

NARRATING CRISIS: RWANDA, HAITI, AND THE POLITICS OF COMMEMORATION

By

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To my mother, father, and sister for your infinite support of all my efforts, scholarly and otherwise

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In the late-twentieth century, the Rwandan Civil War and genocide (1990-1994) and a Haitian military coup and junta (1991-1994) occasioned horrendous acts of political violence. The United States (US), as the world's last superpower, and the United Nations (UN) possessed the political and military might required to ameliorate these conditions. This potential power to intervene sparked debate over humanitarian responsibilities in the Global North, but depictions of these events often devolved into caricature, obscuring the adverse impact of US and UN foreign policy on Rwandan and Haitian political stability as well as the international community's failure to prevent or limit that violence. *Narrating Crisis* examines US and European as well as postcolonial responses to Rwandan and Haitian political crisis and identifies a pervasive discourse on "failed states" that reproduces colonial narratives of African tribalism, Haitian savagery, and the illegitimacy of black sovereignty.

Each chapter identifies new iterations of these narratives in US and European film and mass media as well as African, Caribbean, and Haitian-American literary texts that seek to confront but sometimes duplicate a colonial gaze. These competing visions of Rwanda and Haiti relate to a larger discursive quarrel over the meaning of modernity,

which post-Enlightenment thought has long associated with European/Euro-American civilization. Rather than a product of cultural or racial backwardness or a “Third World” failure to assimilate to “First World” modernity, postcolonial political violence is bound up with the material history of colonialism and the persisting narratives and economic inequalities it continues to produce. Ongoing strife in Rwanda and the aftermath of Haiti’s 2010 earthquake put the importance of this investigation into sharp relief, as colonialist paternalism continues to influence Euro-American as well as postcolonial responses to African and Caribbean political turmoil. This project also reveals the insufficiencies of a binary distinction between hegemonic Euro-American narratives and subversive African-Caribbean narratives, as regressive and progressive accounts of African and Caribbean political violence can be found within both the so-called developed and developing worlds.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In the late-twentieth century, Rwanda and Haiti played host to horrendous acts of political violence. In Rwanda, a four year civil war (1990-1994) between the Rwandan government and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a rebel group of Ugandan-based Tutsi exiles, culminated in a Hutu-led genocide of Rwanda's Tutsi population between the months of April and July of 1994. In Haiti, a military coup and junta (1991-1994) deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, militarizing and factionalizing Haiti to its breaking point. The United States (US), as the last superpower left standing, and the UN (United Nations) possessed the military and political power necessary to influence and possibly ameliorate these conditions in Rwanda and Haiti; this power led to debates over European and North American humanitarian responsibilities for international political crises. Subsequent coverage and discussion of these events and the issue of US and UN interventionism imbued the signifiers "Rwanda" and "Haiti" with heightened significance, but depictions of the crises often devolved into caricature, invoking colonial narratives of African tribalism and Haitian backwardness while concealing the implications of US and UN foreign policy in contributing to and failing to prevent or limit Rwandan and Haitian political violence.<sup>1</sup>

How, this project asks, have literature and film, as discursive constructs, contributed to the creation and contestation of "Rwanda" and "Haiti" as ideas mobilized in such debates over humanitarianism, interventionism, and the causes and effects of

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<sup>1</sup> As Melissa Wall notes, ethnic cleansing in Bosnia during the same period, a European crisis, was described by the media as systematic, modern, and comparable to Nazism. In contrast, the African crisis of the Rwanda genocide was framed as spontaneous, primordial, and exemplary of a sort of transhistorical African fratricide (411). On the tribalism narrative in perspectives on Rwanda, also see Pottier 64. On the narratives of pathology, political psychosis, and backwardness that accompanied reporting on the 1991 coup in Haiti, see Farmer, Girard 81, and, on the reiteration of these themes in 2004, see Potter.

postcolonial political violence? Ranked respectively as number forty-three and number twelve on the Failed States Index (Fund for Peace), present-day Rwanda and Haiti represent two sites within the so-called developing world that have been similarly marked not only by colonial and postcolonial political violence but also a similar discursive positioning—that of being seen as anterior to modernity, i.e, mired in cultural atavism, despite longstanding imbrication in global political and economic patterns. While perspectives on such crises are often varied, complex, and difficult to catalogue, this project seeks to investigate the relationships that exist among Euro-American cultural products such as literature and film, US foreign policy, and African, Caribbean, and Haitian-American literary responses to Euro-American geopolitical power.

*Narrating Crisis* examines Euro-American and postcolonial responses to Rwandan and Haitian political turmoil and identifies a pervasive discourse on “failed states” that reproduces colonial narratives of African tribalism, Haitian savagery, and the illegitimacy of black sovereignty.<sup>2</sup> In this regard, Rwanda and Haiti exemplify the power that such colonial logics of race and modernity continue to exude over contemporary understandings of postcolonial political violence.

In comparing narratives of Rwandan and Haitian political crisis, this project aims to elucidate these discursive patterns as well as their broad material effects by drawing connections between discourses of African and Caribbean underdevelopment while remaining attentive to local specificities and historical exigencies. Colonial narratives of

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<sup>2</sup> As Neyire Akpinarli explains in *The Fragility of the Failed State Paradigm*, the “failed state” rose to prominence as an international legal concept at the end of the Cold War. “Under the leadership of the United States, the international community” has utilized the failed state paradigm “to justify military intervention to protect international peace and security” (1). When intervention does not suit the national interests of the world’s leading states, however, the failed state paradigm can also legitimate inaction during even the most extreme humanitarian crises, as the Rwandan genocide clearly demonstrates.

indigenous primitivism and savagery attribute postcolonial political crises to an intrinsic social backwardness (symbolized by the racial, religious, and cultural alterity of “developing” nations) and, in turn, obscure the implications of broader geopolitical dynamics such as colonial history, foreign intervention, and global politico-economic structures.<sup>3</sup> As scholars such as Terence Ranger and Mai Palmberg have noted, colonial narratives of tribalism and atavism have been especially prevalent in descriptions of postcolonial African societies (Ranger 252, Palmberg 9). While recent coverage of Egypt’s 2011 democracy movement may indicate a substantive change in how such postcolonial political crises are viewed on the world stage, European thought has long distinguished Egypt, as a supposed foundation of Caucasian civilization, from Sub-Saharan Africa, which the social evolutionist thinking of European science, anthropology, and philosophy saw as the epitome of human underdevelopment.<sup>4</sup>

In *Philosophy of History*, Hegel systematized the racial assumptions of colonial discourse by distinguishing civilized “European Africa,” or North Africa, from “Africa proper,” or the Sub-Sahara: “Africa proper—as far as History goes back, has remained—for all purposes of connection with the rest of the World—shut up; it is the Gold-land compressed within itself—the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of night” (148). As extreme cases of postcolonial violence in the black Global South, the Sub-Saharan nation of

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<sup>3</sup> Tellingly, in Pulitzer Prize winner Jared Diamond’s widely popular *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, Rwanda and Haiti serve as his examples of “Third World Disaster” (22). Focusing on Malthusian dynamics in Rwanda and Haiti, Diamond largely ignores the geopolitical dynamics that inhere in African and Caribbean resource mismanagement and the lack of food sovereignty, rendering state failure a choice that Rwandans and Haitians have made for themselves and thereby revealing the popular assumption that failed states fail because of their own ineptitude.

<sup>4</sup> For more on cultural evolutionism and race, see McClintock and Fabian.

Rwanda and the Afro-Caribbean nation of Haiti demonstrate not only the ongoing impact of such colonial conceptions of race and modernity but also the mobility of the devolutionary conceptions of Africa that have followed and been refracted through Haiti, which discursively figures as a sort of Sub-Saharan Africa of the Americas due to its status as the world's first "black republic," a fact observed, as Susan Buck-Morss elucidates in *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, by Hegel himself as he developed his views of world history.

Each chapter identifies new iterations of these primitivizing narratives in Euro-American film and mass media, sources that often influence and shape general awareness and understanding of political events, as well as African, Caribbean, and Haitian-American literary texts that seek to confront but sometimes duplicate a colonial gaze, if not replace it with their own postcolonial nationalist agenda. Ongoing strife in Rwanda and the aftermath of Haiti's 2010 earthquake put the importance of this investigation into sharp relief, as colonialist paternalism continues to influence Euro-American and postcolonial responses to African and Caribbean political turmoil. In this manner, *Narrating Crisis* ultimately reveals the insufficiencies of a binary distinction between hegemonic Euro-American narratives and subversive African-Caribbean narratives, as regressive and progressive accounts of African and Caribbean political violence can be found within both the Global North and Global South.

By turning to cultural products such as literature and film, this study wishes to demonstrate how objects of knowledge such as "Rwanda" and "Haiti" are fashioned, shaped, and reconfigured not only by what Bill Nichols aptly describes as "discourses of sobriety"—e.g., "science, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion, and

welfare” (*Blurred 67*)—but also by ostensibly less serious discourses: art, entertainment, aesthetics.<sup>5</sup> This study thereby seeks to, as Achille Mbembe suggests, dismantle “the false dichotomy between the objectivity of structures and the subjectivity of representations—a distinction allowing all that is cultural and symbolic to be put on one side, all that is economic and material to be put on the other” (*Postcolony 6*). In other words, this study deals with the cultural and symbolic precisely because they do yield economic and material effects. Cultural products reflect and inform audience perceptions, and audience perceptions reflect and inform international political opinion and economic policies.

Rwanda and Haiti serve as important examples of this dynamic, as prevailing assumptions reaching back to colonialism have influenced how these nations are perceived not only in an aesthetic register but also, and not coincidentally, in the register of geopolitics. Eurocentric cultural narratives of African and Afro-Caribbean backwardness aid and abet the creation of ineffective even exploitive crisis intervention policies—what Naomi Klein calls “shock doctrine”—in the US and beyond. In *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Klein explores the impact that economist Milton Friedman’s notion of “economic ‘shock treatment’” has had on North American and European economic policies (8).<sup>6</sup> Friedman’s theories note that nothing

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<sup>5</sup> As Nichols elaborates in *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, discourses of sobriety “assume they have instrumental power; they can and should alter the world itself, they can effect action and entail consequences. Their discourse has an air of sobriety since it is seldom receptive to ‘make-believe’ characters, events, or entire worlds (unless they serve as pragmatically useful simulations of the ‘real’ one)” (3-4).

<sup>6</sup> While foreign policy applications of shock doctrine are of primary interest to this study, Friedman also advocated the use of disaster capitalism locally in the US. In 2006, for a recent and vivid example, shock doctrine was applied domestically via post-Katrina redevelopment strategies that focused on the privatization of the school system, among other new business ventures, rather than the immediate needs of New Orleans’ displaced, exiled, and homeless (Klein 6-7).

creates opportunity for sweeping market changes and neoliberal economic reform like crises (1-10). Realigning foreign markets with the business interests of North America and Europe, Friedman recognized, is most easily achieved when a foreign government and population are reeling from the aftershock of a political, economic, humanitarian, or natural disaster. Such moments of crisis create an opportunity for the world's leading governments and corporations to refashion the zone of disaster by financially directing redevelopment strategies.

The political crises that afflicted Rwanda and Haiti have provided fertile ground for the refinement of such disaster capital strategies. As Tatah Mentan notes in *The New World Order: Ideology in Africa*, shock doctrine as a mode of humanitarian interventionism

gained legitimacy after the imperialist-induced atrocities in Rwanda, Burundi and the former Yugoslav republic in the 1990s to allegedly put an end to crimes against humanity such as ethnic cleansing and genocide. In the wake of these atrocities, the UN, under the direction of the US and its European allies, has executed the doctrine of humanitarian intervention in all the aforementioned countries and the DR Congo, Iraq, Somalia and Haiti. (xiii)

Mentan does not clarify the meaning of "imperialist-induced," but this adjective choice seems to refer to the politico-economic hegemony of Western Europe and North America as the primary catalyst for the Central African and Eastern European atrocities of the 1990s. The participation of postcolonial elites in the continued immiseration of Rwanda and Haiti compels me to add that "imperialist-induced" remains an inadequate descriptor for such events unless we already include the complicity of "native" elites in our understanding of imperialism. However, the prosperity and status of postcolonial elites does derive in overwhelming part from the economic aid bestowed upon them by the shock doctrinaires of the Global North.

Capitalizing on the shock of the Rwandan genocide, for example, the US has donated massive amounts of aid money to the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), Rwanda's post-genocide government, who operate with impunity as a quasi-ethnocracy in Rwanda and an imperial power in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).<sup>7</sup> As I will elaborate in chapters two and three, blind support for the RPF has much to do with the valuable mineral resources, e.g., coltan, that Rwandan military operations help extract from the DRC for sale to the global electronics market, a scenario that benefits both the recipients and donors of disaster capital. The shock of Haiti's 1991 and 2004 coups against President Jean-Bertrand Aristide offered similar investment and redevelopment opportunities for Haitian elites and their business partners in Europe and North America. As I will elaborate in chapter five, coup d'état served as a means for rolling back Aristide's economic reform policies, particularly his raising of the minimum wage in sweatshops, and creating new business investment and development opportunities in Haiti. Even Aristide's brief reinstatement in 1994 was contingent on his acquiescence to the regressive economic demands of the coup regime and the Haitian business elites they represented. Critics of the international response to Haiti's 2010 earthquake have suggested that this natural disaster has also created business opportunities and development contracts (Flaherty 128, 259-62; Dupuy, "Beyond"; Ulysse), perhaps even more effectively than the aforementioned political disasters due to the veneer of unmitigated virtue enjoyed by natural disaster relief.

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<sup>7</sup> Like the "national bourgeoisie" Fanon rebukes in *The Wretched of the Earth*, the RPF, through its authoritarianism at home and its imperialism in the DRC, "appropriat[es] the old traditions of colonialism" by "flex[ing] its military and police muscle" (76). Unlike the national bourgeoisie, however, whose "economic clout is practically zero," the RPF's leading role in coltan extraction exceeds the mere "intermediary activities" Fanon describes (98).

While Klein and Mentan focus on the economic and material aspects of shock doctrine, this project seeks to elucidate the cultural and symbolic concerns that accompany such political interventionist strategies as they are expressed in both ethico-political and aesthetic discourses, with a discipline-specific emphasis on the literary and the filmic. In adopting this approach, I do not wish to suggest that aesthetic artifacts do not still enjoy a certain degree of autonomy from the material realities in which they are produced and circulated but rather that the aesthetic and the ethico-political are never mutually exclusive.<sup>8</sup> While this assertion may seem obvious or even tautological to some readers, it still bears iteration in a project such as this, wherein the political and ethical dimensions of the art objects under study are amplified by virtue of their engagement with historical trauma and public memory work. In this regard, my approach attends to Dominick LaCapra's contention in *Representing the Holocaust* that "we should attempt to work out sustained and careful analyses of the way artifacts [whether 'high' or 'low' culture] always to some extent affect social and cultural stereotypes and ideological processes, even when they insistently attempt to reproduce and reinforce banality" (7). Furthermore, as will be discussed below with more specificity, the texts analyzed in this project all position themselves as political and ethical documents through either direct announcement of a duty (to raise awareness or memorialize) or through allusion and citation of a preexisting historical discourse traversed by competing meanings and significations.

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<sup>8</sup> My position is similar to John Guillory's on the (albeit elusive and contingent) irreducibility of aesthetic experience. For Guillory, while "it [is] possible to translate the (false) philosophical problem of 'aesthetic value' into the sociological problem of 'cultural capital,'" a la Bourdieu, "the translation always has a remainder, which is nothing other than aesthetic experience. This experience is in a certain sense hypothetical, since it need never exist in a 'pure' form. It is in practice always combined with other practices" (327).

For this very reason, my analyses attempt to foreground the implications of form and genre but sometimes give way to the ethico-political urgencies that charge, saturate, and escape confinement within the aesthetic register of each text. Suffice it to say, such ethical, political, and historical considerations are never cut off from aesthetic choices such as genre, medium, and mode of address, thus demonstrating the symbiosis of form and content. In fact, attending to this symbiosis reveals a certain confluence between aesthetic experience and political value. For instance, some of the texts studied herein favor moral certitude, linearity, closure, and redemption—formal investments that may impart politically reductive and narrowly periodized narrations of historical crisis—while others favor moral complexity, ambiguity, fragmentation, and reflexivity—formal investments that tend to impart politically complicated and self-conscious crisis narratives (still others fall within a spectrum between the two). While the interplay of form and content inheres in varying ways in any enunciation (textual, vocal, gestural, imagistic or otherwise), the chosen subject matter of postcolonial political violence tends to raise the stakes of narration by situating the author/text in a seemingly infinite range of discursive antagonisms marked not only by the trauma, victimization, and massacre of actual persons but also by indigenous memory, colonial history, anticolonial nationalisms, decolonization, globalization, and the invention and centuries-long revision of “race,” “modernity,” “tradition,” and “civilization” as analytic categories consecrated in an ever-shifting litany of global divisionisms: metropole/colony, First/Third World, developed/developing nation, Global North/South.

In the case of the developing world, reductive narratives of Third World malfeasance, ineptitude, and social backwardness can authorize questionable

interventionism, as it has in Haiti and post-genocide Rwanda, as well as obscure the legitimate need for foreign assistance, as in the case of Rwanda during the genocide.<sup>9</sup> National interest, therefore, deeply influences the political application of the “failed state” thesis as either an impetus for intervention or an excuse to turn a blind eye. In the apt words of Robert DiPrizio, “slaughtered Rwandans did not threaten Clinton's healthcare-reform and crime bills [like the] Haitian refugees” who were fleeing Cedras’s junta for the shores of Florida (160). Within Rwanda and Haiti, the “failed state” thesis often invokes a symbolics of black primitivity embodied by “tribalism” in the former and *vodou*, as an African-derived religious practice, in the latter. The words of Lawrence Harrison, a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) official and author of *Underdevelopment is a State of Mind*, sharply exemplify how colonialist narratives of Africana cultural backwardness legitimate neoliberal intervention strategies in postcolonial nations. Commenting on “underdevelopment” in Haiti, Harrison states that Haitian culture, with its “stultifying peasant world view” and “Africanisms” such as voodoo, “is the only possible explanation for Haiti’s unending tragedy” (qtd. in Farmer 348). As symbols of African atavism, these tropes of tribalism and *vodou* racially link Rwanda and Haiti to a colonial conception of Africa as the site of the premodern and the

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<sup>9</sup> For complex reasons still being addressed today, the Clinton administration intervened in Haiti by militarily reinstalling Aristide but did nothing to deter the course of the genocide in Rwanda. In terms of scale of violence and degree of public outrage, the crisis in Rwanda far outweighed that of Haiti in 1994. A growing literature, primarily in political science, continues to address these quandaries, and three observations are exceedingly pertinent: the looming specter of the Somalia debacle made another military mission in an African “failed state” too politically risky (Harrow 35), two centuries of US influence in Haiti, an African-descended “failed state,” eclipsed any analogous interests in Rwanda (Dash 1-21), and given France’s long history of hegemony in Central Africa, Rwanda was, quite unlike Haiti, outside the immediate sphere of US influence. In Rwanda, US influence has since eclipsed that of the French due to France’s backing of Hutu nationalism before and during the genocide and the US’s unfettered support for the RPF in the post-genocide years (Gnamo 345).

primitive and cultural products like literature and film serve as sites where these narratives are negotiated, modified, perpetuated, and contested.

Comparative analysis of Rwanda and Haiti therefore elucidates the influence of a colonialist “idea of Africa” that is not stationary and static but mobile and dynamic, influencing observation of both contemporary Africa and the Afro-Caribbean, in general, and what we might call the “idea of Rwanda” and the “idea of Haiti,” in particular. In *The Idea of Africa*, Valentin Mudimbe genealogically traces Africa as an idea “conceived and conveyed through conflicting systems of knowledge” derived from Greco-Roman notions of the barbaric other (xi, 71), then modified by fifteenth-century Europe’s “discovery” of Africa, later made “scientific” by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colonialism’s fascination with “primitivism” and “savagery,” and ultimately consolidated in an enduring (albeit contested) colonial library of texts and artifacts supposed to represent the reality of Africa (xi-xii). In effect, Mudimbe’s claim is similar to Edward Said’s assessment in *Orientalism* that “texts can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it” (94). Mudimbe and Said, therefore, are both concerned with colonial libraries that have produced knowledge of and discourses about colonized lands.

This method of colonial discourse analysis reveals an interplay between colonial conceptions of time and space, between “imaginative” history and geography (Said, *Orientalism* 49-55). For colonists and explorers, the barbarians, primitives, and savages that inhabited subject lands represented a historical past that the inhabitants of

the metropolitan north had long since surpassed. Crystallized further by the ascendance of nineteenth century colonial anthropology, geography became temporalized, or, as Johannes Fabian puts it, time became “*spatialized*” (15). To travel from the metropole to the colony, therefore, was to travel backwards in time toward an earlier phase of human development. This social evolutionist perspective on human history and geography creates what Anne McClintock calls “anachronistic space,” meaning a geographical area perceived as developmentally behind the standards of social progress attained by the Western world, i.e., chronologically behind Western time. In nineteenth-century Europe, this cultural evolutionism was refined into a “racial family tree” that used the findings of colonial anthropology and race science to rank the “races” of humanity from the most developed, Europeans, to the most primitive, Africans. The African continent, McClintock explains, thereby became the epitome of geographic anachronism: “Africa came to be seen as the colonial paradigm of anachronistic space, a land perpetually out of time in modernity, marooned and historically abandoned. Africa was a fetish-land, inhabited by cannibals, dervishes and witch doctors, abandoned in prehistory . . .” (38, 41).

These narratives of black primitivity have been influenced not only by colonialism in Africa but also by colonialism in Haiti, demonstrating a mutually reinforcing quality between the “idea of Haiti” and the “idea of Africa,” especially in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Atlantic World. The Euro-American discourse on black sovereignty, for example, derives in large part from Western reactions to the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), which marked an end to French colonialism in Haiti and followed the American Revolution (1775-1783) by a mere sixteen years. As the first successful

large-scale slave rebellion and anticolonial war for independence, the Haitian Revolution is a kind of primal scene of postcolonial violence, and the powerful narratives it has produced about black nationhood and sovereignty have exerted a strong influence on the contested meanings of race and modernity. The slaveholding nations of Europe and North America, for instance, perceived the struggle for Haitian independence solely as a threat to the economic system of plantation slavery. Haiti thereby became an ominous symbol of African slave rebellion and the illegitimacy of black sovereignty in the Western imagination.

