)

Her hesitation revolves around the idea of what the house might look like now:

What would she have done if, upon arriving at the house of which her memory had such a radiant picture, she found its ruins overgrown with vegetation? Would she have been able to endure the void that nature used to cover her family and the trace of their sacrifice? (103)

Then there is the possibility that another family has moved into her former house:

Without being ripped apart by sorrow and turmoil, would she have accepted that new flowers are now growing on the land where she had seen her family’s blood flow, where she floundered around to get away? Would she have resisted the hatred and despair that seized her? (103)

As with the effects of the radio broadcast, Gatore again chooses language that suggests a visceral reaction to trauma, speaking of Isaro being “ripped apart” by sorrow, of being “seized” by hatred. Such words highlight the fact that trauma often affects sufferers physically as well as psychologically, and help the reader to better comprehend the effects of trauma on the victim, even if they themselves have not experienced the event in question. Isaro’s reluctance to visit her family home also mirrors Mukasonga’s inability to return home until a decade after her family’s deaths (*Cockroaches* 135). Whether in fiction or non-fiction, returning to the site of a major trauma is physically possible, but perhaps psychologically intolerable for the traumatised subject, because of the intensity the effects of the experience have on the individual.

Later, a letter arrives from Isaro’s adoptive parents in France. In it, her father details what happened to her family during the genocide. He reveals that Isaro and her family were their neighbours and friends. When the genocide began, her adoptive parents sheltered her

and her family in their house, “thinking there wouldn’t be any risk if they were with foreigners” (98). This proves a futile hope, however, and the militia eventually came for them. Isaro, her parents and her sister hid under a bed, but were discovered. Her parents were shot in front of her and her older sister was taken away. Isaro managed to escape detection and survive the bullets that the men fired into the bed as a parting shot. Reading this letter, Isaro finds her own memories resurfacing, and she begins to recall the gruesome events in question in detail (98). Again, she reacts physically to the memories of her trauma, crying and trembling. Although she had previously wanted to hear the story of her family from her adoptive parents, now that she has, the memories prove too much for her to bear. After a while she replies to her father’s letter with one of her own, in which she expresses the desire to see her adoptive parents again and, after sending the letter to her parents, she finishes her novel. As she notes, Niko’s story has been a “lifeline” that she has clung to throughout her time in Rwanda (118). Now that it is finished, she seems to be fading away: “She flips through the pages without paying any real attention. They seem foreign to her. She’s sure she’ll never read them again. *Already she isn’t there any longer*” (119, emphasis added). Then, as with her earlier attempt at killing herself, she sits on a ledge, only this time she holds a dagger rather than pills. She allows herself to topple over, making sure she will land on the point of the dagger. Finally, she has escaped her trauma.

4.1 Niko: Victim or Perpetrator?

Of the two narratives in *The Past Ahead*, Niko’s is the more complex. It is not written chronologically, but rather moves between the past and the present. More importantly, however, it is written in such a way that the reader struggles to tell what is real from what is not. Niko often delves into a dreamscape that the reader may struggle to understand, particularly because there is little to no signposting to differentiate this mental landscape from that of reality. An unknown authorial voice warns us of this:

“Dear stranger, I forgot to warn you that Niko’s mind is a wild labyrinth in which you agree to become lost and to keep trying to have faith. In a way, it’s a fall to which you must surrender, an exploration of a private domain that you have to accept as unfit for visits.” (35)

Time, for Niko, is far less structured than it is for others: “Generally speaking, with Niko it’s impossible to have a reliable temporal reference point because he himself doesn’t think it’s terribly important” (16). This attitude towards time, coupled with the extended dream sequences interspersed throughout his narrative, make it difficult for the reader to accurately

follow Niko's plotline. Unlike Isaro, whose narrative is chronological and clearly signposted by various events, the only clarity evident in Niko's story is that his timeline vaguely follows the course of his life from his childhood before the genocide to his older self after the genocide. Furthermore, the time during the genocide is largely erased, giving us little sense of when exactly he became a member of the *Interahamwe* or how long he spent killing his fellow countrymen. Perhaps the best example of Niko's temporal eccentricities takes place when one of his jars falls on his head, knocking him unconscious. Upon waking, Niko is unsure how long he has been out for (63-4). He deems it likely that he has only been unconscious for a few hours, but he also acknowledges that, for all he can tell, he may have fallen asleep "for one or several days" (64). Even the fact that the fire has burned out does not assist him in determining the length of time that has passed, given that the smell of ashes can last for days. His disorientation is not helped by the dream that he had while unconscious: "If he relied on what was going on inside his head during this time, he would insist he'd slept for an eternity" (64). Thus, if Niko has actually been asleep for several days, then it is possible that the genocide could have begun while he was unconscious on his shop floor. Logically, however, it seems unlikely that this is the case, given that there was little sign before this event that violence was brewing. It is more probable that, for Niko, time is broken up into particular events that may occur close together or else are connected in his mind in some other way. Because he places little importance on time, I would argue that he ignores much of its day-to-day passage. For him, most days are the same – they blur into one lengthy sequence, broken only by the occurrence of a significant event that falls outside of the monotony of daily life. These events are often made more memorable to Niko because of the dreams that accompany them. When he returns to the 'real' world, it takes him some time to shake off the remnants of the dream and adjust to what one might categorise as 'normality'. It is likely, therefore, that the incident with the jar and the beginning of the genocide appear to him to occur simultaneously simply because they are two significant events that interrupt the routine of everyday life. Put differently, they are two significant occurrences in his life that he, with his unusual concept of time, conflates simply because nothing else of importance occurs in between them.