In the US South, “the very word ‘Haiti’ evoked images of black slaves devastating property and torturing and murdering their former masters,” who “feared that the revolution [in Haiti] would eventually infect their own slaves” (May 33). In this regard, just as notions of Africa have influenced conceptions of Haiti, notions of Haiti, particularly in terms of the feasibility or infeasibility of black sovereignty, have impacted conceptions of Africa, especially in the United States, where close proximity made the Haitian Revolution a frightening example of how the American plantation system just might meet its end if African-American slaves followed the example of their Saint Domingue counterparts. Aiming to capitalize on this fear, southern politicians, as well as some of their northern counterparts, used the term “Africanization” to describe the process by which other nations might fall into the abominable grasp of “Negro rule as in Haiti” (May 35). Once Haiti had achieved independence, US and European politicians often narrated the ostracized nation’s “‘decline’ since emancipation” as evidence of black racial inferiority (May 176), an assessment that cast a politically charged shadow of doubt across the prospect of African and Afro-Caribbean self-rule. As this project

aims to demonstrate, such colonial narratives of illegitimate black sovereignty in Africa and the Caribbean persist to this day, iterated in the lexicon of tribalism, primitivism, underdevelopment, and failed states.

While indebted and informed by critics of colonial discourse such as Mudimbe, Said, and McClintock, this study differs from the works of these scholars in its emphasis on much more recent events. Focusing on late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century political strife rather than the colonial discourse(s) of centuries past necessitates attentiveness to how the “idea of Africa” may have morphed or adapted to the exigencies of contemporary geopolitics (especially, but not limited to, the issues of diaspora, postcoloniality, and globalization that accompany a comparative African/Afro-Caribbean project such as this). Due to the blossoming of African, Caribbean, and Haitian-American literature in the twentieth century, this project’s shift toward the contemporary also allows for engagement not only with the colonial/neocolonial library but with the anticolonial/decolonial voices that have attempted to “write back” and confront the hegemonic assumptions of neo/colonial discourse. As Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin assert in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, postcolonial writers continue to write back to the imperial center even though “the imperial structure has been dismantled in political terms” because the values and ideas that undergirded the colonial project still exude hegemonic influence in the era of postcoloniality (6-7). Attentiveness to this very dynamic has influenced the dialogic structure of this project, which addresses hegemonic narratives as well as the postcolonial counternarratives that seek to confront them.

By examining and dramatizing both the political and personal aspects of these crises, the African, Caribbean, and Haitian American literary texts analyzed in this study engage in a struggle for the meaning of “Rwanda” and “Haiti,” oftentimes in a dialogic struggle with official histories and mainstream journalistic observations. However, I do not assume a simplistic moral Manicheanism between “bad Western” representations and “good non-Western” representations in this project (nor, for that matter, bad journalism and good literature). Such a maneuver would amount to what LaCapra describes in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* as “[i]dentity politics in a dubious sense,” which “may be defined as simply repeating and further legitimating or acting out the subject positions with which one begins without subjecting them to critical testing that may either change or in certain ways validate them” (41). Instead, this project critically tests the limits of such identitarian Manicheanism by questioning, rather than assuming, a deterministic relationship between the geographic, cultural, and generic origins of texts/authors and their ability to effectively narrate postcolonial political crisis.

### **Tribalism, Genocide, and the Idea of Rwanda**

How, then, have discursive constructs from the colonial past influenced comprehension of the postcolonial present? Before the genocide, Rwanda had been primarily known as an ecotourism destination, home to the mountain gorillas popularized in *Gorillas in the Mist* (1988), a film adaptation of naturalist Dian Fossey’s private papers.<sup>10</sup> In his graphic novel *Smile Through the Tears*, Rwandan genocide survivor Rupert Bazambanza laments the prevailing pre-genocide image of Rwanda

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<sup>10</sup> Farley Mowat fashioned Fossey’s personal writings, combined with his own interviews and research, into *Woman in the Mists: The Story of Dian Fossey and the Mountain Gorillas of Africa* (1987), the primary source material for *Gorillas in the Mist*.

that *Gorillas in the Mist* has helped circulate: “Visitors really only seemed to care about the country’s natural beauty and its mountain gorillas. This endangered species had been the subject of a famous film, *Gorillas in the Mist*, which told the story of Dian Fossey and her quest to save them” (3). Nicki Hitchcott describes this view of Rwanda as an idyllic home for mountain gorillas as “the Western touristic reading of Rwanda as an exotic, dangerous, uncivilised place, in which mountain gorillas are more important than a million dead citizens” (“Travels” 158). This nearly singular focus on Rwanda’s gorillas has left the nation’s culture, history, and politics a veritable blank space ready to be filled with colonially inflected, Euro-American stereotypes about Africa. When Rwanda descended into genocide, the stereotype of African tribalism provided a ready fill for this vacuum.

The genocide erupted on April 6, 1994, when a surface-to-air missile attack struck down a Dassault Falcon jet carrying two Central African Hutu heads of state, Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana and Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira.<sup>11</sup> While it is still unclear who shot down Habyarimana’s plane, Hutu extremists accused the RPF and began an extermination campaign against Rwanda’s Tutsi population as well as any Hutus who refused to join in the killing. Human rights groups, UN peacekeepers, political leaders, and other observers from around the world demanded an intervention from the world’s superpowers, but these calls for action were greeted only with legal debates (particularly in the US and UN) over the applicability of the term genocide to the violence engulfing Rwanda. One hundred days later, the

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<sup>11</sup> While some inquiries into Habyarimana’s assassination have implicated Hutu hardliners who disapproved of the president’s signing of the Arusha accords, a peace agreement with the RPF, other inquiries suggest that the RPF may have ordered the killing to destabilize the country (Moghalu 51-52).

campaign to eradicate the Tutsi of Rwanda was brought to a halt only after the RPF, had secured the capital city of Kigali. The genocide yielded a high yet still contested body count—estimates range from 500,000 to over one million—and fifteen years later Rwanda still suffers from a lack of significant justice for the dead or reconciliation between the living.

Recourse to African stereotypes leads to minimization and misunderstanding of these details, and although the tribalism narrative did not characterize all reporting on Rwanda, it did constitute a substantial trend across media outlets. *United Press International*, for example, described the situation in Rwanda as “tribal violence” (Gruenwald para. 1), while *The Washington Post* referred to the genocide as “tribal slaughter,” “tribal conflict,” “an orgy of tribal bloodshed” (Lippman A1), and “tribal killings” (Parmelee A1). Similarly, *The New York Times* reported that “bloody clashes between tribal factions” had erupted in Rwanda (Lewis 2), while *The Philadelphia Inquirer* simply called the genocide “tribal fighting” (Jelinek A1). Similarly, after giving hundreds of interviews for print and television news media, Human Rights Watch analyst Alison Des Forges concluded that her attempts to historically and politically contextualize the Rwandan genocide had been stifled by the media’s preference for “the old clichés of tribalism, or at best, the ‘failed state’ explanation” (qtd. in Cohen 66). A few years later, in a similar but perhaps more nuanced and poetically fatalistic vein, Clinton’s US Secretary of State Madeline Albright described Africa as “the hopeless continent” (qtd. in Carruthers 164).

Senegalese novelist Boubacar Boris Diop registers an anxiety over this primitivizing tendency in his novel *Murambi: The Book of Bones*. On the eve of the

genocide, a Tutsi video store owner named Michel Serumundo realizes that he has held false hope for a European, American, or UN intervention force: “The World Cup was about to begin in the United States. The planet was interested in nothing else. And in any case, whatever happened in Rwanda, it would always be the same old story of blacks beating up on each other” (9-10). Serumundo provides an apt definition of tribalism’s vernacular meaning—“blacks beating up on each other”—and laments how such a notion misconstrues events in Rwanda and subsequently obstructs concern among the international community. Appeals to the tribal atavism narrative render the Rwandan genocide a premodern conflict, an event anterior to the machinations of modern global politics and hence a case of irreparable, internecine slaughter. But the Rwandan genocide, rather than a simple case of tribal violence, constituted a complex interplay of national, regional, and international dynamics reaching back to colonial history.

Originally a German colony, the League of Nations bequeathed Ruanda-Urundi, which would be partitioned into the independent states of Rwanda and Burundi in the 1960s, to Belgium after Germany’s defeat in World War I. Belgian colonialism in Central Africa relied heavily on the work of Christian missionaries, who aided colonial aspirations in the African Great Lakes region. The civilizing mission served to indoctrinate Central Africans with European culture and religion, but also led some Belgian, American, and British missionaries to protest King Leopold of Belgium’s brutal tactics, which often included the dismemberment, starvation, and murder of uncooperative African workers (Bendetto 189). The most enduring product of the Belgian Christianizing mission in Rwanda, however, is the missionaries’ ethnographic

sharpening of the Hamitic hypothesis. An invention of colonial discourse, the Hamitic hypothesis used biblical scripture to legitimate theories of African inferiority. Africans, according to the Hamitic hypothesis, are the descendants of Canaan, the accursed son of Ham, who committed a grave sin against Noah in the book of Genesis (9:20-27).

This originally biblical theory received a scientific makeover from the missionaries, whose everyday interactions with Great Lakes natives allowed them to apply the tools of anthropology to their African inferiors, first in the Congo and then in Ruanda-Urundi. In Ruanda-Urundi, the Hamitic hypothesis translated into a radicalized bifurcation between the Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority. Favoring the Tutsi monarchy, the Belgian colonial administration sought to scientifically validate and catalogue the physiological differences that the Belgian missionaries had attributed to the two ethnic groups in their pseudo-anthropological musings. The Tutsi were thereby phenotypically designated as more European than the quintessentially Negroid Hutu. To substantiate this claim, the Tutsi were said to have immigrated to Ruanda-Urundi from Ethiopia, where Ham's originally Caucasian descendants had purportedly settled. The Hamitic hypothesis now claimed that Ham's son Canaan had been cursed with black skin and forced to settle in Sub-Saharan Africa, the original home of the Negroid (Zachernuk 428). The Hamitic Tutsi were now distinguished from the Canaanite Hutu as a superior settler class rightfully predisposed to rule over the native Hutu, and this distinction was codified by the Belgian census of 1933, which forced all Rwandans to carry ethnic identification cards (Melvern 5). Hutu extremism reversed this narrative, casting the Tutsi as inferior precisely because they were an alien and therefore not authentically African race, providing the ideological blueprint for the genocide. As a

grim reminder of colonial race science's persistent effects, those same ethnic identification cards, still in use sixty-one years after the Belgian census, allowed the Hutu army and militias to more easily distinguish their Tutsi prey from the rest of the population.

### ***Vodou, Political Violence, and the Idea of Haiti***

While African gorillas and a colonial conception of tribalism have not dictated Haiti's image abroad, an African cultural retention—*vodou*—has played a substantial role in defining Haiti as an underdeveloped, irrational, and superstitious extension of primordial Africa on the world stage. A syncretism of various African spiritual practices with Catholicism, *vodou* has been a persistent signifier of Haiti's African roots. Simultaneously vaunted by those eager to emphasize Haiti's cultural uniqueness and denigrated by those eager to attribute Haiti's woes to a supposed African-derived primitiveness, *vodou* is often invoked by proponents and detractors alike as an explanation for Haitian history, culture, and politics. Much like the narrative of tribalism in the Rwandan case, the invocation of *vodou* can obscure the relevance of the regional and historical complexities at work in political crises.

The potency of *vodou* as an emblem of Haiti's supposed African backwardness is especially evident in the United States, where Haiti—despite over two centuries of active trade relations, numerous American military interventions, and waves of Haitian emigration—remains “a static country of backward peasants caught in a time warp” in the popular imagination (Farmer 56). In the twentieth century, this image of Haiti was perpetuated by sensationalist journalism, exploitative travel narratives, opportunistic marine memoirs (written by soldiers returning from the 1915-1934 US occupation of Haiti), classic zombie movies, and even “scientific” writings like ethnobotanist Wade

Davis's *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1985), which was crafted into Wes Craven's 1988 horror movie of the same name. In the words of Miriam Neptune, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* depicts "the Haiti of an American imagination, an island of a million horrors," a Haiti populated with Haitian "zombies, mobsters, and angry witches" (149). More recently we have seen this attitude reflected in commentary on Haiti's devastating 2010 earthquake. From Pat Robertson's claim that the earthquake merely punctuates two centuries of Haitian suffering caused by a pact with Satan to the Haitian Consul General to Brazil's assertion that African-derived witchcraft created the Haitian underdevelopment that the earthquake exacerbated (Obenson), colonial narratives of Haitian primitivism continue to obscure the effects of global politico-economics on the current state of affairs in Haiti. In their appraisal of the Haitian present, Robertson and the Consul General refer back to the Haitian Revolution as an illogical, atavistic and demonic spasm of black violence, a precise reiteration of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Euro-American vision of the Haitian war for independence as the illegitimate, aberrant, and doomed founding of a sovereign African/African-descended nation. These examples testify to a long tradition of viewing Haiti as somehow exterior to the Western hemisphere and anterior to modernity itself, even as international and politically modern events ensue within the nation's borders and throughout its diaspora.

This preexisting lens of Haitian superstition and irrationality has also influenced understanding of the tumultuous Haitian politics of the early-1990s, inflecting representations of Aristide. Before he became a candidate for presidential restoration via Operation Restore Democracy, US politicians and media sources frequently characterized Aristide as a Caribbean psychopath or, a la Hegel's description of "Africa

proper“ as “the land of childhood” (148), a naïve child incapable of democratic leadership. Alternating between images of Afro-Caribbean madness and innocence, these reductive depictions of Aristide both offered premises for intervention by revising both the nineteenth-century American plantation stereotypes of the savage and unpredictable “bad black” and the “joyful, childish, [and] lazy but obedient and faithful” “good black” who requires paternal instruction and guidance (Helg 50n7). These very same stereotypes reemerged in the early-twentieth century during the US Marine occupation of Haiti (1915-1934), when paternalistic notions of Haitians as either menacing savages or helpless children underwrote American interventionist policy (Renda 13-16). Aristide, then, had been discursively situated within a US race paradigm that transposed plantation stereotypes of African and African-American slaves onto independent Haitians, first in the nineteenth century and then again in the twentieth.

The Clinton administration set Operation Restore Democracy in motion in mid-September 1994 in order to reinstall Aristide, as the overthrow of Aristide in 1991 had plunged Haiti into new depths of violence—as popular demonstrations of outrage over the coup were met with brutal military retaliation (Robinson 180). However, given the CIA’s logistical and financial support of the 1991 coup, the move to reinstall Aristide was not as straightforward a decision as it may have appeared (von Hippel 99). In a January 1991 article titled “President-Elect Condones Vigilantism,” *Washington Post* writer Lee Hockstader sows the seeds of what will later become a blatant characterization of Aristide as an insane despot condoning retributive political violence. As Aristide explained in a speech to his supporters, “I take note of your will to catch

powerful Macoutes today so that they don't destroy you tomorrow. It is legitimate" (A14). Here, Aristide comments on *dechoukaj*, the Krèyol word for "uprooting," used to describe acts of political reform that sometimes include retributive violence against former Duvalierists, militarists, and members of the *tonton macoutes*, Duvalier's paramilitary security force. This statement alone seems to corroborate the conclusion embedded in the Hockstader's title, but subsequent paragraphs add that Aristide "asked only that the mobs who are seeking out Ton-Tons Macoutes—the dreaded militia that bolstered the 29-year Duvalier family dictatorship—use 'vigilance without vengeance'" and that they turn *macoutes* in to the army instead of killing them (A14). While the content of Hockstader's article shows Aristide sympathizing with the desire to engage in vigilantism but ultimately discouraging it, Hockstader's title serves as a thesis directing readers toward a different conclusion, that of Aristide being a bloodthirsty manipulator and orchestrator of mob violence.

By the time Aristide had taken office, this image of psychotic violence was being supplemented with depictions of Aristide as an innocent who would fall prey to nefarious political forces if he did not receive proper financial education from his First World benefactors. In an article from February 1991, *Washington Times* reporter Lauren Weiner, quotes an anonymous "international financial source" as saying, "We are now in the process of educating [Aristide] . . . but there could be other more radical constituencies trying to pull him in another direction" (A7). However, by October 1991, a month into Cédras's junta, the US had begun cleansing its hands of the militarily overthrown Haitian president, with President Bush making an uncharacteristically candid admission about the US military record in the Americas:

“We’ve got a big history of American force in this hemisphere and so we’ve got to be very careful about that” (qtd. in “Haiti’s President”). Bush’s call for cautiousness seemed to derive from an understanding that the long history of US power in Latin America and the Caribbean demanded that further intervention be prudent, selective, and unequivocally in the best national interest, otherwise the US sphere of influence in the Americas could be unnecessarily tarnished—reinstalling Aristide did not fit the bill.

By 1992, a CIA psychological profile offered another reason for keeping Aristide out office by declaring him a “psychotic manic depressive with proven homicidal tendencies.” In 1993, CIA officer Brian Latell publicly defended this profile before Congress. This public declaration from a supposed authority on Aristide’s mental health allowed Aristide to be described without question as “a certifiable psychopath” by national security advisor Brent Scowcroft and a “killer” and “grave human rights abuser” by US senator Jesse Helms (qtd. in Hallward 44). Aristide was effectively rebranded in accordance with this psychological profile, despite the fact that the Canadian medical board has shown that Dr. Harvé Martin, the Canadian physician supposed to have diagnosed Aristide, does not exist (Farmer 184). More recently, Frederick H. Fleitz, Jr., a Special Assistant to the Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security and a former CIA analyst, has described Aristide as “a veritable madman” and Haiti as a “Fourth World country” (134). While Fleitz’s book, *Peacekeeping Fiascoes of the 1990s: Causes, Solutions, and US Interests* poses as rigorous academic analysis, this assessment of Haitian politics has

more in common with the imaginary Dr. Martin's fictitious diagnosis of Aristide than it does with scholarly research, observation, and evaluation.

While consulting these sources that infantilize and pathologize Aristide before and during the junta, the motivations for restoring Aristide to power assume a curious character. However, in Katherine Kean's documentary *Rezistans*, Allan Nairn sheds some light on the dynamics at play in Operation Restore Democracy: "the US had a very clear, systematic policy of supporting the forces of terror in Haiti while at the same time, back in Washington, twisting Aristide's arm." The objective of Operation Restore Democracy, therefore, was to reinstall a domesticated Aristide, one that could assuage the Haitian populous that saw him as their representative while still upholding the economic status quo of Haitian subservience to the demands of the global market.<sup>12</sup> This mounting pressure ultimately led to the restoration of Aristide to the presidency but only after Aristide had been forced to accept nearly all of the demands of the coup leaders and *de facto* ruler General Raoul Cédras and his accomplices could leave with a severance package instead of prosecution for their crimes.<sup>13</sup> Many of these factors were omitted from the dominant script of events. Instead, the overwhelming conclusion to be drawn from the US media was, much like that offered by Graham Greene's novel *The Comedians*, "to see Haitian politics as

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<sup>12</sup> Not everyone was behind the mission to reinstall Aristide, however. As US Senator Bob Dole quite bluntly expressed it, "the return of Aristide to Haiti is not worth even one American life" (qtd. in Hallward 49).

<sup>13</sup> As Peter Hallward puts it, "after giving the generals the greenlight to decimate the popular movement for several years, the US took good care of them when in October 1994—their mission accomplished—they were eventually induced to step down. After arranging to lease three of his houses, the US flew Cédras into a luxurious retirement . . ." (41).

black lunacy. . . . Haiti as the throbbing organic centre of darkness in the Western Hemisphere” (Dash, *Haiti* 111).

### **Commemoration, Appropriation, and the Narration of Political Crisis**

Depictions of Haitian politics portraying Aristide as either psychotic or infantile render Haitian politics irrational and insular, despite the fact that global logics have been at play since the very inception of Haitian independence. Similarly, when media reports describe the situation in Rwanda as “tribal violence” (Gruenwald para. 1), “tribal slaughter,” “tribal conflict,” “an orgy of tribal bloodshed,” (Lippman A1), or another variation on the trope of tribalism, they establish a phantasmatic chasm between modern Euro-America and premodern Africa. These perspectives comprise a dangerous and prevailing sentiment: such postcolonial political crises result from a kind of backwardness intrinsic to developing nations. This sentiment is dangerous in the sense that it produces narratives that omit, ignore, or obscure the external factors—political, historical, and economic—that greatly impact a former colony’s fragile balance between stability and violence. The chapters that follow examine a variety of creative texts that respond to such primitivizing discursive treatments of Rwanda and Haiti. Surveying a variety of literary and filmic texts from popular and “high” culture is important because historical production takes place in a variety of places and contexts, not just in academic departments or journalism offices. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot explains:

We cannot exclude in advance any of the actors who participate in the production of history or any of the sites where that production may occur. Next to professional historians we discover artisans of different kinds, unpaid or unrecognized field laborers who augment, deflect, or reorganize the work of the professionals as politicians, students, fiction writers, filmmakers, and participating members of the public. (25)

How, then, this project seeks to ask, have novelists, filmmakers, and even comics artists contributed to the making of recent Rwandan and Haitian political history, histories that are still being written and are highly contested?<sup>14</sup>

In a related vein, Pierre Nora distinguishes memory, as a certitude about collective origins consecrated unconsciously in taken-for-granted cultural practices, from history, a conscious and systematic reconstruction of the past as a mode of identity verification.<sup>15</sup> For Nora, as modernity erodes the certainty of collective memory, history becomes increasingly important as a means for constituting and buttressing one's social identity: "The demand for history has thus largely overflowed the circle of professional historians. Following the example of ethnic groups and social minorities, every established group, intellectual or not, learned or not, has felt the need to go in search of its own origins and identity" (15). Historical consciousness, extracted through archival research, serves to reconstitute memory in a modern, secularized form: "Modern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image" (Nora 13). Along with writing and audio and televisual recording, museums, anniversaries, and other forms of commemoration serve as ways

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<sup>14</sup> Stephen Smith demonstrates the highly contested nature of the history of the Rwandan genocide in "Rwanda in Six Scenes," a short articles that tracks how the author's perspective has evolved over time: "I am not arguing that we should all know everything there is to know about Rwanda. My point is that we don't seem to want to know what happened in 1994, or what's happening now. We've learned the wrong lesson from the organised massacre of 800,000 people, which we failed to prevent. Eager to pay off our moral debt, we're blinded by guilt. . . . At the same time, the denial of freedom and rights under the previous regime in Rwanda impels us to shower Kagame with leadership awards and aid money even as he denies them again" (8).

<sup>15</sup> As Nora elaborates, "[m]emory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past" (8).

of documenting, preserving, and imagining the past that often take moments of historical crisis, rupture, or revolution that constitute “a break with the past” as their object of remembrance (Nora 7). This dynamic is exemplified by the recurrent historical tropes encountered in this project: the Rwandan genocide, the Hutu Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, the Duvalier dynasty, the Aristide administration.

Due to the dialogic (but not deterministic) structure of this project, the primary texts discussed herein were produced from a variety of locations under divergent circumstances. As narratives of crisis, these texts not only negotiate Rwanda and Haiti as discursive “ideas” but also describe events in which actual people were tortured, maimed, raped, traumatized, and murdered as well as forced to witness the mutilation and execution of their friends, family, and community members. With the exception of Rwandan genocide survivor Rupert Bazambanza’s *Smile Through the Tears*, I have chosen texts produced by writers or filmmakers who have not directly experienced the crises they narrate. Therefore, the texts analyzed in this project are marked by varying degrees of distance or proximity to the actual site of violence and trauma. While some of these texts utilize survivor, witness, and perpetrator testimonies with limited mediation to construct their narratives, they nevertheless engage in divergent modes of commemoration and appropriation that may not accurately reflect the wishes, needs, or memories of the victimized.