As a result of Niko's lack of time-keeping, it is impossible to know how old he was when the genocide began. We are privy to his birth and its circumstances, and we know that he leaves school and takes over the blacksmith's shop from Gaspard, but these events are not associated with specific calendar days, months or years. It is therefore impossible to know at what age Niko became a murderer. While it is likely that he was a grown man by the time he

started killing, it is equally possible that he was still in his teens. The events surrounding how Niko ends up leading the Intentionally Enraged also do not provide much in the way of context. We are privy to the internal logic that leads to him killing the man in front of him, but little else aside from the fact that he seems to relish his new role as the group's leader. Again, I would argue that part of his contentedness within the group setting stems from his lack of company during his childhood. Thus, he may remain ambiguous towards the killing itself, but he enjoys the sense of camaraderie the group setting provides. Applegate convincingly argues that at least part of the reason Niko joins the Intentionally Enraged is his need to belong to a larger group. She writes of Niko: "[H]is sensitivity and loneliness seem directly linked to his willingness to kill [...] As a member of his group of killers, for the first time in his life, [he] is part of a community" (72). Niko's loneliness has always affected him physically: "Niko considered himself a loner, a sort of perpetual passerby, alone and ignored. Part of his body, in the region of his belly, suffered from this incessantly" (51). As a result of this severe loneliness, it makes sense that Niko would stay with the Intentionally Enraged, even if it means killing, because he is finally able to experience a sense of belonging.

Niko's lack of a fully chronological timeline is reminiscent of Edkins' theory of trauma time. It seems that, for Niko, his day-to-day life occurs on one level, and his participation in the genocide on another. This dual version of time makes it even more complicated to comprehend Niko's concept of time. Not only must we tease out what is real from what is imaginary, but we must also be aware of what constitutes the linear timeline of his life and what constitutes the continued looping of trauma time that occurs outside of that. What is clear, however, is that, during his time in the cave, Niko continually relives his crimes and therefore his trauma. His recollections are punctuated with dreams or other musings which indicate that he cannot help but recall the death he has inflicted, and is ultimately trapped or haunted by it. Though he feels ashamed of his actions as a member of the *Interahamwe* (8), there is no relief from his memories.

Niko's narrative is further complicated by the insertion of an unknown authorial voice or narrator at certain points – as evidenced in the earlier quotation. This voice usually provides some kind of warning or commentary on the trajectory of Niko's story. It is this voice that begins the story:

"Dear stranger, welcome to this narrative. I should warn you that if, before you take one step, you feel the need to perceive the indistinct line that separates fact from fiction, memory from imagination; if logic and meaning seem one and the same thing to you; and, lastly, if anticipation is the basis for your interest, you may well find this journey unbearable." (1)

This is the first of a number of warnings we receive from this unknown voice, cautioning us against continuing reading the novel if we have certain expectations of it. The above comment also provides us with the first clue that certain events in the novel are not necessarily to be taken at face value. Another example reads:

“Dear bystander, if you are in as much of a hurry as this stranger, you should follow him and vanish as well. This is the best time, for after these lines it won’t be as easy for you as it is now to leave.” (4)

Further on in the novel, we are warned:

“[D]on’t forget you are still free. You can turn back, stay here for a moment only or forever, continue to look for the exit or break through the walls of the maze to get out faster. Take all the time you need to decide, and, should you choose to go on, follow me.” (35)

That these warnings come solely in Niko’s sections is significant. Clearly there is something about his story that the unknown speaker is warning us against. The reader is continually given the opportunity to turn back, to put down the book and walk away. It seems initially that these warnings are predicated largely on the way in which Niko’s mind works, on the way in which it breaks down what one may consider a conventional, lucid, linear thought process. Instead, it is filled with images of repressed flashbacks, the idea of teaching a goat to talk and such questions as the role of guardian angels (26), amongst other oddities. The real and the imaginary are so closely intertwined in his mind that it can, at times, be virtually impossible to separate the two. There is, however, more to these warnings than the reader at first realises. It is only when we come to Niko’s memories of the killings that we understand why the authorial voice cautions us against continuing: not simply because Niko’s mind is a labyrinth, but also because our view of him will change drastically should we continue reading. When these initial warnings are issued, the reader still holds a great deal of sympathy for Niko, the abandoned child unable to communicate with anyone due to his muteness. Once we become privy to the full scope of his memories, however, we are confronted with Niko the murderer. Thus, readers’ full comprehension of the previous cautions only comes once we know of the crimes he has committed and when it is too late for us to unlearn what we now know about his past. It is, as the voice notes, no longer easy for us to turn back. Indeed, even if we do decide to stop reading at this point, we cannot erase the image of Niko killing his first victim – we can only prevent ourselves from learning of the extent of his further murders. We are, however, no doubt compelled to keep reading so as to uncover the extent of Niko’s crimes, since we have become too invested in the character to

“break through the walls of the maze” (35). Rather, we must follow the narrative through to its end, no matter how uncomfortable such a journey may be. And it is a journey in a sense. The unknown voice suggests that it is acting as a guide, helping us to navigate not only the peculiarities of Niko’s mind, but also of his life. This idea of a journey continues into Isaro’s narrative as she undertakes her journey to Rwanda to untangle her childhood and so attempt to round out her identity.

Niko does not have a conventional entrance into life. His mother dies in childbirth and he rolls onto the floor, going unnoticed until the dog discovers him (48). At first his silent cries are assumed to have been muffled by the noise of an oncoming storm, then it is posited that his muteness is a form of revenge for his family’s initial negligence (49). Later, there is the suggestion that, traumatised by his mother’s death and absence, Niko’s silence is a kind of mourning (49). It slowly becomes apparent, however, that his muteness is simply a part of who he is – something he can never and will never outgrow. As a result, he is largely shunned by both his family and his community. This ostracisation means that Niko turns inwards for company. He resides in an imaginary world of his own devising, a world incomprehensible to most, including the reader. At one point, for example, he decides, despite his muteness, to teach one of the family’s goats to speak (26). In order to better understand the goat (which he names Niko), he decides to live like it: “[F]or several months, the two Nikos, inseparable, spent the better part of their time together, feeding, grazing and chasing each other [...]. At night, before going to bed, Niko took great pains to teach the baby goat the subtleties of human language” (26). While the goat naturally does not learn to talk, Niko remains unperturbed. In fact, he later dreams of being in a field with goats and sheep. One of the billy goats, separating itself from the herd, comes up to him and embarks on a philosophical discussion regarding the superimposition of worlds on each other, a concept Niko has himself pondered before (70-71). While it is not explicitly stated, one cannot help but wonder if this is the same goat Niko tried to teach as a child. It is such behaviour as well as his thought processes that mark Niko out as unusual. The narrator comments: “Usually, any little detail is enough to prompt Niko’s mind to stray into endless digressions” (39). Once he is living in the cave with the monkeys, however, such digressions cease. This suggests that, as part of his attempt to repress his trauma, he needs to suppress all thought in case his musings lead to recollections of his past actions.

There has been much criticism of Gatore for choosing to write Niko’s story – the story of a perpetrator. For example, Applegate questions the ethical nature of such a portrayal: “Is it a mistake to ask a reader to recognise the humanity of a killer?” (77). For survivor Esther

Mujawayo, the answer is a resounding no. She believes that it is “not her role to understand the killers” (qtd in Applegate 76). She continues: “I do not want to understand them, and I do not want to excuse them. They did this, they did this and I want them to pay, and I want them to sleep badly” (qtd in Applegate 76). Her stance, particularly as a survivor of the genocide, is understandable given the atrocities committed by *génocidaires* and other Hutus during *itsebabwoko*. However, Niko’s case seems a good example of Mamdani’s notion of victims who become killers. In creating a sympathetic character – one whom we initially view as a victim of society’s cruelty – Gatore creates an opportunity for the reader to at least try to understand the actions of many of the genocide’s participants. Often when we think of *itsebabwoko* we think of the *génocidaires*, those hardened killers who planned and promoted the genocide, who took a perverse pleasure in the massacres. We think of men like Georges Rutaganda and Grégoire in *Hotel Rwanda* who were fully committed to the Hutu Power cause. We forget that there were many ordinary Hutus who chose to kill for reasons other than a belief in Hutu superiority. It is arguably this demographic that Gatore seeks to represent through Niko’s story. In choosing to make Niko a character for whom we can feel some empathy, Gatore sets up a situation in which we see the complexity in defining victim and perpetrator. We step away from the idea that every killer is a monster and see the complexity behind their actions. As Applegate notes, Niko’s smile makes him look like “a demon” to some (74). Yet, the reader still feels sympathy for him, knowing his background. It is therefore a shock when we later learn that Niko is in fact a perpetrator and perhaps those who viewed him as a demon were not so wrong after all. The vision of Niko the victim has been shattered and we must find a way of reconciling our long-standing sympathy for the boy with our disgust at the man. Gatore forces us to consider whether or not this is possible. Can a perpetrator ever be a victim? Is it possible to be both victim and perpetrator? *The Past Ahead* suggests that the answer to these questions is, to a certain extent, yes.

Examining Gatore’s stance towards identity in *The Past Ahead*, Applegate argues that both Niko and Isaro wear figurative masks throughout the novel (75). She writes: “Both characters are defined by a constructed, artificial identity that does not allow for variation, personal expression, or freedom. Their masks are polished and perfect, but both killer and victim are imprisoned by these roles” (75). What Applegate means is that, for both Isaro and Niko, their masks – or identities – have been imposed on them by others, including the reader. According to the usual categorisation of participants in the genocide, there are victims and there are killers, again often predicated on their ethnic identity. This is how Isaro and Niko have been categorised. It is difficult, then, to accept that Niko may be both victim and

perpetrator. It is, however, this very duality that Gatore seeks to address. Bernhard Giesen, in his book *Triumph and Trauma*, writes:

To regard somebody as a victim seems to be a spontaneous self-evident classification that does not need further justification. Indeed, the suffering and the death of victims are obvious facts beyond doubt and question – ultimate certainties about our cohumans, if there are any at all. (45)

If there is a victim, however, then there must also be a perpetrator, someone who inflicted the violence that resulted in the creation of a victim. And if it is as easy to define the term ‘victim’ as Giesen suggests it is, then, logically, it must be similarly simple to define ‘perpetrator’. The two terms are, after all, antonyms. Drawing on Judith Shklar’s writing, Giesen states:

The very notion of victims presupposes agencies that intervene and change human lives, that define and recognize victimization. To define someone as a victim is to assume that his or her condition is the result of human action and that it could have been avoided if human decisions would have been different. (46)

A perpetrator, therefore, must be that person or persons whose actions result in the victimisation of others. Importantly, these actions are deliberate since, as Giesen notes, they are based on voluntary decisions made by the individual or group perpetrating the violence. In Niko’s case, he voluntarily chooses to kill the prisoner before him when ordered to do so. This is therefore a deliberate act which, according to Giesen’s argument, makes Niko a perpetrator. Theoretically, then, he cannot be a victim, because the violence was inflicted *by* him, not *on* him. What such a dichotomous view fails to acknowledge, however, is the complexity of defining victims and perpetrators, particularly when it comes to the question of trauma. From the outset it is made clear that Isaro is a victim of the genocide, but it is more difficult to classify Niko’s position. Reading about Niko’s childhood, it is difficult not to feel sympathy for him. We view him as the victim of neglect, a boy so lonely that he tries to teach a goat to talk. To quote Giesen again: “The social construction of victimhood presupposes an outside actor who is at least partly responsible for the misfortune of the victim” (47). It could be argued that Niko is simply a victim of circumstance – his muteness, which he cannot control, has made him an outsider even in his own family.