Hence, following LaCapra, I find it important to emphasize that conflating the trauma of the victim with that of the perpetrator as well as that of the witness, let alone that of the secondary witness (who observes through textual or testimonial mediation rather than direct observation), would not only be misleading but also highly

inappropriate.<sup>16</sup> While the observer of crisis may experience trauma empathically, the victim of crisis experiences trauma directly, trauma of an irreducible, nontransferable, experiential psychic quality. This project's focus on crisis narratives that enact commemorative and appropriative gestures rather than unmediated testimonies of trauma (although a certain collapsing of these categories can be seen in chapters three, four, and five) has necessitated readings informed not only by the aforementioned discursive, historical, and geopolitical considerations (time and space, geography and history) but also by formal attention to the narrative strategies through which these stories of trauma, crisis, and conflict are told (voice). In other words, while I am primarily concerned with how narratives of crisis ideologically and aesthetically render recent history for implicit or explicit political purposes, this project must also consider, like LaCapra, how "the victim and the victim's voice is mediated and stylistically qualified . . ." (*Writing* 18n24).

The concept of narrative is useful for approaching these multiple considerations of time, space, and voice as features of discourse, history, and story-telling. For this reason, I tend to avoid the term "representation," except for very discrete, specific instances, and favor "narrative," since "representation" can refer to an isolated visual or literary image or object such as a single person/character, artifact, or landscape, while "narrative" refers to a system of meaning that temporally and spatially orders individual

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<sup>16</sup> It is for this very reason that LaCapra criticizes Hayden White's assertion that the "middle voice" should be used to narrate traumatic events: "Hayden White proposes the middle voice in undifferentiated terms as the proper way of representing the Holocaust. In a seeming performative contradiction, he even writes that the middle voice is the way to represent realistically not only the Holocaust but modern experience in general. . . . A rashly generalized middle voice would seem to undercut or undo systematically not only the binary opposition but any distinction, however problematic in certain cases, between victim and perpetrator, as it would seem to undercut the problems of agency and responsibility in general. . . ." (LaCapra, *Writing* 25, 26).

objects and images (representations of people, places, and things) that experience a series of events (plot) within a textually constructed world, whether fictional or nonfictional. In drawing this distinction, I do not wish to suggest that an isolated representation is not interpreted in a narrative fashion that places a singular representation within a larger “story” or field of meaning. Rather, I wish to emphasize that narrative texts demand hermeneutic as well as intertextual reading strategies that discursively and textually situate rather than decontextualize individual representations (images, objects) from the textual habitats in which they reside. I find this distinction exceedingly important when dealing with narratives of postcolonial political crisis, i.e., stories filled with racialized representations of violence and suffering, as it would be far too misleading and reductive to decontextualize and label singular representations “good” or “bad” without first attaining a full understanding of their narrative operation.

In chapter two, I demonstrate how *Hotel Rwanda*, a Hollywood film that narrowly construes the exigencies of the Rwandan genocide through its singular focus on the redemptive witness figure of Paul Rusesabagina, provides an example of how mass media texts can hegemonically memorialize events in ways that suit the ideological and material desires of Western, especially American, audiences. *Hotel Rwanda* temporally and nationally bounds the genocide to a single time and place, 1994 Rwanda. This narrow periodization of the event partitions Rwanda off from other related regional conflicts such as Africa’s World War and ongoing crises in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, and Uganda. Critics such as Lemarchand, for instance, assert that Paul Kagame’s RPF regime has instrumentalized the genocide as a way to insure international support for what has become a “thinly veiled military ethnocracy” (96). In

*Hotel Rwanda*, the RPF are depicted as an unequivocally messianic force quelling violence that they never had anything to do with in the first place, despite the fact that “a key element in the chain of events leading to the butchery is the outbreak of the bitter civil war instigated by the RPF” (103).

This largely Euro-American conception of Rwanda is not securely fixed within the Western world, however, as both *Hotel Rwanda* and the Rwandan government utilize a narrow temporal focus that ignores the genocide’s prelude and aftermath. Both *Hotel Rwanda* and Rwanda’s official genocide commemorations thereby elide the current regime’s dubious human rights record. This truncated narrative underwrites Rwandan imperial operations in the DRC, where Rwanda and its allies extract valuable resources such as coltan for sale to multinational communications and electronics corporations. Subsequently, *Hotel Rwanda* participates in a discourse on the Rwandan genocide that suits the intra- and international ends of the RPF as well as Western material interests in the Congo, where eighty percent of the world’s coltan deposits can be found.

Chapter three examines texts that might provide an alternative to the hegemonic, narrowly periodized narrative articulated by *Hotel Rwanda*, texts by African writers that, through translation into English, have become available to American audiences. Part of Fest’Africa organizer Nocky Djedanoum’s “Duty to Remember” project, a project meant to bring African writers together in solidarity with Rwanda, Boubacar Boris Diop’s *Murambi: The Book of Bones* and Véronique Tadjo’s *The Shadow of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda* are both informed by the authors’ research and interviewing of survivors, witnesses, perpetrators, and aid workers in post-genocide Rwanda. If the Duty to Remember writers seek “to situate the Rwandan genocide within a

transnational, transhistorical and transcultural framework” as an act of “global memory work” (Hitchcott, “A Global” 158), comparative analysis of Diop’s and Tadjó’s texts reveals a significant divergence within Djedanoum’s project as to how such global memorialization is conceptualized and achieved. Much like the prevailing discourse embodied by the Rwandan government’s official genocide narrative, *Murambi* conceals ongoing Central African atrocities even as it seeks to commemorate the Rwandan atrocities of 1994. The ostensibly “decentered structure” of *Murambi* (Hitchcott, “Writing” 54) is rather centered on a particular historical narrative that emphasizes the effects of French imperialism in Rwanda while excising the infidelities of the RPF from its narration of the genocide. In contrast, Tadjó’s *The Shadow of Imana*, provides a drastically different articulation of the Rwandan genocide than that of Diop’s *Murambi* by utilizing a broader spatial and temporal construction of the crisis, a more radical form of polyphony (in which excerpts from Tadjó’s interviewees often stand with limited or no mediation), and a bifurcated narrative structure (organized around “The First Journey” and “The Second Journey”), that resists definitive closure. These structural characteristics demonstrate a departure from the Diopian desire to appropriate the Rwandan genocide as part of an anti-France political agenda, thus allowing for engagement with the struggle for national reconciliation in post-genocide Rwanda, including fuller attention to the actual concerns of genocide survivors.

Chapter four brings these issues into comparative context with Holocaust studies by examining graphic novels about the Rwandan genocide alongside Jewish-American comics artist Art Spiegelman’s *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* (1973). Using the visual-literary mode of comics, *Maus* was among the first graphic novels to tackle an

issue as grave as the Holocaust. In this regard, *Maus* sets a formal precedent for genocide survivor Rupert Bazambanza's *Smile Through the Tears: The Story of the Rwandan Genocide* (2005) and Belgian journalist J. P. Stassen's *Deo gratias: A Tale of Rwanda* (2006). While these issues could easily be broached in other genres, the use of the graphic novel enables *Deo gratias* and *Smile Through the Tears*, much like *Maus*, to visually render complex temporal and spatial associations between the personal and the geopolitical, as well as the past and the present. But at the center of *Smile Through the Tears* and *Deo gratias*, as well as *Maus*, is a concern with the issue of animality, the animalization of the genocide victim. Through their adoption of the graphic novel, Bazambanza and Stassen, like Spiegelman before them, enact a reversal of the animal trope that rendered the Jews *untermenschen* (underhuman) and the Tutsi *inyenzi* (cockroaches). Rather than detracting from the content of these genocide narratives, the graphic novel allows for a historical engagement with a twentieth century comics and cartoons corpus that animalized Jews and Africans. Historical comparison of *Smile Through the Tears* and *Deo gratias* also problematizes easy distinction between "bad Western" and "good non-Western" representations. For instance, despite Stassen's background as a citizen of Belgium, Rwanda's former colonial master, *Deo gratias* critiques European complicity in Rwanda's travails and challenges the narrative of Tutsi/Hutu tribalism. Conversely, despite Bazambanza's status as a genocide survivor invested in national reconciliation, *Smile Through the Tears* wanders dangerously close to a Tutsi-centric narration of Rwandan history that duplicates the Manichean ideology of the genocide.

In chapter five, I begin to repeat the organizational structure of the Rwandan chapters by turning to a hegemonic text that reflects and informs a reductive and primitivizing Euro-American discourse on Haitian politics, demonstrating that representational dynamics similar to those of the Rwandan genocide have impacted understanding of the Haitian military coup and junta of 1991-1994, the effects of which culminated in a second military coup against deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004. Asger Leth's documentary *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* (2007) depicts the violence that accompanied the 2004 coup by following the lives of gang leaders from the slum of Cité Soleil, a pro-Aristide stronghold. Stylistically indebted to rap music videos, Leth's documentary reduces Haitian politics to street thuggery and explicitly and simplistically connects Aristide's administration with gang violence in Cité Soleil. These depictions of contemporary Haitian politics relate to a subtext on the Haitian bicentennial that *dis*-commemorates Haitian independence. By discommemoration, I refer to an act of reversing or negating the significance of a memorialized event. *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* discommemorates Haitian independence by implicitly equating Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's first and twice democratically elected (and twice militarily ousted) president, with Francois and Jean-Claude Duvalier, the infamous father and son dictators who ruled Haiti with terror and violence for a combined thirty years. Appeals to Haiti's revolutionary history are cast in negative terms and given voice primarily through Aristide supporters, who are constructed in an often criminal, violent, and unhinged manner. In turn, the foreign supported coup forces who deposed Aristide in 2004 (much the same forces that also deposed him in 1991) are romanticized as liberators and democracy promoters despite their effective role as a paramilitary death squad guilty of

terrorizing and massacring thousands of Aristide supporters, largely at the behest of Haitian and Western business elites invested in preserving Haiti as a low wage labor bastion. The external factors such as foreign occupation and interventionism that have contributed to Haitian strife are subsequently obscured, rendering Haiti a “failed state” whose intrinsic backwardness testifies to the failure of black sovereignty, a failure incepted at the dawn of Haitian independence and serialized in the Duvaliers and Aristide.

In chapter six, I continue to follow the pattern laid out in chapters two through four by examining Haitian-American novelist Edwidge Danticat’s *The Dew Breaker* (2005), a text that confronts the neo/colonial narratives exemplified by *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* by elucidating the geopolitical inequities that foment Haitian political strife, primarily through Danticat’s depiction of the *tonton macoute* not as a demonic embodiment but as a human figure corrupted by harrowing social conditions. Nine short stories comprise *The Dew Breaker*, each story interweaving with the others to create a novel from originally autonomous, alinear fragments. The characters of each story, from the diasporic characters living in Brooklyn to those living in rural Haiti, are connected to one another through Mr. Bienaime, the dew breaker of the book’s title. The consequences of the dew breaker’s actions reverberate throughout the US and Haiti and span the administrations of Francois and Jean-Claude Duvalier (1957-1986) as well as Jean-Bertrand Aristide, their democratically elected successor (1991, 1994-1996, 2001-2004), and the first administration of René Préal (1996-2001), revealing the transnational and cyclical dynamics that perpetuate Haitian political violence. This transnational and broadly periodized narrative thereby resists the commemorative

process of fixating on a particular moment of crisis or a particular political figurehead, often for partisan, politically instrumentalist ends. Through these narrative strategies *The Dew Breaker* rehumanizes the *tonton macoute* and demonstrates that Haiti is neither isolated from Western hemispheric politics nor anterior to North American modernity.

In chapter seven, I follow up on the issues raised by *The Dew Breaker* by turning more fully toward the “idea of Haiti” as an epistemological construct deriving from Western reactions to the Haitian Revolution that continues to be forcefully contested by postcolonial, especially Caribbean, writers. For many in the slaveholding nations of Europe and North America, the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) amounted to an outbreak of African savagery. Since colonial discourse had perceived African slaves as premodern subjects incapable of pursuing liberty and national sovereignty, Haitian independence challenged the Eurocentric narrative of political modernity, instantiating a rupture in Western historical consciousness. Nineteenth-century historians dressed this epistemological wound by attributing the Haitian Revolution to the intellectual influence of the French Revolution (Haitian culture, symbolized by the African-derived religious practice of *vodou*, retained its primitive connotations). But rather than reifying the hypocrisies of Enlightenment philosophy, the Haitian Revolution had revealed its obscene contradiction: the rhetoric of universality embodied in “The Rights of Man” concealed a European provincialism predicated on African enslavement. This historical “silencing” of Haiti’s revolutionary past, to use Michel Rolph-Trouillot’s phrasing, has since been an important site of epistemological contestation in Caribbean literature.

Chapter seven explores this dynamic in Caribbean-Canadian writer Nalo Hopkinson's *The Salt Roads* (2003), a magical realist/*vodou* fantasy novel that challenges both the Western historiographical and Caribbean nationalist traditions of writing the Haitian Revolution. If Western epistemology has subsumed Haitian history into its fabric, constructing the Haitian Revolution as a byproduct of French modernity, Hopkinson reverses this relationship by connecting eighteenth-century Haiti, nineteenth-century France, and fifth-century Egypt through a *vodou*-inspired vision of world history. This radical re-envisioning of time and space replaces a unidirectional, linear, and hegemonic understanding of historical causality (French independence yields Haitian independence) with a multilateral, circular, and subaltern appreciation of global human events. *The Salt Roads* depicts the lives of three women spiritually connected through Ezili, a female *Vodou Iwa*. Throughout the novel, Ezili possesses Mer (an eighteenth-century slave in Saint-Domingue), Jeanne Duval (the mulatto mistress of French poet Charles Baudelaire), and Thais (a fifth-century Egyptian prostitute). Mer, Jeanne, and Thais are women who have—like the Haitian Revolution—been silenced, paralleling the epistemological process of historical silencing on a personal level. As a slave woman, Mer represents a historical absence, a figure omitted from dominant histories. Likewise, Jeanne Duval also suffers from the biases of dominant historiography, entering the historical record through Baudelaire scholarship, a tradition that has effectively silenced Duval's humanity, depicting her as Baudelaire's lazy, stupid, leeching dependent. Similarly, Thais, Catholicism's "dusky" Saint Mary, comes into historical being through Catholic hagiography, which describes her as a formerly sex-addicted prostitute saved from her self-induced debauchery by a miraculous conversion. *The Salt Roads*

historically recovers these historically silenced women and places them within a narrative of global political modernity that finds its center in Haitian history and culture.

In conclusion, I will synthesize the individual findings of these chapters into a more general statement on the narration and commemoration of political crisis and the historiography of the recent past. I will also attend to current events in Rwanda and Haiti, particularly the increased attention Rwanda's role in the Congo has recently received as well as Haiti's devastating 2010 earthquake, cholera outbreak, and botched elections. Observations and reactions to these situations continue to be influenced in varying degree by the reductive notions of Rwanda and Haiti that are delineated throughout this project, subsequently obfuscating broader systemic understandings of Rwandan and Haitian political violence and short-circuiting the efficacy of relief and redevelopment efforts in favor of neoliberal economic interests.

CHAPTER 2  
GENOCIDE AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORIALIZATION: *HOTEL RWANDA* AND  
AFRICA'S WORLD WAR

Genocide has become banal, much more banal than Hannah Arendt thought possible when describing Eichmann. It is now the tool employed by those with the power to impose their narratives of history, or of freedom, on the world.

—Kenneth Harrow, “Foundational Fantasies,” 39-40

Between April and July of 1994 an estimated 500,000 to 1,000,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus died at the hands of Hutu militiamen, soldiers, and the ordinary Rwandan civilians who, by coercion or of their own free will, joined in the killing. The mass slaughter, lasting roughly one hundred days, erupted after a missile assault brought down a jet carrying Hutu President Juvénal Habyarimana, who had been on a return flight from a presidential summit in Tanzania. Habyarimana's assassination mobilized the Hutu army and extremist Hutu militias, who used the attack as evidence of Tutsi aggression, an aggression they claimed could only be stopped through the systematic extermination of all Tutsis in Rwanda. This rhetoric of fear compelled many Hutu citizens to turn on their neighbors and participate in genocide; others refused, only to be executed alongside their Tutsi peers. This immensely complicated situation, with sociopolitical roots in colonial history, the Hutu Revolution (1959), its national and regional aftershocks (1960s to 1990s), and the Rwandan Civil War of (1991-1993), prompted a veritable non-response from the world's superpowers and lackadaisical reporting from the mainstream media, which often resorted to a well-worn, culturally developmentalist explanation for African political crisis: “tribalism.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For examples of the tribalism narrative in US media reporting on the Rwandan genocide, see Wall.

Ten years later, the world seemed ready to listen, to learn from its mistakes, and to grieve along with Rwanda over its violent “past.” Performances of public remembrance emerged, those conducted by and for the traumatized Rwandan nation and those conducted by and for the shamefaced West. As exemplary of these two forms of remembrance, I have in mind Rwanda’s official state-sponsored genocide commemorations of April 2004 and a Hollywood film released that same year, *Hotel Rwanda*, which has become a historical cipher for Western, especially American, audiences wishing to learn more about Rwanda’s genocide. While other forms of remembrance have arisen before, during, and since the tenth anniversary, the Rwandan commemorations and *Hotel Rwanda* bear unique distinctions: where the commemorations have been imbued with the stamp of official national narrative by the Rwandan government, *Hotel Rwanda* has become an oft-praised and widely distributed “reference point . . . into an event” (qtd. in Motskin 74).<sup>2</sup> Like *Schindler’s List*, a point of comparison in this essay, *Hotel Rwanda* has acquired the power to “fabricate archives” of the atrocity it represents (Claude Lanzmann qtd. in Bernstein 432). Both *Hotel Rwanda* and the Rwandan commemoration ceremonies function to memorialize and raise awareness about the Rwandan genocide, but what happens when an event like Rwanda’s genocide is commemorated, enshrined in a particular time and locality, and what purposes do these memorials serve?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Upon its release to DVD, *Hotel Rwanda* was among the most rented movies from Netflix, and five years later (as of 2 March 2010), the film ranks number nineteen on Netflix’s top one hundred rentals (Netflix). *Hotel Rwanda* was also a three time Oscar nominee and winner of AFI’s Best Feature Film award in 2004 (IMDb).

<sup>3</sup> The Rwandan commemorations bear the additional burden of seeking national reconciliation and healing, but, as the remainder of this essay will argue, reconciliation has been obstructed rather than nurtured by the historical narrative imposed on the Rwandan citizenry by the commemorations.

This essay asserts that commemorations themselves are “narratives of history,” and the historical narrative proffered by President Paul Kagame’s Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), the ruling regime in post-genocide Rwanda, renders the genocide banal, instrumentalizing the history of the crisis to serve its own political ends.<sup>4</sup> On 7 April 2004, President Kagame presided over the tenth annual commemoration in Kigali with a speech at the Amahoro Stadium. As Lars Waldorf notes, Kagame’s commemoration speeches are often highly politicized affairs used “to denounce political opponents and the international community” (523).<sup>5</sup> Raising the profile of the tenth anniversary over previous commemorations, the United Nations (UN) “General Assembly declared 7 April 2004 as an International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda” (*United Nations Today* 89). Making the most of this heightened exposure, the 2004 commemorations also featured a public burial “where victims of the 1994 genocide were” laid to rest in “a concrete tomb” as UN dignitaries and the world media looked on (Thompson 433).

Significantly, these commemorative events focused exclusively on the events of 1994 (Harrow 41), thereby asserting a historically and geographically narrow script of the genocide. This genocide script only allows for a limited view of the RPF’s role in Rwandan history. That role is, in fact, singular: *those who quelled the Hutu-led genocide of the Tutsi*. The RPF’s role in the genocide’s prelude (the Rwandan Civil War) as well as its aftermath (reprisal massacres, Africa’s World War) remains hidden,

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<sup>4</sup> I use the acronym RPF to refer to the ruling political party as well as its pre-genocide military branch, the RPA (Rwandan Patriotic Army), as well as the RPA’s post-genocide incarnation as Rwanda’s official military, the RDF (Rwandan Defence Forces).

<sup>5</sup> “At the 2002 genocide commemoration,” Waldorf elaborates, “President Kagame attacked his predecessor, Pasteur Bizimungu, who had attempted to create a new opposition party. Bizimungu was arrested three weeks later” (523).

and *Hotel Rwanda* presents a genocide script temporally compatible with this truncated narration of the genocide. By participating in a mythology of the genocide that supports the RPF's official narrative of events, *Hotel Rwanda* conceals ongoing human rights abuses even as it seeks to reveal the atrocities of 1994. In other words, by giving the impression that all is well in post-genocide Rwanda, *Hotel Rwanda* erases the domestic and regional infidelities of the RPF from general public consciousness and fossilizes the violence of the genocide in the discrete time and place of 1994 Rwanda.

These parallels between *Hotel Rwanda* and the Rwandan commemorations need not lead to a conspiratorial view of the film—there is no collusion among *Hotel Rwanda* director Terry George, the film's production company Lion's Gate, and the Rwandan government. In fact, President Kagame has publicly lambasted *Hotel Rwanda* (apparently detesting how the film makes a hero of Paul Rusesabagina, a Hutu hotelier who harbored more than a thousand Tutsi refugees in the Hôtel des Mille Collines during the time dramatized in *Hotel Rwanda*) despite the film's RPF-friendly narrative arc. And Rusesabagina has voiced extreme dissatisfaction with the Rwandan government, even declaring Kagame a war criminal in a 2006 letter to Queen Elizabeth II (Rusesabagina, "Letter"). In response, Kagame and his partisans have made Paul Rusesabagina a target of their commemoration speech denunciations (Waldorf 523). Suffice it to say, *Hotel Rwanda* expresses neither the views of Kagame nor of Rusesabagina, whose fierce opposition to the RPF's official narrative of the genocide puts his perspective at odds with *Hotel Rwanda*'s articulation of events. Instead, this essay asserts that *Hotel Rwanda*'s script of the genocide resembles the RPF's because both narratives are easily reconcilable with the ideological preconceptions of American

audiences. Ideologically, the film supports the view that the RPF, as current US allies, must be a force for good and also reifies a Euro-American belief in exceptional African figures (protagonist Paul Rusesabagina and the RPF) who excel despite the intrinsic African political backwardness from which they purportedly originate. Given its lack of attention to the geopolitical implications of the Rwandan genocide, *Hotel Rwanda* also tends to reify rather than challenge the tribalism narrative. In turn, these ideological preconceptions, which *Hotel Rwanda* does not create but rather crystallizes in a textual touchstone, support Western material interests in the resources now being pillaged in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)—particularly coltan, an ore used to manufacture an enormous range of electronics—by Rwanda and its allies.