Following Giesen’s logic, however, there is more to Niko’s victimhood than merely circumstance. Those around him purposely ignore him, showing little inclination to include him in communal life. The villagers, therefore, are the outside actors to whom Giesen refers. By choosing not to allow him into the community, they create the conditions which

eventually lead him to become a perpetrator of barbaric violence. We are urged to feel empathy for the young Niko, to see him as a lonely child pushed to the margins of society because of his muteness. And this strategy works. Although we are aware from the beginning that he is running from something, we sympathise with Niko. In fact, our sympathy is heightened by the hints of an atrocity he is trying to escape, because we believe him to be the victim. We do not for a moment think that *he* might be the source of others' victimhood, largely because he is portrayed as an innocent child suffering from the actions of others for much of the novel. This is a deliberate move by Gatore, which heightens the shock we experience when we discover what Niko has done. Gatore's strategy here is made all the more effective because he does not go into great detail about Niko's actions as a killer, and we are therefore left to imagine the horrors that the latter has committed. Indeed, Niko himself is unable to articulate or even consciously acknowledge his brutality, which highlights the extent to which he is traumatised by what he has seen and done. In order to equate the child Niko with his adult self it is necessary to break down the binary of victim and perpetrator, and think rather of Niko as both.

As mentioned earlier, Niko begins his killing spree when he is caught by a group of armed men, possibly the *Interahamwe*, and forced to kill another man, a Tutsi, to prove he is on their side (81). One may argue that Niko murders the man out of a sense of self-preservation, that he is forced to do so in order to prevent himself from being killed. Such an argument, however, is negated by the cool logic with which Niko makes his decision: he understands that the man in front of him will die regardless of his decision. He is also acutely aware that he has a choice to make here. He has already seen one person refuse to kill and so be killed himself. Thinking through his options, Niko observes that he has three choices: "[R]un and get a bullet in his back, explain that he cannot do it and get a bullet through the eyes" (81) or kill the man in question. He also knows that if he refuses to kill the man, "they'll throw both their corpses on top of the others, and they'll shout 'Next!'" (Gatore 81), and he wonders what a person should do "when resistance, even through the sacrifice of oneself, will not save anything or anyone?" (81). It takes only a few seconds for Niko to think these thoughts, but in that time, he reaches his decision. As the group's leader shouts "Three!", he brings a club down onto the head of the man kneeling in front of him. This scene is the one around which Niko's narrative turns. In this moment, with this one decision, he ceases, in the reader's eyes, to be the innocent and lonely young boy of the novel's beginning. He becomes, instead, a murderer, one of 'them' – a perpetrator.

By choosing to participate in the killing, Niko becomes part of a group, albeit a murderous one, thereby filling his childhood need for acceptance. He further cements his status as perpetrator by continuing to voluntarily take part in the slaughter of others. He is even elected leader of his unit. Whatever his motivation or his degree of commitment to the genocidal cause, he therefore continues to make the conscious decision to kill. Even as he commits these acts, however, Niko remains a victim in a sense as well. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, he is the victim of a broken system, a context in which there are only two choices: kill or be killed. Had the genocide not occurred, there is no reason to believe that Niko would have murdered anyone despite the sense of latent violence that resides within him. The system requires a choice from all Hutus, however, and Niko makes his. Secondly, and more importantly, Niko makes his choice because of what it means for him personally. And, thirdly, Niko is a victim of trauma. This may seem at odds with our usual idea of a trauma victim – someone who has faced brutality or abuse of some kind at the hands of others – but it is nonetheless true. Throughout the novel, Niko is tormented by the memories of his killings. In particular, he cannot help his mind from returning to his initial murder. Although he never sees the face of the man he clubbed to death, he notices that the person has the same stoutness, the same baldness – even the same voice – as his father. Niko actively tries to convince himself that all of this means nothing (82), an act of denial which, Applegate argues, is indicative of his attempts to distance himself from his actions, both then and later during the genocide (73). Reliving the moment in the cave, however, such distancing proves difficult to achieve. Moreover, in an earlier dream Niko saw a tree whose leaves foretold the manner of death of each person in the village and, on his father's leaf, were the words "Killed by his son" (75). No matter how hard he tries, Niko now cannot erase these words from his memory. Nor can he prevent himself from linking them to the man he clubbed to death.

The torment he experiences in remembering his murdering spree prevents Niko from eating or even leaving the cave. He comes to view himself as a prisoner of the monkeys with whom he shares the space (Applegate 71). There is no evidence that the latter is true, however, since his incarceration seems more to be a form of self-punishment imposed as a means of atonement for his previous crimes. As his memories surface and we come to know of his terrible acts, so he slowly wastes away. From being the victim of loneliness, he now seeks it out, purposely isolating himself from the rest of society. There are three other people also living on the island, but Niko has chosen a cave far from them. Part of this self-imposed isolation is likely to avoid external judgement and punishment for his crimes. But it also seems to be a result of his tortured mind. He has deliberately returned to a position of

solitariness, something which he once found unbearable. Moreover, if he seeks solace in his isolation, he does not find it. Instead, he is haunted by the faces of his victims. He tries to block them out, but, in the end he – like Isaro – is unable to prevent the memories from overwhelming him. He lets himself starve to death, a slow death and once again a deliberate choice on his part. Having initially chosen to kill others, he now realises that his only escape from his mental torment is to let himself die.