### **Genocide Scripts: Articulating History**

The final shots of *Hotel Rwanda* exemplify this narrowness of historical perspective and the peculiar image it subsequently presents of Rwandan current affairs. The film concludes with a series of black screens bearing white text. Providing the film with historical closure, one of these screens reads, “The genocide ended in July 1994, when the Tutsi rebels drove the Hutu army and the Interahamwe militia across the border into the Congo.” The next screen adds, “They left behind almost a million corpses.” Here, memorialization becomes a double-edged sword, as the desire to raise awareness of the Rwandan genocide is satisfied by initiating a static and insular view of the genocide’s history, one that obscures ongoing strife in Rwanda and the Congo. The RPF-led Tutsi government in post-genocide Rwanda has utilized a similar historical articulation in order to gain political leverage in both the national and international arenas. This narrow historical articulation allows the RPF to cash in on what Filip Reyntjens describes as “the genocide credit” (qtd. in Lemarchand 106). The RPF’s

genocide credit derives from their acquisition of unquestionable status as both victims of the genocide and the messianic force that quelled the violence. This double standing as victims and saviors has made the RPF's dubious domestic and regional human rights record a blind spot for foreign observers eager to support the RPF as an act of atonement for the West's failure to intervene in the genocide (Lemarchand 106).

But how would *Hotel Rwanda's* genocide script alter if we questioned these concluding screens, asking, what happened to those Hutu forces driven into the Congo by the RPF? With the genocide in Rwanda creating an overwhelming number of refugees, the Congo (still named Zaire at this point) came to play host to displaced civilians and Hutu military and militia forces fleeing from the RPF, a refugee population of over two million (Prunier, *Africa's* 47). This influx of refugees exacerbated preexisting tensions over land and citizenship rights in Zaire (Mamdani 14), and, paradoxically, many refugee camps became rearmament and training facilities for exiled Hutu forces (Lemarchand 147). Border skirmishes between these exiled forces and the RPF, now Rwanda's official army, became commonplace, and this growing security threat eventually became a pretense for a Rwandan invasion of the Congo. This invasion precipitated the First Congo War (1996-1997), which culminated in Laurent-Désiré Kabila's RPF-supported coup against Mobutu Sésé Seko. With Rwandan forces as a persisting presence in Kabila's newly renamed Democratic Republic of Congo, tensions between Congolese and Rwandese continued to escalate, leading to Kabila's decision to order all Rwandan forces out of the DRC.

By August 1998, these deteriorating relations between Rwanda and the DRC climaxed in the Second Congo War, also known as Africa's World War (1998-2003), a

five year conflict involving Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Angola, and their proxies (Prunier, *Africa's* 72, 285). A coalescence of multiple regional conflicts, Africa's World War further destabilized the Congo, with exiled Rwandan Hutu forces aligning with Kabila and his allies against the largely pro-Tutsi alliance of Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda. One of the world's poorest yet most mineral-rich nations became even poorer, with Congolese elites, Rwanda, and the other invading forces pillaging the Congo for its lucrative resources and playing mineral-broker to Western governments and corporations. Arms, drugs, gold, diamonds, and coltan form the center of this criminalized Congolese economy (Lemarchand 5, 216, 245). Trade in coltan, an ore used to manufacture computers, jet engines, cell phones, and other electronic devices, funds Rwanda's military (Lemarchand 234) and makes RPF activities in the Congo, where eighty percent of the world's coltan deposits can be found, imperative to a myriad of global industries and economies dependent on electronics. In the Rwandan-controlled coltan mines, Rwandan soldiers force Hutu prisoners to dig for this valuable material (Lemarchand 255), exemplifying the ghoulishly synergistic relationship among monolithic demonization of the Hutu, glorification of the RPF, and exploitative extraction of the Congo's resources. While standard periodization of Africa's World War marks 2003 as the conflict's end, coltan-driven instability and violence continue in the DRC. Since the conflict's outset in 1998, an estimated "three and a half million people have died in the eastern Congo" and approximately "three million have become refugees." In the DRC, this recurrent cycle of instability, violence, and displacement begetting more instability, violence, and displacement has been amplified by the RPF's fundamental role in the Congo Wars (Harrow 42) and the global trade in coltan.

Within the borders of Rwanda itself, the RPF's genocide credit similarly obscures ongoing human rights abuses, concealing grim Rwandan realities such as "accusation cooperatives" that sell genocide denunciations (Prunier, *Africa's* 3), large numbers of arrests based on spurious evidence of genocide complicity (Prunier, *Africa's* 11), and organized RPF-led massacres (Prunier, *Africa's* 15). UN High Commission for Refugees official Robert Gersony reveals a great deal of the RPF's questionable post-genocide behavior in the Gersony Report, a document that was immediately embargoed by the UN so that the new Rwandan government would not be undermined before their reconstruction project had even gotten off the ground. A particularly disturbing finding of the report details the use of peace and reconciliation meetings as an opportunity for mass killing, with RPF soldiers "indiscriminately slaughter[ing]" those who had gathered in the spirit of community healing. Using tactics like these, the Gersony Report concludes, the RPF killed 25,000 to 45,000—Hutu and Tutsi alike—in the first six months of the new regime's reign (Prunier, *Africa's* 16). These activities seem to constitute "a policy of political control through terror" (20), but this information faced direct suppression from the UN. The revelations embedded in the Gersony Report found immediate disfavor among some UN member states, especially the US, which had ignored the genocide but since become a repentant Rwandan ally (31). At the behest of the US, the UN's official position on Gersony's findings became "[t]he Gersony Report does not exist" (qtd. in Lemarchand 96). While direct suppression of the Gersony Report has since been abandoned, widespread ignorance of the RPF's post-genocide activities continues almost organically, aided by the ideological dissonance that accompanies recognition of RPF brutality. *Hotel Rwanda's* constricted

narration of the genocide exemplifies this process, wherein those facts that ideologically harmonize with dominant preconceptions and material interests achieve wider and more powerful circulation than those facts that are ideologically challenging and obstruct economic desire for valuable resources.

This compatibility between the RPF's version of events and *Hotel Rwanda's* is ultimately self-defeating, since the film seeks to do human rights work, i.e., it seeks to educate and raise awareness about the Rwandan genocide so that future human rights atrocities might be challenged by a global citizenry enlightened by humanitarianist mass media. If there were any doubt that the makers and distributors of *Hotel Rwanda* see the film participating in a sort of *cinema of awareness*, a piece of humanitarian pedagogy, we need only watch the trailers that open the *Hotel Rwanda* DVD: in a brief public announcement following previews for soon-to-be-released movies, actor Don Cheadle, who plays the film's protagonist, Paul Rusesabagina, calls upon viewers to take action in Darfur, highlighting the sentiment that the West can make up for its failures in Rwanda by intervening in the Darfur crisis. While drawing attention to the crisis in Darfur is entirely laudable, even vital, this movement from Rwanda to Darfur creates seriality between the crises: Rwanda, the African crisis the First World failed to amend, is followed by its sequel, Darfur, the African crisis the First World may yet be able to solve. There are, indeed, lessons to be learned from the failures of the international community in aiding Rwanda, and many of those lessons are undoubtedly relevant to the crisis in Darfur. But this refocusing from a temporally and geographically insular view of 1994 Rwanda to Darfur renders invisible the ongoing strife present in Rwanda and its neighbor, the DRC, where the death toll from 1998 to 2006 reached

four times that of the Rwandan genocide (Lemarchand 4). This pattern of crisis recognition parallels the enormous rate of coverage Darfur has received in contrast with that of the DRC. In 2005, “coverage of the Darfur crisis was over five times that of the Congo [1,600 articles versus 300], though the Congo situation killed over three times as many people as Darfur” (Prunier, *Africa’s* 353). Just as the Congo constitutes an unsavory narrative, as extended coverage would reveal how both Rwanda and its Western allies have benefitted from coltan extraction and arms dealing in the DRC, Darfur, which has been mischaracterized as a simple case of evil Arabs killing good Christians, resonates with post-9/11 audiences in the US and Europe (Eichler-Levine and Hicks 715).

### ***Africa’s Schindler’s List?***

In a sense, all films can be seen as historical articulations of whatever their subject matter might be, but recreating historical tragedy for the big screen raises especially daunting ethical and aesthetic obstacles. These concerns are not lost on *Hotel Rwanda* director Terry George, who has expressed his desire to imbue his film with “veracity,” a fidelity to the historical matter, so that the film may be “a piece of the record of genocide” (qtd. in Motskin 74), as well as accessibility, which will ensure that the film reaches and informs a large and diverse audience. George explains, “For me, I’m into the ‘Get-this-as-right-as-you-possibly-can’ and then justify the few changes that you’ve made within the context of the story [approach]. . . . I feel there’s an obligation to the history of the event. Whether we like it or not, these films have become the reference point for schools and for people into an event” (qtd. in Motskin 74). Therefore, the received history itself goes unquestioned and then undergoes formal

reduction into the constraints of the historical Hollywood drama, since, as George admits, the goal of mass market appeal creates formal burdens:

I knew the film had to go like a train. We couldn't sit down, we couldn't indulge ourselves with any long scenes, because the central element or driving force for a wider audience, if we were to have crossover, was the thriller element. I had to keep the audience on the edge of their seats. If they s[*i*]t down for any exposition they're going to get lost in the whole mess of it. (qtd. in Motskin 74)

Seemingly, then, for George, reconciling veracity and accessibility in a genocide film is a surmountable task. But for any who recall the debates that have surrounded mass culture Holocaust texts like *Schindler's List*, skepticism may be the natural response to George's directorial confidence, especially his unrestrained enthusiasm for invoking a "thriller element."

Characteristic of a dramatic, Hollywood thriller, *Hotel Rwanda*—much like *Schindler's List*—employs definitive narrative closure. In the words of Gertrud Koch, words just as applicable (perhaps even more applicable) to *Hotel Rwanda*, *Schindler's List* "leaves us with the comforting idea that a very bad story has come to a good end" (405).<sup>6</sup> In Michael Bernstein's estimation, which also bears applicability to *Hotel Rwanda*, "*Schindler's List* is not just an ambitious but flawed movie; it is a work that manipulates the emotions raised by the enormity of its historical theme in order to disguise the simplistic melodrama of its actual realization" (429). Many of these aspects of *Schindler's List* testify to "a characteristic American urge to find a redemptive meaning in every event" (Bernstein 431). *Hotel Rwanda* also accommodates this

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<sup>6</sup> As Koch also notes, "[w]hat remains problematic in Spielberg's ritual end is not the reference to survival instead of death and destruction as the core of Holocaust history so much as the problem of voice once again: who is speaking, who tells us to overcome the pain in order to survive and live 'happily ever after'? Who has the godlike eye in which we are mirrored? Who is doing justice?" (403).

yearning for redemptive meaning, thereby creating a memory of the event that could not be in starker contrast with the grim, on-the-ground realities continuing to vex Rwanda. Testifying to this redemptive quality, the American Film Institute places both *Schindler's List* and *Hotel Rwanda* among its picks for "America's Most Inspiring Movies" (American Film Institute 3). While there may be nothing unsettling about finding inspiration in Rusesabagina's story in-and-of-itself, constructing his inspirational narrative becomes possible only by excising the more troubling aspects of Rwanda's post-genocide history. Exclusively focused on Rusesabagina's efforts to save Tutsi refugees, *Hotel Rwanda* becomes a vehicle for the inspirational, "underdog"<sup>7</sup> story of one individual's triumph over seemingly insurmountable odds rather than an actual account of the genocide. As Michael André Bernstein explains of *Schindler's List*, such constructions of historical tragedy do not simply entertain but also serve as tools of cultural pedagogy:

"Spielberg's movie does not merely, in Claude Lanzmann's devastating phrase, 'fabricate archives,' it is already beginning to affect the way our culture understands, historically orders, and teaches how the Holocaust should be remembered . . ."

(Bernstein 432). George himself has used similar language to describe *Hotel Rwanda*, calling the film a "reference point" for the Rwandan genocide, a historical touchstone. It is from this privileged position that *Hotel Rwanda*, like *Schindler's List*, works to "fabricate archives," molding public understanding and memory of the Rwandan

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<sup>7</sup> In his article "Underdogs," Rand Richards Cooper draws parallels between *Hotel Rwanda* and *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), which dramatizes a female boxer's professional and personal struggles. The underdog story works within the redemptory frame by dramatizing individual struggle against overwhelming adversity.

genocide and, despite its pretensions to the cinema of awareness, commodifying its tragic history for recreational purposes.<sup>8</sup>

The formal aspects of *Hotel Rwanda*'s archival fabrication are largely directed by George's pursuit of a "thriller element," which leads him to privilege action over exposition. To create this thriller element, for example, *Hotel Rwanda* evades extended exposition through evocative use of Radio et Television Libres des Mille Collines (RTL) broadcasts. Before the genocide began, the Interahamwe used these Hutu Power Radio broadcasts to incite fear and hatred of the Tutsi among the Hutu citizenry. The Interahamwe also used these broadcasts to coordinate attacks and hunts for specific individuals once the genocide had begun. Hutu Power Radio broadcasts recur frequently in *Hotel Rwanda*, aesthetically imbuing the film with an appropriately ominous atmosphere and providing a modicum of insight into the ideology of Hutu extremism. Signifying a radio-dial search for RTL, the film opens with a black screen accompanied by radio static and cross-banding frequencies. Once the radio signal has stabilized, an RTL radio announcer begins speaking: "When people ask me, good listeners, why I hate the Tutsi, I say read our history. . . . Rwanda is a Hutu land." The announcer's proclamation, "Rwanda is a Hutu land," alludes to the Hamitic hypothesis, which postulates that the Tutsis descended from Ham, Noah's cursed son, and migrated to Rwanda from Ethiopia. While European biblical exegesis originally described the tribe of Ham as black, Napoleon Bonaparte's Egyptomania led to a reworking of the Hamitic legend in the nineteenth century, so that the Ancient Egyptian

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<sup>8</sup> Commenting on *Schindler's List*, Reid Miller notes how the Hollywood blockbuster subsumes moral considerations into its fabric even as it commodifies historical tragedy: "In fact, the lowest-common-denominator feature of the blockbuster becomes evidence in this instance of the film's universal quality, a modal backflip that harmonizes the capitalistic ethic of profit maximization with the emergence of the morally sublime" (708).

wonders newly-excavated by the French could be claimed as part of Caucasian rather than black African history. This revised version of the Hamitic hypothesis asserted that “[o]nly Ham’s youngest son Canaan was black; his cursed progeny populated sub-Saharan Africa” (Zachernuk 428). In Central Africa, German and Belgian colonists used the Hamitic hypothesis to rationalize their privileging of the supposedly more European, Hamitic Tutsis over the sub-Saharan, Canaanite Hutus. Originally a product of colonial discourse, the Hamitic hypothesis became central to Hutu Power ideology as a counterdiscourse: the Hutu were now glorified as autochthonous, the Tutsi denigrated as alien.

Along with radio broadcasts, *Hotel Rwanda* also uses brief exchanges between characters to introduce a modicum of historical context. The Belgian race science that made the Hamitic hypothesis empirical in Rwanda is touched on in a discussion between Jack Darglish (Joaquin Phoenix), an American news photographer, and Benedict (Mothusi Magano), referred to as “Kigali’s finest journalist” by Rusesabagina (Don Cheadle), hotel manager of the De Mille Collines. As they sit at the hotel bar, Jack asks, “What is the actual difference between the Hutu and the Tutsi?” Benedict answers, “It was the Belgians that created the division.” He goes on to describe how the colonizers measured the noses and other features of the Rwandans to determine who would be classed as Hutu and who would be classed as Tutsi. Benedict also explains that when the colonists left they gave power to the Hutu, who sought revenge for years of Tutsi domination. Jack asks Paul for his opinion of Benedict’s explanation, and Paul confirms, “sadly, it is true.” In its elision of certain historical facts, Benedict’s version of Rwandan history mirrors the official narrative put forth by the RPF: the Tutsi-

Hutu dichotomy, while galvanized by Belgian race science, was not created out of whole-cloth by the colonizers. Contrary to revisionist histories that paint precolonial Rwanda as an ethnic Eden with no distinction between Hutu and Tutsi, such distinctions did exist before colonization. Colonial race science does, however, radicalize these distinctions, with the Belgian-conducted census of 1933 eradicating the fluidity that had once existed between Hutu and Tutsi. Before the census it had been possible for a Hutu to rise to Tutsi status (*kwiihutura*) and for a Tutsi to fall to Hutu status (*gucupira*), primarily through the acquisition or loss of wealth (Adhikari 286). Through economic success and the taking of Tutsi wives, for instance, a “Hutu family . . . could over a period of a few generations become Tutsi” (Adhikari 363n19). The census replaced this mutability of status with a purely static, racialized vision of Rwandan society, making possible the ID cards used to distinguish Hutu from Tutsi during the genocide.

Benedict’s assertion that Belgian race science alone created Hutu and Tutsi identities constitutes a backwards temporal projection of the “[e]nforced ethnic amnesia” characterizing Kagame’s RPF regime. As Lemarchand notes, “[b]lind spots, ethnic amnesia, and denials of historical evidence operate to mask unpalatable truths and magnify others out of proportion” (106, 100). Kagame’s “suppression of ethnic identities by decree” masks the unpalatable truth of RPF contributions to the creation of the genocide (106), primarily in the form of the RPF invasions of the early-1990s that culminated in the Rwandan Civil War (1990-1993). Each incursion increased suspicion of internal Tutsis as a fifth column allied with the external, Ugandan-based Tutsis comprising the RPF (116). From Lemarchand’s perspective, Kagame’s official suppression of ethnic identities has worsened rather than alleviated Rwandan

ethnopolitics, creating a dismal status quo that maintains the RPF's state authority at home and abroad: "Enforced ethnic amnesia is the most formidable obstacle to reconciliation, because it rules out the process of reckoning by which each community must confront its past and come to terms with its share of responsibility for the horrors of 1994" (Lemarchand 106). Ethnic amnesia, therefore, does not serve the purposes of reconciliation but rather the political agenda of the RPF, a state of affairs that short-circuits Rwanda's search for much needed national reconciliation. Benedict's articulation of Rwandan ethnohistory supports this enforced ethnic amnesia by making Hutu-Tutsi strife only a product of Belgian colonization. While Belgian race science certainly did radicalize the Hutu-Tutsi dichotomy, laying the groundwork for genocide, the Tutsi monarchy in Rwanda had often subjugated its Hutu subjects well before colonization, a fact that the RPF would rather see omitted from Rwanda's official national narrative.

### **The Exceptional African**

Perhaps it is no small coincidence that *Hotel Rwanda* has not only been nicknamed the "African *Schindler's List*"<sup>9</sup> but also falls into many of the same ethical briar patches. In addition to the aforementioned characteristics shared with *Schindler's List*, *Hotel Rwanda* also utilizes a narrow narrative focus on a lone, heroic savior figure, Paul Rusesabagina. Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire, Force Commander of the UN peace keeping mission to Rwanda during the genocide, has suggested that *Hotel Rwanda* exaggerates Rusesabagina's actions at the expense of the UN observers who worked to protect the Mille Collines refugees: "It seems the filmmakers downplayed the

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<sup>9</sup> See Burr.

eight UN observers who protected people in the hotel. They did a lot of the saving. The manager [Rusesabagina] was there, and I was aware of him, but that's it. I remember he was helpful" (qtd. in Adhikari 298). While *Hotel Rwanda* may take dramatic license with Rusesabagina's actions, in this critique of George's film I wish to take nothing away from Rusesabagina himself, whose real-life efforts in Kigali, whether exaggerated or not, at the very least *aided* in the protection of 1,268 lives (Adhikari 279). I do wish, however, to highlight why Rusesabagina is successful in a discursive sense, how his story is compatible with preconceived notions Western viewers are likely to have about Africa. Once again, George's own words are illuminating. Of the film's protagonist, George comments,

Paul's probably the best example of the surrogate for the audience, because he led this European-style, middle-class life in Kigali, and his career, his training, all taught him to accommodate Europeans and Westerners. . . . He doesn't want to listen to hate radio. He's hopeful about the UN intervention, and clearly dismissive about the militia. Then, as the genocide starts to unfold, he's completely knocked sideways and has to fall back on his resources, basically taking the talents of his job and suddenly putting them to this monumental use. (qtd. in Motskin 75)

Given George's stated goal of accessibility, the use of an empathetic, relatable protagonist is understandable, perhaps even indispensable. Rusesabagina becomes the exceptional African sensible enough to not "want to listen to hate radio," as if middle- to upper-class Rwandan businessmen stand apart from a population otherwise enamored with Hutu Power broadcasts. The film thoroughly establishes Rusesabagina's "European-style, middle-class life," making him a Westernized voice of reason capable of interpreting African complexities for an American audience.

*Hotel Rwanda's* representation of the attack on Habyarimana's plane exemplifies Rusesabagina's role as the audience's interpreter. Shortly before the plane crash, Hutu

Power Radio broadcasts a message for the president: “do not trust the rebels.” Once Habyarimana’s plane has been shot down by a missile attack, Hutu Power Radio attributes the attack to the RPF. When Rusesabagina returns home to find a dozen neighbors hiding in the dark in his home, they reiterate what they have heard on the radio. Rusesabagina acts as a voice of reason, saying, “Why would the rebels kill him [Habyarimana] when he agreed to peace.” Testifying to the controversial nature of this assertion, the living Paul Rusesabagina’s view of Habyarimana’s assassination differs greatly from that of his fictionalized counterpart in *Hotel Rwanda*. Rusesabagina has compiled a document entitled “Compendium of RPF Crimes—October 1990 to Present: The Case for Overdue Prosecution” in which he asserts the likelihood of the RPF attacking Habyarimana’s plane to incite Hutu violence against Rwandan Tutsis (4-5), as such violence would authorize an RPF conquest of Rwanda. Though it is still unclear who shot down Habyarimana’s plane, the fictionalized Rusesabagina’s explanation unequivocally corresponds with the RPF’s official version of events: Hutu extremists killed Habyarimana for negotiating peace agreements with their enemies, the Tutsi rebels.

Much of Rusesabagina’s credibility arises from his acclimation to European modernity, which *Hotel Rwanda* portrays through Rusesabagina’s facility with business etiquette. Rusesabagina demonstrates this Western business world literacy in an early conversation with his assistant Dube. When potential business partners meet, Rusesabagina explains, a Cohiba cigar is worth more as a gift than a cash gift of the same value: “This is a Cohiba cigar. Each one is worth 10,000 francs . . . but it is worth more to me than 10,000 francs. If I give a businessman 10,000 francs, what does that

matter to him? He is rich. But if I give him a Cohiba cigar, straight from Havana, hey, that is style. . . .” In a later meeting with George Rutagunda, also a businessman, Rutagunda’s rabid, tribalistic ethnopoltics contrast Rusesabagina’s deracinated business ethic. When Rusesabagina visits Rutagunda’s compound to buy hotel supplies, Rutagunda remarks, “It is time for you to join your people [the Hutu].” As Rusesabagina tries to politely end the conversation and make his way back to the hotel van, a warehouse worker operating a forklift drops a crate. When the crate breaks, its contents—hundreds of machetes—scatter across the floor. Rutagunda, sinisterly grinning, explains that the machetes are from “China,” purchased for “10 cents each.” Once back in his van, Rusesabagina remarks to Dube that Rutagunda and his followers are “fools” whose “time is over,” identifying Rutagunda as a businessman who, unlike Rusesabagina, mixes business with ethnic politics. Rusesabagina’s adherence to a deracialized business paradigm resonates with audiences accustomed to the American discourse of colorblindness, increasing Rusesabagina’s credibility as audience “surrogate.”