It is in this ending that we see Niko once again as both victim and perpetrator since, while he makes the choice to become a killer, he later becomes the victim of his memories. Strictly speaking, the latter, in terms of Giesen's definition, may not be an outside actor per se, but they are something over which Niko has no control. Furthermore, had he not decided to murder others, he would not have to contend with such recollections. Unlike choosing to kill, he cannot choose to repress his memories no matter how hard he tries. Not only is he haunted by his past acts, but he is also forced to relive them over and over again in his dreams and his attempts to understand the world into which he has emerged. For example, when a monkey is shot, Niko believes that the animal took the bullet that was actually meant for him (25). This indicates a sense of overwhelming guilt on Niko's part for his past actions which, as Caruth suggests in her arguments on latency (*Unclaimed* 182), he is only just beginning to comprehend. Furthermore, when the shots are fired, Niko finds himself cowering in the same position "in which he had surprised so many of his victims" (20). This realisation results in his once more being "overcome by a flood of memories that sicken and exasperate him to the point that he vomits out everything he has just eaten" (20). We become aware, then, that Niko's trauma occurs belatedly and that he is haunted by his past actions. Although his trauma stems from a choice he made earlier, we can still view him as a victim, because the killings themselves have left him scarred. Their recollection causes Niko to once more become a victim while still remaining a perpetrator of horrific violence.

As someone who falls into the categories of both victim and perpetrator, Niko reminds us that such labels are not binary, but rather need to be carefully examined for nuances. As Applegate notes, identity "can always be rewritten and reinterpreted" and that, by doing so, it becomes possible to view a person differently (81). This is precisely what happens with Niko – as his story unfolds, his identity is rewritten and reinterpreted until we are able to see him in a much more complex light. That we could feel sympathy for a participant in genocide seems unthinkable and yet we do feel sympathy for Niko. Even when he has imprisoned himself on the island, it is possible to find a degree of sympathy for him, as we watch him disintegrate under the weight of his regret. The Niko we see on the island is

clearly traumatised, and no longer the boy who tried to teach a goat to talk or daydreamed his way out of loneliness. Instead, he is a broken man, one who has seen atrocities and committed many of them himself. He is unable to repress his memories and equally unable to cope with their implications. He is both “brutal *and* sensitive” (Applegate 72), somehow occupying what are usually perceived as two separate spheres. Perhaps the best that we can say of Niko is that he is a survivor, at least until his death.

4.2 Isaro: The Prodigal Daughter

As noted previously, Isaro’s narrative is more straightforward than Niko’s, since she is presented as the more ‘traditional’ victim of the genocide – forced to witness the deaths of her parents, taken to a foreign country, and brought up in a manner that elides part of her identity. As a result, her story is more about recovering the past than it is about repressing it. In this respect, as in others, she acts as a foil to Niko. It is unlikely that this is unintentional on Gatore’s part. Moreover, Applegate believes that Isaro and Niko are both forced into set roles by others, with little way of escaping them (75). For Isaro, this situation also restricts her from accessing her full identity and from processing her trauma. Part of her reason for writing Niko’s story – the story of a perpetrator, albeit fictional – is that she is attempting to understand what happened in Rwanda during her childhood (Applegate 75). In other words, she is trying to uncover both her country’s history and her own – and, in doing so, she feels the need to explore how or why ordinary Rwandans took part in the bloodshed. Applegate also notes that Isaro moves from documenting the accounts of others to writing the story of a killer herself “[a]s a way to repair her estrangement from life” (75). Isaro’s original idea to collate the stories of genocide survivors, both perpetrators and victims, is possibly based on the fact that, in reality, there is some difficulty in distinguishing one from the other, so to do so would help her more firmly anchor herself in her country’s history. Gatore’s novel offers a clear example of this difficulty when he records an exchange between Isaro and her lover, Kizito. One day, for no reason at all, Isaro suddenly wonders if Kizito might be the man who killed her parents (xiii). Up to this point, she viewed him as a lover and a helper, someone whom she can trust and who cares for her. There is no logical reason for her to suspect him – just as there is little reason for us to suspect Niko of being a killer. Once more we see a similarity between Mukasonga and Gatore as, upon visiting her home for the first time since the genocide, Mukasonga also wonders if the neighbouring Hutu family killed her parents (103). Isaro’s inability to trust even her lover highlights the way in which *itsembabwoko* has affected the relationships and intimacy between people. She initially intends to tell Kizito that

she loves him, but is suddenly overcome by the thought that he may have murdered her family (xiii). It is difficult, after all, to live in a post-genocide Rwanda where killers and victims must live as neighbours once again (Applegate 71).

The radio broadcast that opens Isaro's narrative indicates to both her and the reader that she exists in a kind of limbo – neither entirely Western nor entirely African. As her adoptive father explains, in the letter he writes to her at the end of the novel, "We have taken to heart your reproach that we gave you no explanations. Our undoubtedly debatable idea was *not to weigh you down with all that before you were firmly centred in your life*" (Gatore 97, emphasis added). The notion that Isaro will only be capable of coping with her past once she is "firmly centred in [her] life" is an ironic one, however, given that, by existing in a space between two identities, she will never be 'firmly centred'. In fact, it is only through knowing her history that she will be able to anchor herself. It is necessary for her to know and acknowledge her painful past in order for her to return from the liminal space she occupies. The project on which she therefore embarks is an attempt to preserve the memories of those who experienced what the narrator refers to as "the tragedy" (45), and she aims to interview everyone – survivors, perpetrators, resistance fighters – about their experiences. She refers to the project as "a kind of memory inventory" (45), and, in undertaking it, she not only hopes to record the history of her country, but also, hopefully, to uncover her own history. It is immediately clear to the reader, however, that such an enterprise is impossible, both on an individual level and as part of the record of a nation torn apart by tragedy. As indicated earlier, even if Isaro does not intend to literally interview every single person who lived through the violence, she does not take into account the fact that not all her potential subjects will be open to the idea of sharing their stories. Moreover, even if she does collect enough narratives to create the book of survivor accounts she envisions, doing so will not necessarily lead to understanding on her part. Indeed, it is likely to make the genocide more difficult to comprehend, since the accounts she collects will likely be contradictory. As a result, coming to terms with her own past will be more complicated than she anticipates. This is exemplified in her relationship with Kizito. At first affectionate towards him, she finds herself withdrawing further and further into her own world. Despite there being "no reason for her not to love him" (77), she realises that she is unable to give him the love he deserves, given her suspicion that it might be he who killed her biological parents (118). Gatore describes this suspicion as bewildering, exploding in Isaro's head unexpectedly (118) – imagery which suggests that, in the aftermath of the genocide, it is impossible to tell who is a perpetrator, an accomplice or a bystander. As we see in Mukasonga's memoirs, there is often no way to

identify the perpetrator of a crime. Moreover, in some cases false accusations were made against individuals as a means of seeking revenge or of expropriating their land, jobs or even to shift the blame for especially heinous crimes onto someone else. In Brown's 2011 film *Kinyarwanda*, for example, a former murderer claims that he witnessed his superior kill a baby (00:19:09-00:19:32). He later admits, however, that he was the one to do so (0021:04-00:21:27). The effort to admit the truth comes at the price of his life, as he commits suicide shortly after. Isaro's project, therefore, is an unfeasible one, not only because she can never hope to interview everyone, but also because she will have no way to separate the truth from those narratives which seek to minimise the guilt of their narrators. Hatzfeld notes this in *The Strategy of Antelopes*, too, when interviewing a man named Alphonse Hitiyaremye, who explains that many Hutus do not admit the whole truth when testifying to their crimes (128).

Isaro's death indicates that she is so overwhelmed by both her own traumatic experiences and those of others that she finally succumbs to suicide: she is unable to come to terms either with her own past or that of her country of origin. From this perspective, her adoptive parents' decision not to divulge her childhood history to her perhaps makes a degree of sense, as that history's traumatic nature may cause her more pain than anything else. The question remains, however, as to what point in her life she would be considered stable enough to learn her story. And who would decide when this should be? Ultimately, it must surely be up to Isaro herself to decide when she wants to hear about her childhood and so bring back the repressed memories buried deep in her consciousness. For we learn, as does Isaro, that her memories of her childhood, presumably in Rwanda, have not disappeared. Once she returns to the country, they slowly return. This process in fact begins on the night she arrives. When Kizito, then an unknown taxi driver, tells her a traditional story about a toad and a swallow, something stirs in her memory. As she listens, she finds herself feeling inexplicably concerned, and tries to work out what the story "refused to help her remember" (58). It later transpires that she has heard this story before – her adoptive father told it to her on the flight to France when she could not sleep (97). Isaro's recollection of this story thus comes at the point when her memories of what happened prior to her adoption begin to resurface: "Spontaneously, the story of the toad and the swallow, which she had tried so hard to recall, was the first thing that came back to her" (97). Later, her biological father's letter recounts the events that led to her being taken to France. While reading this letter, it becomes clear to Isaro that she does in fact does recollect the events surrounding her family's death. What she finds more difficult to explain is how she seemingly forgot them in the first place. She reflects:

How could it be that, during all the time in France, she didn't remember any of the things that had happened, although she'd been old enough to realize what was going on, even if she didn't understand? In fact, she'd always known [...] In tidying up her memories, that reminiscence revealed a corner that had been left to wither in obscurity and dust. Vague at first, then more and more sharp, she began to see more clearly. (97)

As she reads her father's words, Isaro notes: "Memories came flooding in as forcefully as water fills a lock" (98). Thus, unlike Niko, whose memories unfold gradually, Isaro's recollections come all at once, consuming her and the reader in a sudden wave of violence and death. In this reaction, we see yet another way in which Isaro and Niko are contrasted. For Niko, the memories trickle out only when he forgets to put up his defences and he must constantly avoid thinking about his actions "for fear of feeling dreadfully ashamed" (8). For Isaro, meanwhile, she is overcome by the memories in a sudden onrush of pain. Significantly, both experiences are described through the metaphor of water, and Applegate takes this analogy further when she writes about the respective deaths of the two characters, both of which give a sense that the person is drowning in memories and misery (72). That such an onslaught of memories resurfacing should trigger an extreme response in Isaro does not seem odd. After all, she is finally acknowledging – with a clearer sense of understanding – the horror that she witnessed as a young girl. And she is reliving this trauma while working on a project that has also opened her up to the trauma of others. In fact, the memories of those she interviews begin to consume her: they do not "just enter her ears and leave through her arm and pen in the form of ink" (113). This description of how the recollections of her subjects remain with Isaro even after she has written them down goes a long way to explaining why Kizito describes the project as asphyxiating her, since she views herself as the "guardian" of the stories she hears (113). However, in taking on this burden, she is ultimately exposed to even more trauma, as she experiences it vicariously through her interview subjects: she is figuratively drowning in the pain of the stories she transcribes.