Through his role as audience surrogate, Rusesabagina comes to occupy a Marlowesque position, a positioning that seems intentional given George’s own allusion to *Heart of Darkness* in discussions about the film. Describing a sequence he calls “the *Heart of Darkness* part,” George equates Rutagunda with Colonel Kurtz, thereby equating Rusesabagina with Marlow. In this sequence, Rutagunda explains his genocidal intentions to Rusesabagina. George explains, “I took that image [of Rusesabagina meeting Rutagunda] and put it in the center of the film because I needed that, the *Heart of Darkness* part, where the audience goes out and sees what’s going

on. And also hears the militia man, Rutagunda, articulating the definition of genocide: ‘We’re gonna wipe them all out.’” (qtd. in Motskin 75). This invocation of *Heart of Darkness* links Rutagunda to Colonel Kurtz, a European who has “gone native,” corrupted by the madness of the Congo. Rutagunda’s rephrasing of Kurtz’s “Exterminate all the brutes!” (Conrad 51) thereby casts him as someone (this time an African) also overtaken by the savagery of the “Dark Continent.” The film’s omission of sociopolitical context subsequently makes Rutagunda exemplary of an African backwards slide into atavism, a failure to assimilate to the Western modernity demonstrated in the words and actions of the sophisticated, businessman Rusesabagina. Positioned by the film as a Marlowesque audience surrogate—a Westernized observer capable of interpreting some details yet also in disbelief at the African darkness unfolding around him—Rusesabagina must go through a process of revelation, wherein he comes to accept impending disaster and formulate a response plan. This emphasis on Rusesabagina, however, allows the broader context of the conflict to remain as opaque and mysterious as the strange sights and sounds that perplexed Marlow as he journeyed up the “primordial” Congo River toward Kurtz’s stronghold.

### **Indicting the West**

Even as it exceptionalizes Rusesabagina, *Hotel Rwanda* critiques its Western characters, particularly Jack Daglish and Colonel Oliver (Nick Nolte). After his conversation with Benedict, for instance, Daglish turns to two Rwandan women sitting at the bar. He asks the first woman if she is Hutu or Tutsi, then asks her friend the same question. When they answer that one is Tutsi and the other Hutu, Daglish proclaims, “They could be twins!” As he leaves the bar to follow David, his production team leader,

Daglish whispers his room number to the closest woman, in case she would like to finish their conversation in private. Daglish comes off as a vapid and opportunistic thrill-seeker in this scene, as well as later in the film, when he returns, sweaty and eager, from shooting massacre footage outside the sanctuary of the hotel. Rushing into the room where David has set up a production suite, Daglish hurriedly hands the videocassette of the violent footage to David and tells him to play it, unaware that Rusesabagina is seated at a desk on the other side of the room. Daglish is ashamed to have shown the footage in front of Rusesabagina and apologizes to him in a later scene. Through his apology, Daglish is allowed some reflexivity that complicates his character and introduces a brief inquiry into the politics of representing mass violence.

*Hotel Rwanda* depicts Colonel Oliver in a similarly ambivalent light. Sitting at the hotel bar alone with Rusesabagina, Oliver snaps from the pressure that has been mounting on his failing UN peacekeeping mission. Rusesabagina thanks Oliver for his help, and Oliver replies: "You should spit in my face . . . You're dirt. We think you're dirt Paul. . . . The West, all the superpowers, everything you believe in Paul. . . . You could own this freakin' hotel except for one thing. You're black. You're not even a nigger, you're an African. They're not gonna stay Paul. They're not gonna stop the slaughter." As Madelaine Hron argues, this scene caricatures Oliver, a move that further ennoble the exceptional African hero, Rusesabagina: "to elevate the role of the Black saviour hero, the role of the UN is distorted and vilified, and comes to represent the ineffectual West, symbolized by white troops, as headed by Col. Oliver (supposedly representative of General Dallaire) who is caricatured as an alcoholic." Hron notes that this representation of Oliver distorts the actions of Dallaire as well as the makeup of the

remaining UN forces: “after the departure of the Belgians, the UN forces left in Rwanda consisted of Ghanians, Tunisians and Bangladeshi forces, so very few Whites [were present]. More importantly, General Dallaire was instrumental in rescuing the hotel survivors; on May 1st, 1994, Dallaire secured a ‘prisoner exchange’ with the leader of the Hutu forces . . .” (214-15). Taken in tandem with Dallaire’s lament about the eight UN observers whose actions were minimized in order to highlight Rusesabagina, Hron’s statement elucidates a very deliberate element of *Hotel Rwanda*’s genocide script: indictment of the UN. As Mohamed Adhikari notes, “playing on Western guilt about Rwanda is part of the film’s commercial agenda” (294), and indictment of the UN is one of the film’s primary vehicles for doing so. While the UN’s ineffectiveness in the case of Rwanda’s genocide constitutes a travesty worthy of much indictment and reflection, *Hotel Rwanda*’s univalent depiction of the UN distorts the historical material. This distortion further ennobles not only Rusesabagina but also the RPF, whose genocide credit is bolstered by continual denigration of the UN.

While it may seem at first glance contradictory for Rusesabagina to be made exceptional by his so-called Westernization just as the West itself is denigrated, the two gestures are in fact compatible with the Euro-American vision of modernity informing the film. Rusesabagina is heralded for his Western values while the West is chastised for its failure to act on its own values by intervening in Rwanda. Aside from a few passing references to Belgian colonialism and France’s arming of the Hutu army, *Hotel Rwanda* elides mention of Western complicity in the creation of the economic and political factors precipitating the genocide. The crisis is therefore rendered as an African-created problem in need of messianic assistance from the world police. Ironically, despite its

desire to criticize Western incompetence, the film participates in a pervasive mythology about the Rwanda genocide—namely, that its constitutive events can be localized in 1994—that obscures ongoing Western complicity in Rwanda’s crisis, and it is precisely such a focus on 1994 that allows continued Western complicity, along with RPF improprieties, to go largely unquestioned.

### **Introducing the Rwandan Patriotic Front**

Beyond Rusesabagina, *Hotel Rwanda* also depicts the RPF as a heroic force working to save lives during the genocide. As discussed above, *Hotel Rwanda*’s omission of ongoing Congolese exploitation by multinational corporations and foreign governments relies upon omission of the RPF’s post-genocide human rights abuses. But omission of the RPF’s regional pre-genocide activities also facilitates this concealment of multilateral resource exploitation in the Congo. Nearing the film’s conclusion, the RPF arrive as a messianic force saving a UN convoy from assured destruction at the hands of encroaching Interahamwe militiamen. In this scene, the RPF overwhelm the Interahamwe in a road skirmish, a prelude to the RPF’s eventual containing of the genocide. Sweeping, triumphant music accompanies the RPF’s on-screen entrance. The soundtrack’s heroic timbre amplifies the disciplined and orderly appearance of the RPF soldiers, whose cleaner and more sophisticated uniforms contrast those of the Hutu soldiers and harlequinesque Interahamwe militiamen. Adhikari refers to this sequence as “improbable” and “inept” (290), since the RPF “pursu[ed] a war plan during the genocide that gave greater priority to military victory than to protecting Tutsi civilians” (Kuperman 62). This depiction of the rebels, then, functions to strengthen the RPF’s savior status by distorting the actual nature of the rebel invasion. When the RPF arrive to save the escaping UN convoy, they arrive as an

entity with no history, obscuring the fact that Tutsi as well as Hutu aggression played a part in sowing the seeds of genocide.

In 1990, Habyarimana's government was facing faltering coffee prices, a constraining Structural Adjustment Program, rising tensions between northern and southern Rwanda, and invasion from the RPF, who were receiving "considerable logistical and military support from Uganda." The RPF believed they would be "viewed as a force dedicated to the overthrow of a dictatorship" by the general Rwandan population; instead, they were "perceived as Ugandan-supported counterrevolutionaries in league with a Tutsi fifth column inside Rwanda" (Lemarchand 116). These events fueled Hutu Power ideology inside Rwanda, and the invasion of 1990 was followed by invasions in 1991 and 1992 as well as failed peace talks in 1992 and 1993. The RPF responded to these peace negotiations with non-cooperation and the breach of a cease-fire agreement in early-1993, a move that "antagonized even their allies within Rwanda." Peace negotiations in late-1993 and early-1994, after the genocide had begun, were also refused by the RPF, "despite increasing signs that such refusal would lead to massive retaliation against Tutsi civilians" (Kuperman 62). Rather than a messianic force intervening to quell a genocide in which it had no hand in fomenting, as *Hotel Rwanda* suggests, the RPF and its operations in Rwanda embody an attempt to restore the Tutsi political hegemony of pre-independence Rwanda, even at the expense of civilian Tutsi casualties.

In this regard, the RPF's ascendance to power completes a longstanding restorative political project conceived by the progeny of Ugandan-based Tutsi exiles, a diasporic population perceiving itself as estranged from its ancestral Rwandan origins.

Many of the Tutsis exiled by the Hutu Revolution of 1959 and the subsequent anti-Tutsi violence of the 1960s and 1970s settled in neighboring Uganda, where they developed political and military networks from within the Ugandan army, networks that developed over time to form the RPF. In Uganda, Tutsi refugees faced alternating periods of persecution and privilege. Some of these Tutsi exiles found themselves first in the military service of Ugandan dictator Idi Amin throughout much of the 1970s and then in Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA) in the early- to mid-1980s (Kuperman 65). Museveni's overthrow of Milton Obote, Amin's dictatorial successor, earned those Tutsis who had served in Museveni's rebellion valuable military, governmental, and business positions (65-66). The rise of Museveni also enabled the return to Uganda of the Rwanda Alliance for National Unity (RANU), a Tutsi refugee organization that had moved to Kenya during Obote's second reign (66). In 1987, the newly militarized RANU formulated plans for an armed return to Rwanda and christened its shift in outlook with a name change to the Rwandan Patriotic Front (Prunier, "Rwandan" 125). That project, restoring an idealized Rwandan homeland to its former Tutsi-dominated glory, seems to have assumed primacy over the wellbeing of the Tutsi population internal to Rwanda.

*Hotel Rwanda's* narration of events temporally and geographically excises these complexities from its record of the genocide, prompting the question, why does such dramatic variance from on-the-ground Rwandan political realities characterize a film intended to inform audiences about an African humanitarian crisis? In short, some stories are easier to tell than others. *Hotel Rwanda's* narrowly periodized narration of the Rwandan genocide harmonizes with a larger discursive field characterized by

Western guilt over 1994 coupled with continued evasion of the crisis in the Congo. Admission of UN, US, and European failure in 1994 thereby allows for penance over atrocities of the African past to overshadow concern for atrocities of the African present. Effective concern for human rights in Africa must include a broader understanding of the regional and international mechanisms of licit and illicit commerce that impact Africans across the continent.

Some corpses, however, are easier to memorialize than others. *Hotel Rwanda's* redemptive narrative closure—like the official Rwandan commemorations—memorializes the corpses of 1994, thereby presenting an image of contemporary Rwanda that does not trouble the ideological and material desires underwriting the First World imperative of supporting the RPF. This failure to transcend the trappings of narrow periodization causes a self-defeat of the film's humanitarianist impulses, as a focus on 1994 overshadows ongoing human rights abuses in Rwanda and the DRC. A broadly periodized narration of Rwanda would allow unsavory facts to rise to the surface, facts that have faced both deliberate and unconscious suppression. The image of a peaceful post-genocide Rwanda ruled by benevolent victims-turned-saviors now allied with the US serves the desire for Western atonement as well as continued and invisible exploitation of the Congo (from which multinational electronics and technologies companies benefit and with which, subsequently, the world's leading countries have no incentive to get involved), whereas the more accurate image of a post-genocide Rwanda plagued by reprisal massacres, failed national reconciliation, prisons overpopulated with the spuriously accused, and a militarized government

leading imperialistic operations in the DRC clashes with the ideological and material interests of a world addicted to coltan.

CHAPTER 3  
WHOSE “DUTY TO REMEMBER”? : RECOUNTING RWANDA IN *MURAMBI: THE BOOK OF BONES* AND *THE SHADOW OF IMANA: TRAVELS IN THE HEART OF RWANDA*

In 1998, ten African writers brought together by Nocky Djedanoum, organizer of the annual African arts and culture festival Fest’Africa, visited Rwanda to witness the fallout of the 1994 genocide. The project, “*Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire*,” commonly referred to in English as the “Duty to Remember” project, asked its contributors to meditate on the continental and, in turn, global significance of the genocide. Djedanoum conceived the project as a testament to the “moral solidarity of writers everywhere in Africa with the Rwandan people,” as “a sharing of mourning” (qtd. in Small 86). And while the notion that a literary initiative can provide a platform for shared mourning with the victims and survivors of genocide has faced many significant criticisms,<sup>1</sup> Djedanoum has persistently and staunchly defended the project as an African political imperative that needs no justification because “it involves Africans responding to an African tragedy” (Marczewski 4). Since “journalistic essays by Western journalists” had comprised the vast majority of writing on the genocide, Djedanoum saw this organized undertaking as an answer to the “critical need . . . for Africans to speak out” and break the “general silence in Africa” concerning the crisis (Cazenave 71). These works thereby constitute an “attempt to construct a memory of the genocide” that makes the tragedy “part of Africa as a whole . . .” (Small 88).

Through their attention to global dynamics, namely the failures and complicities of the

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<sup>1</sup> As Audrey Small notes, it may be difficult for literature to create solidarity with Rwandans when language barriers and widespread illiteracy and poverty prohibit the average Rwandan from reading or even acquiring the fictional as well as nonfictional works comprising Djedanoum’s project (88). The solidarity “offered by non-Rwandan authors,” Marczewski explains, “has been viewed by some as a cynical gesture to provide relief from the guilt of having not reacted during the genocide” (28).

UN, the US, and France, the project contributors also highlight the transcontinental significance of the Rwandan genocide, enacting what Nicki Hitchcott describes as a “global act of commemoration” (“A Global” 154).

But what exactly does this “global act of commemoration” achieve, what sort of historical perspective on the genocide does it articulate? When these writers assume this duty to remember, which aspects of the genocide should they remember? Do they remember for the dead or for the living? For Tutsis alone or also for Hutus? Do they remember for Rwandans, for Africans, or for the entire world? In the words of Amy S. Marczewski, “[p]oliticizing memory makes memorializing genocide a partisan—and therefore divisive—issue” (234). Memorialization, as both a potential cause and effect of politically instrumentalist historical narratives, bears a reciprocal relationship with the politicization of the past.

Perhaps in response to these very difficulties, the literary device of polyphony and the motif of travel and discovery recur throughout the “Duty to Remember” project, most notably in Boris Boubacar Diop’s novel *Murambi, le livre des ossements* (as *Murambi: The Book of Bones*) and Veronique Tadjou’s genre-blurring travel essay *L’ombre d’Imana: Voyage jusqu’ au bout du Rwanda* (as *The Shadow of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda*). Diop, in particular, has received significant praise for his polyphonic use of multiple narrators, including Tutsis and Hutus, nationals and exiles, and survivors and perpetrators as well as a French soldier. Marczewski describes *Murambi* as “a text that foregrounds multiple voices and dialogue while also including essential elements of historical discourse” (Marczewski 173). Hitchcott argues that “[t]he effect of these multiple narrators is to encourage the reader to view the genocide

from a variety of different angles and to resist a reductive interpretation of the events” (“Writing” 54). Polyphony thereby allows Diop to confront the reductive perspectives offered by colonial discourse, Eurocentrism, and Hutu extremism:

This decision to present the genocide from a wide range of points of view implicitly challenges the self-interested, monolithic narratives of Belgian colonialism, “la francophonie,” Hutu Power, RTLM (Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines) and the Western media, all of which helped to essentialise Rwanda in the global imagination, and directly or indirectly contributed to the success of the genocide. (Hitchcott “A Global” 156-57)

While it is significant that *Murambi* polyphonically challenges such reductive interpretations of the genocide, the monolithic narratives listed here do not account for all of the essential elements of the Rwandan genocide’s history. Belgian colonialism, French imperialism, Hutu extremism, and the Euro-American media have all participated in essentializing Rwanda at various times for various ends, but so too has the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) by officially sanctioning an instrumentalist, Tutsi-centric genocide narrative that has had severe repercussions at home in Rwanda and abroad in the Congo. Failure to recognize this troubling aspect of the genocide’s aftermath allows a new silence on the genocide to replace the general African silence that the “Duty to Remember” project has sought to break.

The absence of the RPF from Hitchcott’s list of those who have “essentialised Rwanda in the global imagination” points to a lacuna in critical interpretations of *Murambi* as well as *Murambi* itself. While there is and should not be a mandate requiring an aesthetic text to work in a historically comprehensive manner, it is revealing to evaluate how creative works shape history and consider what broader discourses in which those narratives might participate. The ostensibly “decentered structure” of *Murambi* (Hitchcott, “Writing” 54) is rather centered on a particular historical narrative

that emphasizes the effects of French imperialism in Rwanda, a focus consonant with Diop's critical writings on the *la francophonie* (Qader 16). In turn, by excising the infidelities of the RPF from its narration of the genocide while emphasizing French complicity, *Murambi*, for quite legitimate reasons, essentializes Rwanda as an exemplar of disaster in the African Francophonie, of French imperialism gone hellishly wrong. When Dr. Karekezi, a notorious genocidaire in Diop's novel, states to Colonel Perrin, a French military officer, that "What happened in Rwanda is, whether you like it or not, a moment of French history in the twentieth century," he is precisely right for many reasons, including France's logistical and military support of the genocidal regime and its harboring of genocide perpetrators after the fact via Operation Turquoise.<sup>2</sup> In its exposure of France's complicity in the Rwandan genocide, *Murambi* does demonstrate the "potential . . . for articulating and imagining that which is absent or suppressed in official versions of the genocide" (Hitchcott, "Writing" 56). But this potential is only partially realized, as *Murambi* fails to reveal that which is actively suppressed in the RPF's official narration of the genocide—ongoing human rights abuses, a slide toward one-party rule, military operations in the Congo. In fact, Diop's focus on French complicity holds much in common with the Rwandan government's own focus on the failures of Europe and North America, a rhetorical strategy meant to "legitimize [Rwandan President Paul] Kagame's aggressive military activity within the Great Lakes region" by using "the memory of the genocide as a shield against any criticism of his politics. By reminding the United Nations or countries like France, Belgium, and the

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<sup>2</sup> As William J. Lahneman notes, "France defined Operation Turquoise as a humanitarian mission to secure and protect displaced persons and civilians, notably Tutsis and moderate Hutus," but "Operation Turquoise has been criticized for granting refuge to Hutu perpetrators of genocide and facilitating their safe exit into Zaire with their arms intact" (85-86).

United States how they looked the other way in 1994, the official memorialization of the genocide functions as a powerful rebuttal to any interference from foreign powers” (Dauge-Roth 91). On the surface, *Murambi*’s polyphonic construction may seem to “contrast . . . the project of the Rwandan government, who views a single memory as essential to identity formation in post-genocide society” (Marczewski 190). But polyphony, still prone to politicization, does not offer a certain solution to the pitfalls of memorialization. *Murambi* remains silent about related and ongoing atrocities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and effectively freezes the effects of the genocide within Rwanda’s national boundaries. Much like the prevailing discourse embodied by the Rwandan government’s official genocide narrative, *Murambi* thereby conceals ongoing Central African atrocities even as it seeks to commemorate the Rwandan atrocities of 1994.

If the Duty to Remember writers seek “to situate the Rwandan genocide within a transnational, transhistorical and transcultural framework” as an act of “global memory work” (Hitchcott, “A Global” 158), comparative analysis of Diop’s and Tadjó’s texts reveals a significant divergence within Djedanoum’s project as to how such global memorialization is conceptualized and achieved. Tadjó’s *The Shadow of Imana*, for instance, provides a drastically different articulation of the Rwandan genocide than that of Diop’s *Murambi* by utilizing a broader spatial and temporal construction of the crisis, a more radical form of polyphony (in which excerpts from Tadjó’s interviewees often stand with limited or no mediation), and a bifurcated narrative structure (organized around “The First Journey” and “The Second Journey”), that resists definitive closure. These structural characteristics demonstrate a departure from the Diopian political desire to

dwell on France's contributions to Rwandan strife at the expense of ignoring RPF complicity, thus allowing for engagement with the struggle for national reconciliation in post-genocide Rwanda. In actuality, Diop and Tadjó utilize quite different forms of polyphony in their respective works, one that carries the germ of politicization and another that actively resists it, one that rehearses what Achille Mbembe describes as "history as sorcery" ("African Modes" 245) and another that resists such recourse to the "cult of victimization" (244). For instance, in focusing the light of criticism securely on French imperialism in *Murambi*, Diop allows the participation of the RPF in the genocide's history to remain in the shadows. Such a "privileging of [African] victimhood over [African] subjecthood is derived," Mbembe argues, "from a distinctively nativist understanding of history—one of history as sorcery": "According to this point of view, the history of Africa can be reduced to a series of subjugations, narrativized in a seamless continuity" ("African Modes" 244). This perspective on African history can have the dangerous effect of inoculating Africans against criticism of their own exploitation of other Africans, as demonstrated by the specific case of Rwandan imperialism in the Congo. Tadjó resists this trap by focusing on the multiplicity of actors, European and African, who have contributed to Rwanda's ongoing tribulations. This is important as a means to achieving true reconciliation in Rwanda and ameliorating the cyclical, regional violence within which the history of the Rwandan genocide is ensconced.

### **Polyphony or Ventriloquism?**

*Murambi* is a story of travel and discovery. For Diop's protagonist Cornelius Uvimana, the son of Dr. Karekezi, traveling to post-genocide Rwanda marks a return from exile. As Diop has explained, Cornelius's status as a returning exile provides "a 'way in' for the reader, through whom one could begin to grasp the complexity of the

situation” (Small 94). Cornelius returns to Rwanda to learn about the genocide and attempt to understand it. The genocide thereby becomes an existential cipher for Cornelius, a key to understanding his life as a whole: “It was clear that everything he had experienced abroad, away from Rwanda, would only find its true meaning in what had happened four years earlier. In a certain way his life was just beginning” (36). In his return from exile, however, Cornelius resembles the countless tourists who travel to Rwanda to visit the country’s genocide sites in order to discover the “truth” of the genocide. When Cornelius’s childhood friends Stanley Ntaramira and Jessica Kamanzi, former RPF agents, pick him up from the airport, the taxi driver ascribes tourist status to Cornelius by asking him to write down the name of his country. Puzzled by the taxi driver’s assumption that he is a foreigner, Cornelius seeks an explanation from Stanley and Jessica. Stanley explains that genocide tourism has become a cottage industry in contemporary Rwanda; the taxi driver has mistaken Cornelius for just another foreign visitor: “they’ve been coming to us from all over the place as of two or three years ago” (38). Along with this touristic ascription, Cornelius’s distance from the genocide manifests in his desire to write an ill-conceived play about a French general who mourns the death of his intelligence-gathering “spy-cat” yet remains unmoved by the human victims of the genocide (57). After drinking “a few glasses of Primus and whiskey” (50), an inebriated Cornelius describes his idea for a play to Roger, a friend of Stanley’s. Roger responds to Cornelius’s summary of the play with a mirthless warning, “You shouldn’t drink. It’s dangerous for you” (57). These passages illustrate that despite his identity as a Rwandan exile, Cornelius’s relationship to the genocide

resembles that of the naïve tourist, the foreigner that comes to Rwanda to gawk at the spectacle of its genocide memorials and ponder humanity's capacity for barbarity.

But the revelation that his father, Dr. Karekezi, masterminded the massacre at Murambi undercuts Cornelius's naïveté and changes the meaning of his return to Rwanda. Cornelius plans to visit the memorial at Murambi and meet with his uncle, genocide survivor Siméon Habineza, to learn more about the genocide. As Jessica reveals, Cornelius has a more intimate relationship with the genocide than he had initially conceived: "Tomorrow you're going to Murambi, and you should know that your father organized the massacre of several thousand people there. The carnage at the Murambi Polytechnic, that was his doing. You should also know that he had your mother, Nathalie Kayumba, your sister Julienne, and your brother François, and all his in-laws killed there" (76-77). Upon learning that his own father plotted the murder of thousands, including the rest of his family, Cornelius's life is forever changed. Now, rather than an exile returning only to search for meaning in a genocide that victimized his family, Cornelius also finds himself filially connected to the perpetration of that genocide: "He was the son of a monster. . . . Now, his return from exile could no longer have the same meaning. From now on, the only story he had to tell was his own. The story of his family. He had suddenly discovered that he had become the perfect Rwandan: both guilty and a victim" (78). The realization that he is not just the son of a genocide victim but also the son of a genocide perpetrator causes Cornelius to rethink his relation to the genocide. Cornelius subsequently becomes "ashamed of having entertained the idea of a play," and his "nagging conscience" leads him to "tirelessly recount the horror . . . because he [now] s[ees] in the genocide of Rwandan Tutsis a

great lesson in simplicity. Every chronicler could at least learn—something essential to his art—to call a monster by its name” (179). As Marczewski suggests, “[i]n overcoming his ‘bad faith’ and dedicating himself to telling the story of Rwanda’s ‘horror,’ Cornelius’s story ends up resembling that of Diop, and the *écrire* project in general . . .”

(Marczewski 173). Cornelius, now burdened with the responsibility of telling the story of Rwanda to the world, embodies the very responsibility to remember and recount that burdens Diop and the other Duty to Remember writers.

But, whatever issues Cornelius’s filial connection to the genocide may raise are foreclosed by Diop’s recourse to a polemical narrative that reduces Rwanda to a metonym for the African Francophonie. Despite its polyphonic narrative strategy, *Murambi* consistently works within a spatial and temporal construction of the genocide’s history that ignores the complicity of the RPF in the genocide’s prelude and aftermath, both nationally in Rwanda and regionally in the DRC, while emphasizing French complicity in Rwanda’s travails. While Diop’s “mobilization of a multiplicity of voices” may seem to confront “the tendency to create a single and official version of memory” (Marczewski 189-90), the historical perspective delivered through this multiplicity of voices corroborates the RPF’s official version of the genocide. Despite *Murambi*’s ensemble of narrative voices, Diop’s novel presents the same historical articulation of the Rwandan genocide time and time again, an articulation that begins with the 1959 Hutu Revolution. While it is fitting that Stanley and Jessica, the novel’s primary RPF characters, privilege an RPF-friendly historical narrative, Cornelius, the caretaker at the Nyamata church (74), and the father of Faustin Gasana, an Interhamwe militiaman (17), all begin their summaries of Rwanda’s trajectory toward genocide with the onset of the

Hutu Revolution (1959-1962), in which Gregoire Kayibanda and his Hutu partisans, with Belgian assistance, broke the hold of Tutsi political dominance (Lemarchand 114). Stanley, who has “traveled all over the world to raise funds and explain the RPF’s struggle to foreigners,” often expresses exasperation over the misconceptions non-Rwandans have about the genocide (45, 46). In Stanley’s words, “The genocide didn’t begin on the sixth of April 1994, but in 1959 through little massacres that no-one paid attention to” (48). The massacres Stanley refers to were part of the violence and social upheaval that constituted the Hutu Revolution, a political and ideological movement that did deepen the social and ethnic rifts that influenced waves of anti-Tutsi violence throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. But Stanley neglects the fact that the Hutu Revolution began as a response to Hutu disenfranchisement at the hands of the Belgian-sponsored Tutsi elite, an omission that expunges Tutsi transgressions from Rwandan history.

In Jessica’s narration, the events of 1959 serve not only as the starting point of the genocide’s history but also as a deviation from the social normality that preceded the Hutu Revolution: “Ever since 1959, every young Rwandan, at one moment or another in his life, has to answer the same question: Should we just sit back and wait for the killers, or try to do something so that our country can go back to being normal?” (30). For Jessica, social normality is consonant with the Tutsi domination of colonial and precolonial Rwanda, but Tutsi political dominance remains invisible in Jessica’s romanticized view of the past. Her historical perspective suggests that political violence was miniscule or perhaps nonexistent during the “normal” period that preceded the Hutu Revolution. Jessica reiterates this sentiment in a later chapter, “The Return of

Cornelius,” by describing the RPF invasions of 1994 as a fight to regain the normality of pre-1959 Rwanda: “when all’s said and done, it doesn’t really matter what happens to some or to others, or even to the country. We fought to make Rwanda normal. That’s all. It was a good fight” (63). In Jessica’s version of Rwandan history, for instance, the Hutu Revolution ushers in an epoch of social aberration, one that mars the normative social milieu that characterized the Rwanda of bygone days. Subsequently, the RPF struggle “to make Rwanda normal” figures as a sacrificial and restorative project bigger than the individuals who participate as well as the country itself, a position that seems to derive from a Tutsi-centric historical perspective that does not even recognize that Tutsi dominance ever existed.

Cornelius gives a similar summary of the genocide’s history to Zakya, his girlfriend in Djibouti, and, much like Stanley, experiences a “gnawing irritation” from trying to explain Rwanda’s travails to a foreigner (66). As Cornelius explains to Jessica, Zakya “had the same old stereotypes in her head: two ethnic groups who’ve hated each other since time immemorial. . . . I tried to explain it to her patiently. I told her that it wasn’t true and especially that the first massacres dated from 1959 and not from the beginning of time” (65). Just like Stanley and Jessica, Cornelius excludes the social inequities that foregrounded the events of 1959 from his description of the genocide’s history, providing an RPF-friendly genocide script that ignores Tutsi complicity in Rwandan hardships. When Zakya resists Cornelius’s tidy explanation, however, he delves deeper into Rwandan history, desperately searching for answers: “Zakya caused me to doubt. I went back to studying the history of Rwanda. But I didn’t find any answers there. The documents prove that the Hutu and the Twa were oppressed long

ago by the Tutsi. I am Hutu but I do not want to live with that legacy. I refuse to ask of the past more meaning than it can give to the present” (67). Cornelius’s trek through the historical record could have made possible a more complex understanding of the genocide than that of the 1959/1994 narrative, but Cornelius quickly forecloses this opportunity by equating earlier events in Rwanda’s history with an irretrievable and irrelevant past. Cornelius fails to see that he has already asked the past to give meaning to the present by envisioning 1959 as the prefiguration of 1994, a pattern of selective historical memory that supports a Tutsi nationalist vision of Rwandan history.

This historical perspective corresponds to an RPF-friendly spatial understanding of the genocide’s aftermath that ends at Rwanda’s border with the Congo, over which Interahamwe and Hutu Army forces fled to escape the encroaching RPF toward the end of the genocide. Cornelius conveys this narrow geographic vision when he compares the genocide to other contemporary conflicts throughout the world while omitting the most relevant and related conflict, the crisis in the Congo: “we’ve never seen so many appalling things all at the same time. The Balkans. Algeria. Afghanistan. And did you know that in Sierra Leone they just mutilate their victims?” (64). While such comparisons can help demonstrate that African crises are not the result of some intrinsically African defect but rather bear similarities with other sociopolitical conflicts around the world (although Cornelius awards Sierra Leone the most grisly status), this list of comparative atrocities curiously omits the DRC, suggesting a conceptual disconnect between related regional conflicts in Rwanda and the Congo, namely the Rwandan genocide and the Congo Wars, conflicts that involve many of the same key actors. *Murambi*, in fact, has nothing to say about the Congo, save for a few references

to Zaire as a refugee destination, and subsequently presents a geographic understanding of the genocide's aftermath that ends at the Rwandan side of the Rwanda-Congo border. *Murambi* therefore commemorates the Rwandan genocide in a manner that historically and spatially freezes the conflict's effects in 1994 Rwanda, thereby concealing the post-genocide activities of expelled Hutu forces and the RPF—including the latter's participation in the ouster of the Congolese government—within the DRC. In this regard, *Murambi* replaces the African silence on the genocide, the silence Djedanoum hoped to break, with a silence on RPF abuses throughout the region. The latter silence has had a devastating effect—the nearly one million corpses attributed to the Rwandan genocide have since been eclipsed at least four-fold by violence in the DRC (Lemarchand 5), a great deal of which has been fomented by the Rwandan military's central role in the Congo Wars and the Congolese conflict minerals trade.

In *Murambi*, these Rwandan indiscretions are ignored in favor of Diop's vigilant focus on French complicity in the Rwandan genocide. In keeping with the novel's polyphonic construction, Diop uses a variety of voices to highlight France's longstanding allegiance with President Habyarimana and the extremist interim government that filled the vacuum left by his assassination. While France has much to answer for regarding its role in creating the political landscape that fostered Rwanda's descent into genocide, Diop's excessive emphasis on French complicity enables nonrecognition of the RPF's role in Rwandan strife. If literary polyphony allows for the minimally mediated coexistence of conflicting, discordant voices within a single narrative, Diop's recurrent critique of the African Francophonie amounts to a false or ventriloquial polyphony, wherein many of the narrators that populate *Murambi* voice strikingly similar sentiments

despite their divergent subject positions. From the mouths of genocidaires, RPF agents, French soldiers, and Hutu radio announcers springs forth an insistent recognition of France's scandalous relationship with Hutu nationalism. When Jessica notes before the genocide erupts that some "sinister civil servants" in France had a vested interest in keeping the RPF out of Kigali (28), her statement is both historically accurate and appropriate in a literary sense to her role as an RPF agent. But we learn much the same thing from Dr. Karekezi, who, despite speaking from the opposite end of the political spectrum, has more to say about the French than he does his arch enemies in the RPF (105). Although comprised of "the competing and sometimes contradictory voices of perpetrators, bystanders, and 'outsiders'" (Marczewski 187), Diop's polyphonic narrative deploys a remarkably harmonious historical perspective that reconciles the conflicting sentiments of these multiple narrators.

Beyond Jessica and Karekezi, Diop's critique of French complicity reaches its apotheosis in the words of French military officer Colonel Perrin. Through Perrin, the reader learns that the genocide has sparked a debate in the French government over whether or not the French military should intervene and engage the RPF rebels in battle: "In Paris, confusion had reached a peak. Certain enthusiasts already saw us going at it with the RPF resistance fighters in the streets of Kigali, to sort this business out one on one" (119). Colonel Perrin connects this paternalistic relationship between France and Hutu-controlled Rwanda to a near pathological desire among some French officials to maintain control of *la francophonie* at all costs:

I'm always a bit thrown off by these men with a one-track mind: "Africa is ours, we're not going to let it go." They're all rather crazy over there. . . . I noticed that the least resilient of them ended up becoming racists. Knowing of Africa only their distant and docile creatures, chosen precisely for their

mediocrity, they get to be convinced, even if they can never say it out loud, that Africa is pure shit. And that's why they believed, in nicknaming the RPF fighters the "Khmer Noir," they would turn the whole world against them. . . . (123)

Here, Perrin offers an insightful critique of French imperialism in Africa, one that elucidates both the relationship that exists between the French government and their despotic African protégés and the racism that informs this kind of neocolonialism, as such fundamental and opportunistic tampering with African governance operates under the assumption that "Africa is pure shit" and thereby legitimately subject to European political engineering.

This depiction of the French government's misguided determination to support their Hutu allies to the bitter end corresponds with the actual sentiments of French President François Mitterrand at the time of the genocide. Mitterrand saw the RPF's mission to invade Rwanda and topple the Habyarimana government simply as part of an Anglophone crusade to conquer Francophone Rwanda in order to diminish French influence in Africa (Melvern 257-60).<sup>3</sup> Cornelius indicts Mitterrand toward the novel's end, paraphrasing the callous words that "the Old Man" had for Rwanda in 1995: "In those countries a genocide doesn't mean much" (177). In a similar vein, Diop directly and vehemently criticizes Mitterrand in his preface to genocide survivor Yolande Mukagasana's memoir *Les Blessures du silence* (2001), "a preface that the French publisher [Actes Sud] refused to include because it aligns the former French president with the '*génocidaires*' . . ." (Hitchcott, "Writing" 56). Considering Diop's mission to confront French imperialism, in general, and Mitterrand, in particular, reveals the lucidity

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<sup>3</sup> Mitterrand's worse fears have since come true, with the US- and UK-supported Anglophone RPF making English an official Rwandan language in 1996 (Crystal 4).

of Perrin's anti-French sentiments as a ventriloquism of Diop's own anti-French political agenda. While Mitterrand's behavior and attitudes toward French Africa most certainly warrant vitriolic condemnation, the transposition of Diop's Francophonie critique to the mouth of Colonel Perrin has a peculiar effect, one that inoculates the RPF against criticism: just as Perrin moves from the general case of French Africa to the specific case of Rwanda ("they get to be convinced . . . that Africa is pure shit. And that's why they believed, in nicknaming the RPF fighters the "Khmer Noir," they would turn the whole world against them."), the RPF becomes an unassailable entity, as only the French imperialists that Perrin castigates would dare denounce the RPF.

While Diop's critique of French imperialism in Rwanda and, by extension, the African Francophonie is well-founded, his insistence on iterating French offenses at the expense of ignoring RPF offenses grants *Murambi* a morally reductive political climate, in which the Hutu and the French share responsibility for Rwandan political strife while the RPF stand as eternally innocent savior figures. If, as Hitchcott suggests, *Murambi's* numerous "[c]riticisms of the French government reveal the extent to which the genocide extended beyond the Rwandan nation-state" (Hitchcott, "A Global" 159), they only reveal the transnational reach of the genocide in one direction—toward France.

### **Beyond "History as Sorcery"**

In Tadjó's *The Shadow of Imana*, a very different historical and geographical perspective on the Rwandan genocide emerges, one that foregoes a polemical insistence on emphasizing French complicity and resists the lure of synthesizing the multiplicity of voices present in the text into a singular and harmonious historical narration. Like *Murambi*, *The Shadow of Imana* is framed as a narrative of travel and discovery, but the subject of Tadjó's journey is the author herself. Where Diop situates

the reader's journey into Rwanda through the returning exile Cornelius and his progression toward the revelation of his father's criminality, Tadjó immediately situates the reader in a more universal register by focusing on issues of human subjectivity, namely the fear of the other as an engine for mass violence. At the beginning of her journey Tadjó positions herself as an outsider burdened with the desire to understand Rwanda, which comes to signify "a nightmare, a primal fear" that she must "exorcise": "I was starting from a particular premise: what had happened there concerned us all. It was not just one nation lost in the dark heart of Africa that was affected. . . . I could no longer keep Rwanda buried inside me. I needed to lance the abscess, lay bare the wound and bandage it" (3). For Tadjó, then, the Rwandan genocide testifies not to a specifically African mode of savagery but to an all-too-human capacity for large-scale violence. Acknowledging this capacity haunts Tadjó, as demonstrated in her use of nightmare and exorcism tropes, and forms the underlying motive for her search for understanding in Rwanda. Rather than focusing on external forces (Belgian colonialism, French imperialism) as catalysts for the genocide, Tadjó directs her attention toward the internal social conditions that sparked the genocide and considers the potentiality of a similar crisis occurring in her own country, the Ivory Coast: "The faces look familiar to me. Everything is so similar to my own home that it breaks my heart" (9). Tadjó also considers the circumstances in which participants were embedded, asking herself how she would have responded: "what would I have done if I had been caught up in the spiraling violence of the massacre? . . . Would I have killed or would I have let myself be killed?" Tadjó concludes, "Rwanda is inside me, in you, in all of us" (37). By employing this existential register, Tadjó tries to envision the

circumstances that can turn neighbor against neighbor in a manner that does not resort to universal signifiers of evil, madness, or inhumanity. In doing so, she approximates Dominick LaCapra's contention that while writing about "perpetrators, who may also be traumatized by their experience . . . the historian should attempt to understand and explain such behavior and experience as far as possible—even recognize the unsettling possibility of such behavior and experience in him- or herself" (*Writing* 41).

Contra Diop, who has Cornelius progress from naiveté to epiphany, Tadjó maintains the position of traveler and suspends the possibility of revelation. By positioning herself as a tourist/traveler, Tadjó comes to construct a spatial and temporal understanding of the Rwandan genocide that invokes its regional, Central African significance. For instance, during her plane trip to Rwanda in "The First Journey," Tadjó describes a newspaper story she reads while on the plane about tourists in Uganda who were murdered by Hutu extremists exiled by the ascendance of the RPF in Rwanda:

The tourists murdered in Uganda are still making headline news. . . . Eight foreigners, including an American couple, have been murdered in the Ugandan jungle by, according to informed sources, Hutu rebels. Despite the steep terrain and the insects, the tourists had come in hope of seeing some gorillas.

The journalist wants to know who is to blame, starting with the travel agency and going right on up to the government and political authorities in Uganda. . . . In my case though, no one could claim that I have not been duly warned. (7)

The European and American ecotourists Tadjó describes had traveled to southwestern Uganda to see the renowned mountain gorillas of Central Africa, a species also indigenous to northwestern Rwanda and the eastern DRC. Popularized by the work of Dian Fossey, the primatologist whose field work in Rwanda inspired the film *Gorillas in the Mist* (1988), these mountain gorillas had served as the principle attraction for

Central African tourism, especially in Rwanda and the Congo. But unlike these tourists, as Hitchcott notes, Tadjó enacts a reversal of the colonial trope of exploration and discovery by—as an African woman traveler rather than a white “explorer”—searching for humanity rather than savagery in her Rwandan travel narrative:

Tadjó’s gaze has a clear agenda: to expose and undermine the Western touristic reading of Rwanda as an exotic, dangerous, uncivilised place, in which mountain gorillas are more important than a million dead citizens. . . . Following in the footsteps of Stanley and Livingstone, she is part of an expedition to “discover” an unfamiliar and possibly dangerous place, but rather than search for the “primitive Other,” Tadjó endeavours to find the humanity behind the genocide. (“Travels” 151)

By showing a keener interest in the human inhabitants of Central Africa, Tadjó’s mission differs substantially from that of the murdered tourists. However, Tadjó still ascribes herself touristic status, claiming she is aware of and subject to the same dangers these tourists faced in their journey to the Great Lakes region. Through her identification with the murdered tourists, Tadjó disavows any privileged status that may derive from her occupation as an African writer; her subject position does not grant her any automatic insights or immediate knowledge of the genocide. Tadjó therefore strives to suspend her own preconceptions and political perspective as she embarks on her journey in order to learn from what Rwanda presents her rather than imprint her own politicized narrative of African history onto Rwanda.

This attempted suspension of Tadjó’s preconceptions allows for a more future-oriented depiction of post-genocide Rwanda, one that fully engages the difficulties of national reconciliation and the unrest that continues to vex Rwanda and its neighbors in the region. Differing drastically from Diop’s insistent iteration of the 1959 to 1994 timeline in *Murambi*, Tadjó notes the ongoing and multilateral nature of Hutu-Tutsi strife in post-genocide Rwanda: “And still today, the conflicts continue. Sporadic but regular

incursions on the part of the Hutu rebels. Attacks on and counter-attacks by the government in power. . . . Who can swear that this won't begin all over again if hearts are filled with hatred once more? We have to dismantle the cycle of violence. We must continue to condemn every form of massacre" (34). This foreboding image of cyclical violence recurs in the section "The Wrath of the Dead," narrated by a diviner who warns against displaying the corpses of genocide victims: "What we must do now is bury the dead according to our rites, bury their desiccated bodies, their bones growing old in the open air, so that we keep of them nothing but their memory, heightened by respect . . ." (44). For the diviner, displaying victims' bodies constitutes a grave act of disrespect against the traditional burial rites and the victims themselves. Such displays are also complicit in perpetuating violence and hatred: "Men and women, guard against a desire for vengeance and the perpetual cycle of violence and reprisals. The dead are not at peace because your hearts are still shot through with hatred. . . ." (47). Through the voice of the diviner, *The Shadow of Imana* illustrates precisely what gets lost in the 1959/1994 script that informs *Murambi*—the cyclical nature of Central African political violence, a primary obstacle to national reconciliation in Rwanda.

In the section titled "The Lawyer from Kigali," however, Tadjó demonstrates the difficulties that accompany the project of dismantling cyclical violence. From the unnamed lawyer from Kigali, Tadjó learns that the Rwandan judicial system has devised "four categories of responsibility" to facilitate the arduous process of prosecuting those accused of participating in the genocide. The sheer number of the accused—"One hundred and thirty thousand prisoners! Even the United States does not have so many"—and the significant differences in magnitude that characterize each alleged

crime necessitate the use of these categories. Category one, for instance, includes “[m]en and women in positions of authority, that is to say those who ordered or encouraged the massacres by manipulating the people,” while category two encompasses “those who obeyed orders, who killed under duress.” In category three, we find “those who perhaps did not kill but who wounded or mutilated,” and in category four, “those who committed economic crimes like pillage, destruction, theft and dispossession” (24). Such categorization attempts to make prosecutable an unwieldy number of prisoners, but delineating the severe crimes from the minimal, the volitional from the compulsory, only accounts for the first step in the legal process.