The fact that Isaro has found it impossible to access her traumatic memories for much of her life is not unusual for trauma survivors. Caruth describes this effect as 'latency'. As indicated in Chapter One, according to this theory trauma survivors do not experience the traumatic event when it occurs. Rather, there is a delay in the processing of the experience which relegates it to becoming fully evident "only in connection with another place, and in another time" (*Unclaimed* 8). Caruth explains: "The pathology consists ... solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it" (*Unclaimed*

4). While Isaro carries within her the memory of her parents' death and her sister's abduction, she has not been able to consciously access it, despite the fact that – as she notes – she was old enough to realise what was happening at the time, even if she was too young to understand it. As she listens to the stories of others, however, their trauma allows her to access her own. It is only when she reads her adoptive father's account of her journey to France that she is able to clearly and consciously recall what happened. In this sense, then, the memory can be said to haunt her. As Caruth explains, traumatic memories, rather than *being possessed by* the sufferer, *possess them* (*Unclaimed* 6). Moreover, a traumatic memory “often produces a deep uncertainty as to its very truth” (*Unclaimed* 6). Following this argument, then, it is understandable that Isaro wishes to hear the story of her family from her adoptive parents, since doing so will give her the certainty that her memory is not faulty and that the events she recalls really did happen as she remembers them. Having her recollections corroborated by another helps to confirm her trauma and also fills in the gaps in her identity. She is not only an African orphan adopted by a French couple, she is also a survivor of the Rwandan genocide, an important fact if she is ever to be able to coherently explain herself to others. Such knowledge is one aspect of her personal history and identity that has been missing.

As Isaro pursues the truth about her past in Rwanda and thus make sense of her own story, she finds herself overwhelmed by the facts of her origins and displacement as a survivor of atrocity. She finds that she cannot relegate this new knowledge to the corner of her mind where it has been “left to wither in obscurity and dust” (97). Instead, she is forced to confront it head-on, and it is this confrontation with her past that she cannot cope with. She has become possessed by a traumatic knowledge which leads her to suicide. It is obvious from the beginning of Isaro's narrative that she is unable to cope with trauma, whether personal or collective. When she speaks to the Board about her project, for example, there is the sense that she is possessed by the trauma of her country and her people. Although she claims to be dispassionate in her collection of survivors' stories, she soon realises that it will not be quite so easy to remain unaffected by their harrowing tales. This is evident when she describes her interview process. Once she has found a willing subject, she listens to their story without taking notes. It then takes her another few hours afterwards to transcribe everything they have said. At this rate, it will take her as long to complete her book as it will to try all the prisoners in Rwanda's jails – the project, perhaps doomed from the start, will never be completed.

Just as Niko tries to come to terms with his trauma, that is, the violence he has inflicted on others, so Isaro attempts to deal with her own and her country's suffering, but ultimately both characters feel that the only way to respond to their pain is by dying. For both protagonists, then, the weight of their trauma is not only debilitating – it is lethal. Unlike Emma, in Combres' novel *Broken Memory*, they do not find a path to healing. While Emma is able to overcome her trauma by working with a psychologist, Isaro and Niko are tormented by the knowledge of their experiences. For both of the latter, it is the acknowledgement of their trauma that is their undoing. Initially, both seek to avoid this knowing, Niko by consciously repressing his memories and Isaro through her unconscious forgetting of the facts of her parents' death and sister's abduction. Such a state cannot last, however: ultimately, they must both face their traumas. That this acknowledgement comes at the cost of their lives highlights the devastation of remembering. It also draws attention to the fact that – despite what *Hotel Rwanda* or *Inside the Hotel Rwanda* might suggest – trauma does not end with the end of the event that causes it. In the same way that Isaro and Niko carry the memories of their respective experiences, so Rwandans today are forced to live and relive the trauma of the genocide. For them, too, there is no permanent escape. What makes their situation more difficult is the fact that they may find themselves living next door to those responsible for the killing of their loved ones. Or, as Hatzfeld documents, an entire village may be required to reintegrate perpetrators with their victims. As a means of getting around this problem, the current Rwandan government, under the rule of Paul Kagame, has forbidden any mention of the words "Hutu" or "Tutsi" – all citizens are required to identify as Rwandan. Furthermore, perpetrators must go through re-education camps before they are allowed back into society (Hatzfeld 13). And, once they have been reintegrated, they are banned from mentioning the genocide. Even survivors are not meant to speak about *itsembabwoko* (Hatzfeld 79). Nevertheless, the scars and haunting remain.

In conclusion, then, though obviously Gatore's novel is not a hopeful one, since both of its twinned narratives have bleak endings, it does insist on portraying the very real consequences of the trauma of the Rwandan genocide. It goes further than many Western portrayals of *itsembabwoko*, providing its audience with an understanding of the fact that trauma continues indefinitely, no matter how much time has passed since the traumatic event. As a result, it supplies us with a much more realistic account of post-genocide Rwanda and its people.

Conclusion

Although it is difficult to obtain literature on the 1994 Rwandan genocide written by Rwandans themselves, it is important to do so, as this writing acts as something of a corrective to predominantly Western cinematic works that portray the genocide as an aberration in Rwanda's history – a spontaneous eruption of inter-ethnic violence. It is also necessary to read such texts in order to gain a fuller understanding of the country's history and its repercussions not only for the events of 1994, but also for Rwandans today. While films like *Hotel Rwanda* and *Sometimes in April* have successfully brought the events of *itsembabwoko* to the attention of Western audiences, I have argued that they present a somewhat narrow version of the trauma engendered by the events of 1994 and those that preceded the genocide. In this context, Rwandan voices should take precedence: their stories should not be silenced, but rather given preference over other narratives. It is in this spirit that I have analysed predominantly Rwandan authors in this thesis. Where I have used Western depictions, this has largely been in order to discuss factual/historical divergences between them and other accounts, or to compare and contrast different modes of storytelling.

Scholars such as Mahmood Mamdani have emphasised the importance of placing *itsembabwoko* in its proper historical context, and exploring the legacy of colonialism in that country. Cathy Caruth and Laurie Vickroy, meanwhile, write about the meaning of trauma and its effects on the human psyche. Others like Anne Whitehead and Geoffrey Hartman have questioned the ability of language and fiction to represent not just a traumatic event, but trauma itself. In other words, they engage with the question of how to ethically represent a reality that is unspeakable. Postcolonial trauma theorists, like Stef Craps and Irene Visser, maintain that trauma in the postcolonial African context can be traced back to the originary trauma of colonisation and the long-term effects that has had on the ideologies of new political parties in previously colonised countries.

Narratives such as those of Scholastique Mukasonga are significant here, since they suggest the effects colonialism had on Rwandan – particularly Hutu – ideology, and underline the reality that the violence of the genocide had a long history predating 1994. Through her writing, Mukasonga has created a record of the kind of violence that would become all too common during the genocide. As a result, we are able to comprehend the highly fraught nature of Hutu-Tutsi relations throughout the country's history. She also introduces us to the trauma and grief that many survivors of both the genocide and the pogroms of pre-genocide Rwanda, still experience, and provides a personal view of loss, highlighting the collective

nature of death and trauma in contemporary Rwanda. Mukasonga's experience tells of the deeply entrenched nature of trauma. Even after moving to France, she continually returns to the violence of her childhood, particularly through nightmares and aural recollections. Furthermore, she felt compelled to write her memoirs as a tribute to her family members who were killed during the genocide. This is particularly true of her mother, with *The Barefoot Woman* being devoted entirely to her role in Mukasonga's childhood. Finally, Mukasonga's works are a testament to the existence not only of her family, but her entire community – a means of ensuring that they are never forgotten.

Whilst the film *Hotel Rwanda* provides us with the story of how one person can ostensibly make a difference even in an event as appalling as a genocide, and presents Paul Rusesabagina as the hero who saved over one thousand Tutsis and moderate Hutus from certain death, Edouard Kayihura's memoir *Inside the Hotel Rwanda*, by contrast, interrogates the notion of Rusesabagina as hero by presenting an alternative account of the experiences of the occupants of the Hotel des Mille Collines in 1994. In Kayihura's version of events, Rusesabagina is a war profiteer, charging the refugees for food, cooking facilities and simply hiding in the hotel, as well as entertaining his powerful Hutu friends, often part of the coterie organising the genocide. Though it is possible to argue that Kayihura's perceptions are coloured by his intense suspicion and dislike of Rusesabagina, the fact that his version is corroborated by other refugees who were present at the time, reveals the ways in which George's film has arguably misrepresented its central character. Nevertheless, the film does expose viewers to shocking scenes which leave them shaken by the sheer brutality Rwandans faced daily for three months. It is this reality that Kayihura's text confronts directly: it enables the reader to grasp the extent to which Tutsis were hunted down by the Hutu army and the *Interahamwe* during the genocide itself, and the terror experienced by those who had taken refuge in the hotel. It insists that, far from being an impersonal extermination, the genocide was a meticulously planned bloodbath, with lists drawn up of those Tutsis considered especially dangerous. Furthermore, it provides us with a detailed insight to the daily challenges of the refugees living in the Hotel des Mille Collines.

Finally, if films like *Kinyarwanda* and *Hotel Rwanda* fail to acknowledge the trauma left in the wake of the genocide, preferring instead to end on a positive note, and both Mukasonga and Kayihura touch on the impact of the genocide, it is Gilbert Gatore's *The Past Ahead* that provides one of the best insights into the aftereffects of *itsembabwoko*. His contribution to the genocide oeuvre adds to a more holistic comprehension of the aftermath of atrocity, and drives home the point that it is not necessarily possible to process and overcome

trauma. He is unafraid to represent the raw emotions of trauma survivors in the aftermath of the genocide and does not shy away from portraying the death of his characters, both emotionally and physically. He also deconstructs and forces us to reconsider the dichotomy victim/perpetrator, a dichotomy reinforced in many Western portrayals of the genocide. By doing so, he forces his readers to rethink how we understand and relate to characters involved in such gruesome violence. Gatore's novel provides us with the twin narratives of Isaro, a victim, and Niko, a perpetrator, which allows for a direct comparison of the experiences of one versus the other. However, because he has complicated the role of Niko, we are able to see the similarities that exist between the two, thereby forcing us to reconsider what it means to be a perpetrator. We see that, in their experiences of trauma, Isaro and Niko are not all that different, and we must wonder how many actual perpetrators feel similarly to Niko. By problematising the victim/perpetrator dichotomy, Gatore provides a space in which the question of post-genocide trauma can be examined in a more nuanced way. His is the only text discussed in this thesis that deals exclusively with post-genocide trauma. This is significant, because it gives the audience a more rounded view of the genocide and its effects. Gatore's work challenges that of George and Kayihura by openly acknowledging the continued trauma faced by Rwandans, whether Hutu or Tutsi, victim or perpetrator. Moreover, of all the texts discussed in this thesis, Gatore's is the most experimental: by setting up a novel within a novel, or twinned and alternating narratives, the one linear and the other fragmentary, with both leading to the suicide of the two main protagonists, he provides a compelling example of how trauma fiction can be used highlight the complexities of trauma in a post-genocidal context.

In terms of the theoretical framework within which to approach genocide in postcolonial countries – such as that which occurred in Rwanda in 1994 – it is necessary to add postcolonial trauma theory to our analysis, as it provides us with the necessary understanding that violence in such countries is often the result of multiple traumas, and particularly the originary trauma of the initial colonial incursion itself and its aftermath. As authors like Craps note, such violence generally occurs along a continuum, rather than being confined to a specific event. This does not mean, however, that theorists like Caruth should be ignored. Rather, as scholars, we must find the convergence point between the different schools of trauma theory, so as to create a space in which we can discuss the individual and historical traumas of the postcolonial world. It is my hope that this thesis has contributed in some way to this discussion.

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