The question of just punishment still remains. When it comes to punishing the categories of highest responsibility, the lawyer from Kigali “believes in the death penalty” (24), but Tadjó’s ambivalent description of an execution at the Nyamata stadium calls the merit of the death penalty into question: “the execution squad opened fire and continued to fire for four or five minutes. The crowd applauded but the atmosphere was grim. . . . In various districts, on the same day, seventeen other prisoners had been executed” (25). Tadjó suspends direct judgment of the use of public executions, but her tone conveys a sense of futility and distrust toward the death penalty as a tool of justice. Her skepticism is amplified by her recurrent inclusion of stories of spurious genocide accusations and their decimating effects on the lives of the accused. Jailed for accusations of genocide participation but later released due to “lack of proof,” Jean-Baptiste, a former headmaster, now suffers—in addition to the loss of his daughter to the genocide—from stigmatization, unemployment, and the impoverishment of his family (21). Similar accusations and stigmatization led Romain, who preferred

death to the humiliation of unemployment, to commit suicide (55). Consolate conveys a similar story about her mother, who, imprisoned on a spurious accusation of genocide complicity, awaits a trial that may never come (27).

In “The Second Journey” Tadjó engages with the difficulties vexing post-genocide Rwanda even more forcefully while simultaneously calling her own ability to comprehend and coherently narrate the genocide into question. Tadjó immediately frames “The Second Journey” in a way that calls attention to these difficulties inherent in the duty to remember, beginning with a retelling of the story of the murdered ecotourists. Once again, Tadjó reads a newspaper story about the murders during her flight to Rwanda. While both stories attribute the killings to Hutu rebels, the first story describes eight murders, “including an American couple” (7), but the second describes fourteen, all English-speakers murdered as a warning to the RPF’s allies in the US and Britain (83). After describing this second version of the story, Tadjó introduces a third perspective on the murdered tourists from a fellow traveler, a member of the Dian Fossey Foundation:

I ask my traveling companion if she is not frightened. She gives me another version of events. The tourists were not supposed to die. No one really wanted to harm them. It was just that the scales of chance were tipped by an unfortunate circumstance. They found themselves at the wrong place at the wrong time. As far as the authorities are concerned everything is back to normal. The chain of volcanoes is peaceful once more. (83)

Tadjó’s second journey to Rwanda therefore begins with an erosion of the certainty that one can possess complete factual knowledge of an event; a multiplicity of vantage points and interpretations always accompanies the narration of even the most discrete historical situation. This “disagreement about what really happened to the murdered tourists” parallels the disagreements that also accompany “the history of the Rwandan

genocide” (Hitchcott, “Travels” 151). Differing qualitatively and quantitatively, these three versions of the tourist story demonstrate that the narration of history is not only subject to the influence of politics and ideology but also access to reliable data, as the first published story seems to suffer from a lack of reliable demographic information while the version given by Tadjó’s travelling companion seems tinged by her vocational obligation to the Dian Fossey Foundation.

From here on, Tadjó’s own voice directly enters the narrative with decreasing frequency, as a dizzying assemblage of divergent perspectives on the genocide’s aftermath emerges to fill the pages of “The Second Journey.” Comprised of testimonies from genocidaires (84, 100, 102) and survivors (88, 105, 108, 115), stories of children orphaned by “war, AIDS, or family dislocation” (86, 105), a description of a travelling military tribunal wrought with bureaucratic ineptitude (93), an account of a pastor who, forced by the Interahamwe to kill a child during the genocide, has turned himself in and seeks the death penalty (96), a bleak depiction of the overcrowded Rilissa prison (96-101), a transcription of the Hutu extremist manifesto, “The Ten Commandments of the Hutus” (112-13), and a foreboding description of an RPF counter-massacre of Hutu refugees (114), the remainder of “The Second Journey” continues to challenge simplistic, partisan evaluations of both the genocide’s causes and effects. While visiting the Rilissa prison, for example, Tadjó tours the “Section for Those Condemned to Death or Life Imprisonment,” where a perpetrator of genocide confronts her with startling criticisms of the Rwandan justice system:

One prisoner cannot testify in another’s defence. Only those who survived the genocide can testify. It’s a betrayal created between the courts and the genocide survivors. And what about those who have killed, but have also saved lives? The courts should take that into account. Why is there no

follow-up when someone appeals? Where are the copies of the judgments? Why don't we ever have visits from humanitarian organizations? Some people have pleaded guilty, so why have they still been condemned to death? What should be punished is false testimony, false accusations.

The witnesses for the prosecution are living in our houses and taking our possessions. The judges are among the genocide survivors. How can they judge our cases impartially?

Who will punish the war crimes committed during the liberation? The murders carried out in reprisal? And all those people who took part in the massacres before the genocide of 1994, are they going to be punished as well?

We need to get angry with the political classes. They're living in exile. And when some high-ranking official is arrested, at the international court in Arusha, there's no death penalty. It's only the little folk who are executed. (99)

It is not lost on Tadjó that although these criticisms are substantial and disturbing, listening to a genocidaire's criticisms of the legal system that must prosecute him carries with it a certain discomfort: Does accepting his arguments amount to siding with a killer? Or does ignoring his calls for a more honest and transparent justice system allow new injustices to enter Rwandan society? Subsequently, her commentary on his testimony is brief and focused on his appearance rather than his words (he "looks like the man in the street") and "his intelligence": "He knows that time is ticking away, so he needs to be persuasive" (100). Tadjó therefore defers directly judging or supporting the prisoner's testimony and instead lets his words speak for themselves, and the testimony of this category two felon clearly illustrates the many insufficiencies that plague the Rwandan system for prosecuting genocide. No category exists for those who saved lives by actually killing, a scenario in which performing allegiance to Hutu Power by killing a discovered Tutsi could help conceal harbored Tutsis from the Interahamwe. Barring one prisoner from testifying on another's behalf allows a great number of such

category-blurring acts to go unnoted, as other Hutu prisoners would more likely have witnessed and survived incidents involving Interahamwe search parties than Tutsis. The lack of visits from investigative human rights organizations compounds this breach in the prosecutorial system by allowing faulty record keeping, wrongful condemnations, and the partiality of judges to go unchecked by outside observers. Massacres of Hutus that have occurred before, during, and since the crisis—despite their relation to the genocide—also have no rightful category for prosecution in this legal system, a dynamic that risks granting impunity to reprisal killings. In the section, “Camp Kibeho, South-West Rwanda,” Tadjó describes such a massacre and demonstrates the importance of taking this prisoner’s testimony seriously: “History was going into reverse. The executioners were becoming the victims, the victims the executioners. / As if violence would never cease to engender violence” (115). Above all, none of these prosecutorial insufficiencies actually affect the category one criminals who enjoy impunity, or at least mitigated punishment, in exile—“It’s only the little folk who are executed.”

### **Theresa Mukandori and the Uses of the Dead**

These distinctions in how *Murambi* and *The Shadow of Imana* narrate the history of the Rwandan genocide correspond with how each text deliberates on the subject of Rwanda’s official genocide memorial sites, especially the memorial at Nyamata Church. The Nyamata memorial, which features the corpse of Theresa Mukandori, a Tutsi woman whose raped and mutilated body was exhumed for display in 1997, recurs throughout the *Duty to Remember* texts as an image that significantly shocked project contributors (Cazenave 71). Mukandori’s displayed body raises an ethical quandary over the appropriateness of utilizing a raped, maimed, and murdered woman’s body for memorial purposes. In *Murambi*, however, Diop glosses these issues, ultimately

favoring the RPF contention that the bodies of the dead must be displayed so that no one can forget the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda. Much like, the Duty to Remember writers themselves, Cornelius expresses shock during his visit to the Nyamata Church memorial: “The young woman had her head pushed back and the scream extracted from her by the pain had been frozen on her still grimacing face. Her magnificent tresses were disheveled, and her legs wide apart. A stake—of wood or of iron, Cornelius didn’t know, he was too shocked to notice—had remained lodged in her vagina” (73). Engagement with the ethical issues raised by this display is briefly introduced when the memorial’s caretaker explains that “Theresa’s brother is one of the Nyamata survivors. . . . He wanted a decent grave for his sister, but the authorities pleaded with him to leave her body as it was, so that the whole world could see it” (73). With the wishes of the government trumping the wishes of Theresa’s family, her body becomes a sacrifice to the nation. By using the curiously vague descriptor “the authorities,” however, the caretaker mitigates the ethical questions that charge this morbid display. Shaking his head in shock, Cornelius recalls “the words of a famous African American intellectual” who had given up on defending Africa after his own visit to the Nyamata site: “I’ve been wrong all my life. After what I saw in Rwanda, I think that blacks are, in fact, savages. I recognize my mistake. I never want to fight for anything ever again” (73). Focusing instead on Mukandori’s body as supposed evidence of African savagery, Cornelius does not ponder the ethical issues inherent in displaying Mukandori’s body and instead moves onward in his tour of Nyamata.

Once at the Murambi Polytechnic, Cornelius returns to the issue of whether or not it is appropriate to display victims’ bodies at memorial sites. When he does,

however, he quickly sides with the RPF, condoning such displays as a way to make certain the world does not forget what happened in Rwanda:

Cornelius understood better now the authorities' decision not to bury the victims of the genocide after the controversy that came up about it in the country. Some people said that they had to be given a decent burial, that it isn't good to exhibit cadavers like that. Cornelius didn't agree with that point of view. . . . [E]very Rwandan should have the courage to look reality in the eye. The strong odor of the remains proved that the genocide had taken place only four years earlier and not in ancient times. (147)

Here, Cornelius glosses a number of significant issues to come to the conclusion that displaying the bodies of the dead is an appropriate form of memorialization. As the diviner who narrates Tadjó's section "The Wrath of the Dead" illustrates, displaying corpses breaches traditional burial rites, a religious and cultural issue that does not factor into Cornelius's evaluation of the memorials. Cornelius's evaluation also prompts the question, which "reality" should every Rwandan have the courage to look in the eye, and how do the Rwandan memorial sites testify to this reality? The Rwandan memorials do not present the "reality" of the genocide, but rather a state-sponsored representation of the events of 1994. Such representations, Dauge-Roth reminds us, often contradict the memories and sentiments of actual genocide survivors: "The 'symbolic violence'" of the Rwandan memorial sites "too often censures the survivors' voices by imposing official and impersonal representations in which survivors don't recognize themselves and feel furthermore alienated" (86). Exemplifying the representative and contested power of these memorials, the findings of a two-year sociological study have revealed that while some Rwandans feel that the memorial sites "serve an important function in keeping alive the memory of the" genocide, others believe that official memorialization fuels division, "keeps injuries fresh and prevents victims—and society at large—from moving on" (Longman and Rutagengwa 174).

In *Murambi*, Hitchcott sees a realization of Kenneth Harrow's call for an "account [of the genocide] that refuses to leave the reader out of it" (qtd. in Hitchcott "Writing" 50). Harrow, as Hitchcott notes, has been highly critical of the Rwandan government's use of genocide memorial sites, saying they "function to canalize our reactions and understandings into a fixed narrative of the genocide—one that seems to almost write itself" (qtd. in Hitchcott "Writing" 50). For Hitchcott, the distinction between Diop's literary memorial and the RPF's memorial sites lies in *Murambi's* capacity to "implicat[e] the reader in a process of remembering" the genocide through its narrative use of polyphony and a complicit protagonist (58). However, Harrow draws no such distinction, noting that *Murambi*, much like the official RPF genocide script, emphasizes the massacres of 1959 as the true origin of Rwandan ethnic strife (Harrow 39). For Harrow, then, *Murambi* does not, as Hitchcott suggests, provide an "account that refuses to leave the reader out of it" but rather risks creating its own fixed narrative of the genocide. These complex issues are quickly glossed over in *Murambi* via Cornelius's uncritical acceptance of "the authorities' decision not to bury the victims." In reality, the debates surrounding the memorial sites were far more complicated. In fact, as Hitchcott notes, following Susan E. Cook, "some Rwandans felt that the victims deserved a decent burial and that it was unacceptable to put corpses on display in this way; others, including the RPF government, were committed to exhibiting the bones in order to resist revisionism and prevent future violence" ("Writing" 51). But where Cook draws attention to the conflicting political motivations that informed such debate, Hitchcott seems to unequivocally accept the RPF argument that such commemorative preservation counteracts revisionism and prevents renewed massacres. What is

missing from this reading of the memorial sites, as well as *Murambi* itself, is the acknowledgment that the memorials have already revised history and have already authorized ongoing massacres in Rwanda and the Congo by bolstering the RPF's "genocide credit."

In *The Shadow of Imana*, Tadjó also encounters the exhumed body of Theresa Mukandori at Nyamata, but Tadjó's description of Mukandori differs significantly from Diop's. When the Nyamata caretaker in *Murambi* tells Cornelius that "the authorities pleaded with" Mukandori's brother to let them "leave her body as it was, so that the whole world could see it" (73), his statement implies that Mukandori's body remains where she had been slain, without repositioning for the purpose of the memorial. But as Tadjó notes, the corpses of Nyamata had been moved twice, first by UN soldiers (12), then by the Rwandan government (11). Tadjó prefaces a lengthy description of Mukandori's corpse with a list of biographical details, including explicit recognition of the fact that Mukandori's body had been exhumed three years after her death to be featured in the Nyamata memorial site: "Mukandori. Aged twenty-five. Exhumed in 1997. . . . Any children?" (11). Imbuing the spectacle of Mukandori's displayed body with a clinical character, these short descriptions recall the catalogue notes that accompany archive and artifact collections at libraries and museums. But by considering whether or not Mukandori had children, Tadjó reclaims Mukandori from reduction into a mere museum display. As Hitchcott notes, "the question Tadjó raises as to whether Mukandori had a child signals this recognition [of her humanity]. . . ." ("Travels" 157). This search for Mukandori's humanity contrasts Cornelius's reflection

on the Nyamata site as ostensible evidence of African savagery and leads Tadjó to a sustained and critical description of how she has been displayed:

Her wrists are bound, and tied to her ankles. Her legs are spread wide apart. Her body is lying on its side. She looks like an enormous fossilised foetus. She has been laid on a dirty blanket, in front of carefully lined up skulls and bones scattered on a mat.

She has been raped. A pickaxe has been forced into her vagina. She died from a machete blow to the nape of her neck. You can see the groove left by the impact. She still has a blanket over her shoulders but the material is now encrusted into the skin.

She is there as an example, exhumed from the ditch where she had fallen with the other bodies. On show so that no one can forget. A mummified victim of genocide. Remnants of hair are still attached to her skull. (11)

This description calls attention to the uneasy visual coexistence of the Interahamwe's manipulation and subjugation of Mukandori's body—bound, raped, her genitals impaled—with the memorial's orchestration of her body—a preserved corpse staged before a carefully arranged collection of skeletal remains. Extending her commentary to the whole of the Nyamata site, Tadjó adds, "these dead are screaming still. . . . This is not a memorial but death laid bare, exposed in all its rawness. . ." (12). Tadjó registers a similar ambivalence to the Ntarama Church site, where the bodies of the dead have also been exhumed for display at an official memorial site: "The dead point an accusing finger at the living who are still making use of them. The dead want to return to the earth. They rise up in protest. They want to melt into the earth." (16). In the following section "Tonia Locatelli," named for the Italian nurse who was murdered by Hutu extremists in 1992 for publicly accusing the Habyarimana government for launching massacres against the Tutsi, Tadjó further questions the genocide narrative proffered by the Ntarama and Nyamata memorial sites, noting that countless Hutus also suffered violent deaths during the course of the genocide: "And then, how many bones of

moderate Hutus, those men and women who rejected genocide, are mingled with those of the others?” (17). The Rwandan genocide was built on a story of ethnic division; these memorials retell that story by making all victims Tutsi.

These differences in how *Murambi* and *The Shadow of Imana* deal with the issue of Theresa Mukandori and the memorial uses of the dead correspond with each text's broader vision of the genocide and the politics of commemoration in general. While *Murambi* emphasizes the complicity of foreign actors, primarily the French, and minimizes the complicity of the RPF in Rwanda's pre- and post-genocide strife, *The Shadow of Imana* avoids appropriating and narrowly politicizing Rwandan history by focusing on the multiplicity of actors implicated in and affected by the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath. The devastating and criminal effects of French imperialism in Rwanda and *la francophonie* itself demands attention and criticism, but focusing on European complicity to such an extent that African complicity becomes silenced amounts to construing “history as sorcery,” a perspective that does not take African agency seriously and subscribes instead to a “cult of victimization” that sees Africa as a monolithic passivity eternally subject to the tyranny of abstract historical forces. In effect, the RPF become a messianic force that has miraculously vanquished the occultic powers of imperialism and colonialism. As in *Hotel Rwanda*, failure to recognize the implications of the RPF's pre- and post-genocide activities in the region allows exploitation in Rwanda and the Congo to persist with limited critical attention. In contrast, refusing to obscure RPF complicity in Rwandan political strife uncovers African participation in the politico-economic machinery that continues to immiserate Central Africa. Such an articulation of the genocide's history also reveals the obstacles that

continue to vex contemporary Rwanda, including the appropriation of victims' bodies and survivors' voices for politically instrumentalist commemorations of the Rwandan genocide.

CHAPTER 4  
GENOCIDE AND THE GRAPHIC NOVEL: FORM AND HISTORY IN *MAUS: A SURVIVOR'S TALE*, *SMILE THROUGH THE TEARS: THE STORY OF THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE*, AND *DEOGRATIAS, A TALE OF RWANDA*

Beyond literature such as *Murambi* and *The Shadow of Imana* and films such as *Hotel Rwanda*, the last decade and a half has also seen a flourishing of texts about the Rwandan genocide in other genres, each of them bearing their own formal characteristics, capabilities, and burdens of ethical representation. The graphic novel became a microtrend within this phenomenon when two graphic novels appeared almost simultaneously to tell the story of Rwanda, *Smile Through the Tears: The Story of the Rwandan Genocide* (2005) and *Deogratias, A Tale of Rwanda* (2006). Both texts deal with the Rwandan genocide and its effects, but *Smile Through the Tears* and *Deogratias* differ substantially in their approach to recounting the crisis. *Smile Through the Tears*, written by Rwandan genocide survivor Rupert Bazambanza, depicts the pre- and mid-genocide lives of the Rwangas, a victimized Tutsi family that the author had known since childhood, while *Deogratias*, written by J. P. Stassen, a Belgian journalist and comics artist who lives in Rwanda, follows a Hutu boy who had been forced to participate in the slaughter as he tries to adjust, plagued by alcoholism and genocide flashbacks, to life in postgenocide Rwanda.

The graphic novel, a genre derived from comics and cartoons, may seem an unlikely form for dealing with an event as grave as genocide, a topic that challenges all attempts at understanding and representation, but comics artist Art Spiegelman challenged unfavorable assumptions about the genre's capabilities with his two-volume series *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (1973, 1986). *Maus*, a complex narrative and aesthetic achievement, uses the graphic novel as a vehicle for dealing with the Holocaust, an

event so destructive and unimaginable that all subsequent genocides, including Rwanda's, have since been compared to it. While Spiegelman's use of the graphic novel, an ostensibly frivolous medium, initially drew skepticism from observers and critics wary of the genre's ability to responsibly deal with remembrance of the Holocaust, *Maus* ultimately demonstrated that the graphic novel offers complex multimodal (visual and literary) narrative possibilities well-suited to dealing with challenging subject matter.

If the formal characteristics and capabilities of the graphic novel are the major catalyst for the narrative accomplishments of *Maus*, does the graphic novel form similarly affect how *Smile Through the Tears* and *Deogratias* narrate the Rwandan genocide? To explore this question, this chapter first surveys the issues of form that accompany *Maus* and then considers how these issues play out in Bazambanza's and Stassen's narratives. In terms of content, both *Smile Through the Tears* and *Deogratias* display a concern with the Rwandan genocide's relation to colonial history (particularly the effects of Belgian race science on the ethnopolitics of Rwanda), the effects of tourism and globalization on Rwanda's world status, and the failures and complicities of the international community. While these issues could be broached in other genres, the use of the graphic novel enables *Deogratias* and *Smile Through the Tears*, much like *Maus*, to visually render complex temporal and spatial associations between the personal and the geopolitical, as well as the past and the present. But at the center of *Smile Through the Tears* and *Deogratias*, as well as *Maus*, is a concern with the issue of animality, the animalization of the genocide victim. Both Nazism and colonial ideology cast their "others" as primitive subhumans whose supposed distance from

modernity was given the visual marker of animal characteristics—Jews as rats, Africans as apes—in comics, cartoons, and film. By appropriating and inverting the colonial race hierarchy that privileged Tutsis over Hutus, Hutu extremism also animalized Tutsis, favoring the insect imagery of a cockroach infestation. Through their adoption of the graphic novel, Bazambanza and Stassen, like Spiegelman before them, enact a reversal of the animal trope that rendered the Jews *untermenschen* (underhuman) and the Tutsi *inyenzi* (cockroaches). Rather than detracting from the content of these genocide narratives, the graphic novel allows for a historical engagement with a twentieth century comics and cartoons corpus that animalized Jews and Africans.

More than graphic novels, *Smile Through the Tears* and *Deogratias* are also graphic histories, i.e., literary-visual articulations of the history of the Rwandan genocide. Therefore, along with issues of form, these graphic novels also raise issues of historical narration and its relation to authorial positionality. In seeking understanding of the genocide, should we privilege the narration of an “insider,” a genocide survivor, over that of an “outsider,” a journalist from a former colonial power? In other words, does Bazambanza’s victimization qualify him with unique insight into the social machinery that set the genocide in motion? If so, does Stassen’s Belgianness disqualify him from being an adequate narrator/witness of the Rwandan tragedy of 1994? *Deogratias* resists narrative closure through the inexplicable metamorphosis of protagonist Deogratias into a groveling dog who cannot find peace of mind in post-genocide Rwanda, a Rwanda haunted by a lack of justice or reconciliation. This chapter will argue that this approach in *Deogratias* more effectively narrates the complexities and ongoing traumas of the Rwandan genocide than *Smile Through the*

*Tears*, which asserts a rhetoric of, to use Lemarchand's characterization of Paul Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) platform, "ethnic amnesia" (100), a Tutsi/RPF-nationalist representation of the genocide's history.

### ***Maus* and Holo-kitsch**

Utilizing the anthropomorphic conventions of cartoons, *Maus* depicts the different races and nationalities involved in the Holocaust and its aftermath as varying animal types: for example, Jews are mice, Germans are cats, Americans are dogs, and Britons are fish. Spiegelman's strategy was daring, as representation of the Holocaust has been a hotly debated issue for over half a century. As Thomas Doherty explains,

No matter how austere and reverent the tone, no matter how traditional the format any representation of the Holocaust attracts a special measure of critical scrutiny and, if judged lacking, earns a severe measure of opprobrium. The usual criteria for literary and cinematic excellence—originality, wit, formal innovation, and the sundry "pleasures of the text"—are suspended for depictions of the Holocaust. (71)

The duty to remember is thereby tempered by an ethical injunction to not remember inappropriately. But this cautionary edict—remember, but be careful how you do so—has not led to a scarcity of Holocaust texts. The more common situation may actually be oversaturation and superficial titillation, which devalue the importance of acknowledging the Holocaust and weaken the ability of remembrance to engender empathetic responses to history, yielding an effect similar to what Susan Moeller has called "compassion fatigue" (17). As Michael Staub explains, "there is [a] . . . popular perception that there is no problem [with Holocaust representation]: that the Holocaust as theme and subject saturates the cinema, television, fiction, and classroom discussions. This is related to the problem of overtitillation, which stymies and deadens any moral responses beyond the automatic or superficial" (41). Spiegelman had

therefore entered a realm riddled with ethical and aesthetic challenges and had chosen to do so through the undervalued, underestimated, and oft-trivialized medium of the graphic novel.

Through its visual renderings of anthropomorphic characters, an aesthetic device native to comics and cartoons, *Maus* creates “a kind of heightened, excessive fictionality that breaches . . . the requirement that Holocaust fiction produce historically valid, reliable narratives, narratives that might ‘prove’ the events that they record” (Budick 379). But despite this excessive fictionality, Spiegelman has always considered *Maus* nonfiction, which led to Spiegelman’s confrontation with the *New York Times* over how to categorize his work on the best sellers list. Spiegelman recounts the episode in an interview with *Atlantic Monthly* writer Harvey Blume:

I had an entertaining moment with the New York Times Book Review when *Maus* was given a spot as a bestseller in the fiction category. I wrote a letter saying that David Duke would be quite happy to read that what happened to my father was fiction. I said I realized *Maus* presented problems in taxonomy but I thought it belonged in the nonfiction list. They published the letter and moved *Maus* to nonfiction. But it turns out there was a debate among the editors. The funniest line transmitted back to me was one editor saying, let’s ring Spiegelman’s doorbell. If a giant mouse answers, we’ll put *Maus* in nonfiction. (qtd. in Silbergleid 141n14)

While the content of *Maus* is true, a narrative based mostly on conversations between Art and his father Vladek, an Auschwitz survivor, the conventions of the graphic novel have imbued it with a fictional aesthetic quality, in which humans are depicted as humanoid animals. Reservations about fictionality in Holocaust texts have often derived from a modernist paradigm that pits works of “high culture” against works of “low culture.” As Andreas Huyssen notes, “*Maus* undercuts this dichotomy in the first rather obvious sense that Spiegelman draws on the comic as a mass cultural genre, but transforms it in a narrative saturated with modernist techniques of self-reflexivity, self-

irony, ruptures in narrative time and highly complex image sequencing and montaging” (70). Furthermore, Spiegelman himself has railed against what he calls “Holokitsch’ literature” (qtd. in Silverblatt 129), a phrase he uses to describe Holocaust texts that resort to shallow heroism and facile happy endings. Spiegelman’s use of the graphic novel, a genre derived from comic strips and cartoons, adds further interest to his criticism of Holocaust-kitsch, as comics evoke connotations of frivolity and brevity more than most, perhaps more than all, other mediums of narrative aesthetic expression—only the comic can run the gamut of material adaptation from the bubble gum wrapper to the novel. For Spiegelman, it is not the choice of medium or genre in itself that can tarnish the quality of a Holocaust text, but rather how a text shapes history and memory into narrative. Spiegelman, for instance, criticizes Stephen Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* for offering “re-creation for the sake of the audience’s recreation” (qtd. in Mintz 146). Mere recreation, then, is not enough; the effective Holocaust text must incur affective and intellectual engagement to avoid the travesties of Holokitsch; contrary to modernist expectations, the graphic novel allows just such engagement in *Maus*, primarily through the genre’s multimodal capabilities.

### **Form and Memory**

The multimodality of the graphic novel exists in its combination of the literary and the visual, which enables the genre to visually represent multiple temporalities in sequences of drawn frames. The treatment of memory and trauma in these graphic novels is emboldened by the form’s ability to visually layer, sequence, and juxtapose multiple temporalities. Commenting on *Maus*, Hillary Chute describes this technique as a “complicated entwining of the past and the present [accomplished] by ‘packing’ the tight spaces of panels” (Chute 202). One series of frames in *Maus*, for example,

“obsessively layers” scenes from narrator Artie’s childhood with a concentration camp while his mother “Anja’s disembodied arm, readying for her suicide, floats out from the body of the youngster Artie, its thumb just about touching the leg of the adult Artie, who sits in despair on what looks like her casket” (Chute 208). This densely layered panel thereby brings four distinct moments—Anja’s time in the concentration camp, her suicide twenty years later, Artie’s childhood negotiations of Anja’s imprisonment, and Artie’s adulthood negotiation of Anja’s suicide—into temporal and spatial proximity. Similar strategies are employed in *Smile Through the Tears* and *Deogratias*, wherein the multitemporal capabilities of the graphic novel are utilized to dramatize the trauma of genocide as a haunting that reflects back on the past while carrying forth into the characters’ experiences of the present.

*Smile Through the Tears*, for instance, utilizes a layering and packing technique similar to Spiegelman’s. This technique allows for an agile juxtaposition of not only the past and the present but also of the personal and the geopolitical. The opening frame of *Smile Through the Tears* depicts a beautiful mountainous landscape with a jungle in the foreground; a superimposed inlay frame shows a pair of crying eyes. Big bluish tears spill from the smaller frame and touch the snowcapped mountaintops of the larger frame. The accompanying text reads:

The genocide of the Rwandan Tutsis took place under the shocked gaze of the international community. One million slaughtered. Those who could have stopped the horror did nothing, seemingly indifferent to the drama. Rwanda, it was often said, is too small, too poor and too black to elicit compassion. Faced with the unbelievable, the martyred Rwandans could only wonder. (3)

This complex frame juxtaposes the natural beauty of Rwanda with the postgenocide sorrow of its inhabitants and implicates First World complacency as complicit in the

success of the Tutsi massacre. Subsequently, this juxtaposition makes visible the relationship between collective trauma and the depersonalized realm of geopolitical structures.

The second and third frames expand on this relationship by referencing Rwanda's renown as a tourist site and the location of the film *Gorillas in the Mist*. A film crew is depicted happily shooting footage of a gorilla posed in a jungle of bamboo, as the same blue, snowcapped mountains of the first frame still rest in the background. A narrative caption above the film crew reads: "All the same, Rwanda is hardly an unknown country. The real question is why the international community did nothing against the country's systematic racial discrimination" (3). This frame places the genocide within a global context, wherein the Rwandan ecoscape and animal population has enjoyed more international attention than the hardships of its human population. By the third frame, the gorilla has taken center stage; a television set, a photograph, and a newspaper float around the smiling visage of the gorilla, now a bona fide celebrity covered in all forms of mass media. A narrative header forces us to compare the popularity of *Gorillas in the Mist* with the indifference given to the genocide in Rwanda:

Visitors really only seemed to care about the country's natural beauty and its mountain gorillas. This endangered species had been the subject of a famous film, *Gorillas in the Mist*, which told the story of Dian Fossey and her quest to save them. Visitors completely ignored the murder of thousands of Tutsis and the fact that large numbers of Rwandans had been forced to remain in exile, despite their repeated pleas to return to the land of their ancestors. (3)

Bazambanza's references to *Gorillas in the Mist* and Dian Fossey highlight the appeal of Rwanda solely as a site of natural beauty and animal rights activism, elucidating the

position of Rwanda under global capitalism—it is either an environmental Eden for tourists to enjoy or a forsaken hell in the center of Africa.

*Deogratias* makes simpler use of its panels but still enacts a similar weaving of past and present. The nearly six hundred panels that fill the pages of *Deogratias* use the straightforward approach of classic comics: the frames are whole and intact (no overlapping or inseting of smaller frames) and no more than one or two dialogue bubbles or narrative headers accompany them. Where Bazambanza and Spiegelman push the graphic novel to its formal limits, revealing the genre's technical possibilities, Stassen distills the form to its essence, illuminating the capabilities of a simpler frame and text approach. Within each frame, however, Stassen displays his strengths as an artist. Vivid color schemes give the highly stylized, cartoon-like drawings an intense expressiveness. The opening frames of *Deogratias* stand alone with no textual accompaniment, as Stassen's renderings of title character Deogratias loitering listlessly in front of the Hotel Umusambi speak for themselves. Following an almost cinematic style, frame one provides a close-up of Deogratias—whose ragged T-shirt, frazzled hair, and dilated, wide-open eyes clearly convey his postwar trauma—while frame two zooms outward and upward, in mimicry of an aerial shot, to show the bartender brandishing a club as he walks through the hotel bar patio toward Deogratias, who stands in a sandy courtyard beside the bar. The bartender screams, "Beat it! I said beat it!" but another man sitting in the bar interrupts him. The bar patron, an ex-soldier from France who was stationed in Rwanda during the genocide, commands the bartender to let Deogratias in and bring him a beer (1). Once Deogratias has been seated, the former French soldier explains his presence in Rwanda: "You might not believe me, but I

missed this place, so I came back—only as a tourist this time. I just got back from volcano country. I saw plenty of gorillas. Look at the cool pictures I took. I had them developed in Kigali—in just a day, like in Europe!” (2).

With these opening pages, *Deogratias* contextualizes the Rwandan genocide just as *Smile Through the Tears* does, with reference to the renowned gorillas of Rwanda, a strategy that highlights the negative effects of tourism on Rwanda’s world status: concern for Rwanda’s ecology and wildlife has not yielded concern for its human population. *Deogratias* adds the extra twist of making the Frenchman not only a tourist, but also a former soldier who participated in France’s support of the Hutu Army. President Habyarimana received arms and aid from the French government and military, a fact that *Deogratias* reminds the Frenchman of after the hotel bartender mumbles “French son of a bitch” under his breath: “You know, boss, people around here . . . they’re not friends with the French anymore. . . . You know very well why: you were friends with the ones from before” (32). This French soldier turned French tourist thereby links the complicity of the French military with the complicity of the global tourist economy in rendering Rwanda a “non-space” in the global imaginary.<sup>1</sup> The Frenchman’s exclamatory mention of getting his photographs developed in only a day—“like in Europe!”—further the distinction between Europe as the site of modernity and Africa as the site of insignificance and primitivity. Where this passage shows the Frenchman using technology as an index of development, a similar passage shows him identifying the local practice of drinking warm beer as a symptom of Rwandan savagery: “What? Urwagwa, that banana beer? There’s no way in hell you’re gonna get me to

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<sup>1</sup> Madelaine Hron defines a non-space “as a space of insignificance, if not non-existence” (200).

drink that poison! . . . I mean really . . . in this country people drink their beer warm. They say that cold beer would give them sore throats. . . . Bunch of savages!” (6).

Harkening to Fanon’s characterization of the decolonized world as Europe’s brothel (102), the French tourist-soldier also sexualizes Rwanda, characterizing the genocide as an unfortunate massacre of Tutsi women who could have been potential sexual partners: “Holy shit! Deogratias, check out those two bitches! . . . it’s such a shame, when you think about it. All those beauties who won’t be sharing their soft little thighs with anyone anymore. All those sweet pieces of ass hacked to bits with machetes . . . What a waste!” (2-3). As equal parts ex-soldier, tourist, and potential sex tourist, the Frenchman becomes a composite of various forms of European corruption and exploitation (military, economic, sexual). Deogratias remains mute for most of the Frenchman’s dialogue until he begins to flashback to his life before and during the genocide. The flashbacks gradually increase as the novel proceeds, imbuing *Deogratias* with a multitemporal complexity similar to *Smile Through the Tears* and *Maus*, as two or more chronologies are rendered synchronous through juxtaposition on shared or adjacent pages.

Through these juxtapositions of the past and the present we learn the extent of Deogratias’s trauma and crimes: on the day of Habyarimana’s plane crash, Deogratias had just consummated a new relationship with his Tutsi girlfriend, Benina. With the genocide beginning right outside his door, Deogratias harbors Benina in his room while feigning loyalty to the agenda of his Hutu extremist peers. After two days of hiding, Benina tries to leave Deogratias’s apartment to search for her sister Apollinaria and her mother Venetia. Deogratias locks Benina in his apartment to prevent her from risking

capture by the Interahamwe, but she breaks out while Deogratias is away and reunites with Apollinaria (57-64). After hiding in latrines for two weeks, Benina and Apollinaria surrender at a Hutu roadblock, where they find the raped and beheaded body of their mother (74). Julius, the leader of the Interahamwe roadblock, forces Deogratias to rape and murder Apollinaria while the other militiamen rape and murder Benina (71). As Julius begins to lead his men into the safe haven of the Turquoise Zone, Deogratias defies him, with the aid of the French soldier, and turns back toward Kigali, now under RPF control (72-73). When he returns to the roadblock, Deogratias finds dogs feeding on Venetia's, Benina's, and Apollinaria's bodies (75). Deogratias replays this memory throughout the novel, as he imagines himself morphing into a dog as punishment for his sins (26-27, 47, 52, 57, 67, 76). Before being captured by the police, Deogratias poisons and kills the Frenchman (6, 31, 54, 69), Julius, (40, 46, 69), and Bosco, a former RPF soldier (69), because "[t]hey knew what the dogs do" (70). Therefore, as these temporal associations demonstrate, Deogratias seems to hold all parties accountable, including himself, for the destruction of 1994 and takes on the role of penitent as well as executioner as he ritualistically reenacts his traumatic memories.

### **Animality and Anthropomorphism**

Beyond this enabling of such multitemporal juxtapositions, the use of the graphic novel also allows *Deogratias* and *Smile Through the Tears* to play host to a complex convergence of form and content, particularly in regard to the issue of animality—the animalization of the genocide victim. This topical commonality points to the deep influence of scientific racial discourse on modern genocide in both Europe and Africa, as all three novels dramatize animalization: *Maus* through a counteraesthetic of fabulist anthropomorphism and *Deogratias* and *Smile Through the Tears* through strikingly

similar depictions of a Rwandan schoolhouse scene where the subject of the day is racial pedagogy, the racialization and demonization of the Tutsi. *Deogratias* also enacts animalization as a literalization of the title character's personal trauma, as he anthropomorphizes into a groveling dog bereft of home, safety, or security by the novel's end. The history of anthropomorphism in cartoons and comic strips is a history entwined with twentieth-century racial iconography, from the subliminal blackface minstrelsy of Disney's Mickey Mouse to the infantilization of Africans in the Belgian comic *Tintin* and the recurrent depictions of Jews as rats in Nazi political cartoons. In the works under study here, the graphic novel reverses the animal trope to highlight the fabricated character of racial hierarchies and situate genocide as a logical conclusion of biopower, i.e., a final solution to the problematics of population control and the consolidation of political power. As Achille Mbembe explains, following Foucault, "biopower appears to function through dividing people into those who must live and those who must die. . . . This control presupposes the distribution of human species into groups, the subdivision of the population into subgroups, and the establishment of a biological caesura between the ones and the others" ("Necropolitics" 16-17). In *Maus*, the comics strategy of anthropomorphism directly confronts the aesthetic and ideological implements of Nazi biopower, while *Deogratias* and *Smile Through the Tears* dramatize animality as a pedagogy of dehumanization, thereby confronting colonial narratives of tribalism and primitivism by exposing genocide as an aspect of modern biopower—a praxis derived from scientific theories bound up with maintenance of the nation-state—rather than with atavistic ethnic violence.

Spiegelman's use of the comics aesthetic in *Maus* resonates not only as a stylistic stance, but also as an historical and political stance; the structure and style of *Maus* is inextricably bound with its content. The graphic novel, and the world of comics in general, may be "associated with the madcap, the childish, the trivial," but, as Thomas Doherty explains, "the cartoon medium possesses a graphic quality well-suited to a confrontation with Nazism and the Holocaust" (71). Doherty identifies Spiegelman's choice of medium as well-suited to confrontation with Nazism because comics and cartoons were a popular vehicle for Nazi animalization of the Jew. Periodicals like *Der Sturmer* carried "cartoons depicting Jews as hook-nosed, beady-eyed *Untermenschen*, creatures whose ferret faces and rodent snouts marked them as human vermin" (Doherty 74). These cartoons and comics told a certain story about humanity, one of nationalist Nazi exceptionalism and non-Aryan racial inferiority; by adopting the basic form of this vehicle, *Maus* hijacks and redirects the purpose and orientation of Nazi symbology. As Andreas Huyssen notes, *Maus* also reworks the imagery of Nazi films like *The Eternal Jew* (1940), which portrays Jews as an invading rodent horde carrying disease and degeneration:

Spiegelman's mimetic adoption of Nazi imagery actually succeeds in reversing its implications while simultaneously keeping us aware of the humiliation and degradation of that imagery's original intention. Instead of the literal representation of destructive vermin we see persecuted little animals drawn with a human body and wearing human clothes and with a highly abstracted, non-expressive mouse physiognomy. (75)

The animal scheme renders the power structure visible; the Jews in *Maus* are not racially or essentially vermin; instead, they have politically been rendered vermin, the targets of an extermination campaign.

*Smile Through the Tears* also makes deliberate aesthetic and historico-political use of the comics form through allusion to the Belgian comics series *Tintin*, which exemplifies the role cartoons and comics played in the dehumanization of Africans. *Tintin in the Congo* (1930-1931) specifically utilizes an African landscape to stage the adventures of main character Tintin, a Belgian journalist. A famous scene from the comic depicts Tintin at a chalkboard teaching a class full of Congolese children. “My dear friends,” Tintin says, “I am going to talk to you today about your fatherland, Belgium” (qtd. in Sadoul 180-205). *Tin Tin* creator Hergé was compelled to redraw this scene as a mathematics lesson in 1946, when such overt colonial racism had become less acceptable (Sadoul 180-205). This passage blatantly exemplifies the paternalism of Belgian colonial ideology, a paternalism that Bazambanza links to Rwanda, also a Belgian postcolony, through his allusion to *Tintin*. In *Smile Through the Tears*, Degroot, a member of the Rwanga family, is shown reading a *Tintin* comic, as his sister asks from beside him, “Degroot! Why are all the Africans in Tintin so black, like our blackboard at school?” Degroot replies, “It’s to make us laugh” (12). Degroot’s answer indicates his assimilation to the colonial gaze, his visual reorientation to the infantilizing perspective of the European colonialist. Bazambanza further identifies the ability of racism to achieve normalization with a heading to the *Tintin* frame that reads, “As for Degroot, he didn’t need any distractions to make him forget about racial discrimination, because he loved to read” (12). This statement registers a tone of irony, as Degroot is too caught up with racist comic books to be worried about the racism intensifying all around him. The racism of *Tintin* has been normalized for Degroot to a level of

imperceptibility, and the seduction of the comic's humor minimizes the intrusion of the escalating violence in Rwanda into Degroot's consciousness.

### **Graphic Histories**

If the ultimate image of comic book paternalism is Tintin instructing Congolese children in their Belgianness at a schoolroom chalkboard, it is significant that the chalkboard becomes a common image in *Smile Through the Tears* and *Deogratias*—the chalkboard becomes a symbol of institutionalized power and its proliferation through the educational system. In *Smile Through the Tears*, Bazambanza explains that the Rwanga children attend a private school, an “expensive option” that their parents chose in order “to spare them from the policy of ethnic discrimination then enforced in the public schools” (6). This narration provides a sense of inescapability and entrapment, as private school cannot provide refuge from the pedagogy of ethnic division. At the private school, a Hutu woman is shown writing “HUTU – TUTSI – TWA” on the chalkboard. The dashes separating each ethnic group signify a chain of regression from the superior Hutu to the lesser Tutsi to the abjectly other pygmy Twa, a minority group systemically overlooked in commentary on Rwanda, despite estimates that the genocide destroyed nearly half the Twa population (Scherrer 24). The teacher elaborates on the distinctions between the three groups with snippets of Rwandan history and a public outing of Wilson Rwanga as a Tutsi:

Today you have to tell me which of the three ethnic groups on the board you belong to. . . . Now I know that none of you are Twas. This inferior race, otherwise known as pygmies, lives in the forest. . . . As for the Tutsis why, they're just like you, Wilson! Tutsis think they are a kind of royalty who have the God-given right to kill the Hutus. For instance, Queen Kanjogera used to impale Hutu children on her spear. (6)

The student seated next to Wilson turns to him and says, amazed by the teacher's propaganda, "You guys are evil," demonstrating the efficacy of the teacher's pedagogy of dichotomization and dehumanization. As the school day comes to a close, the teacher reminds the students, "Make sure you know what ethnic group you belong to when you come back on Monday" (6).

The subsequent frames of *Smile Through the Tears* elaborate on this scene of ethnic pedagogy by moving in two directions, first to the intimate/personal level of the Rwanga family as Wilson tries to make sense of the incident by discussing it with his family (7), then to the historical level as a two page narrative section summarizes colonial and precolonial Rwandan history to contextualize the contemporary ethnic politics of postcolonial Rwanda. This historical narration is grounded in the authority of family tradition, as *Smile Through the Tears* depicts Wilson's father learning the history of Rwanda from his grandfather. "When I was young," Mr. Rwanga explains, "my grandfather told me how it all began" (8). Below this statement, the frame depicts an older Mr. Rwanga imagining his younger self, cheerful and innocent, speaking with his sagacious, white-bearded grandfather, shown wearing a robe and thoughtfully smoking a pipe. With his attire and actions signifying elderly wisdom, Rwanga's grandfather narrates the arrival of Rwanda's three ethnic groups as successive waves of migration: the Twa arrive first "to hunt in the forests"; the Hutu, farmers who "clear the fertile fields," arrive second; the Tutsi, "cattle breeders, seeking pasture for their herds," arrive last. The next frame reads, "These three peoples complemented each other with their different skills" (8). The accompanying illustration shows two pairs of hands, those of a Hutu and those of a Tutsi, holding a cornucopia of fruits, vegetables, and milk. This

idyllic perspective on the Twa, Hutu, and Tutsi migrations to Rwanda omits the strife that often accompanied the arrival of each successive group to the area. The indigenous pygmy minority, the Twa, suffered marginalization as Ruanda-Urundi (as the area was called before Rwanda and Burundi became separate, independent nations) came to be dominated by a Hutu majority and then a precolonial Tutsi elite, a dynamic inadvertently reiterated by the absence of a third pair of Twa hands from the frame's illustration. *Deogratias*, in a significant departure from this dynamic, reintegrates the Twa into narration of the genocide through the character of Augustine, a landscaper for a white landowner. Demonstrating a puerile fascination with his Twa employee, the landowner asks his translator Venetia, "is it true, what they say? That those guys, when they're really short like that, they have huge dicks?" (30). In a later frame, Augustine transcends this objectification by operating as an intelligent, independent subject. Responding to a claim from Philip, a Belgian missionary, that priests gave Augustine the gift of education, Augustine reminds Philip and his father, visiting from Belgium, that his degrees are worthless, as working for wealthy whites is one of the few lucrative occupations in Rwanda: "Here we have no gold, no copper, no diamonds, but we have whites. You just have to bend down to pick up the money falling from their pockets" (45).

In *Smile Through the Tears*, it is only the arrival of Belgian colonists, who bring with them the instrumental divisiveness of race science, that disrupts this idyllic depiction of Rwanda's precolonial ethnopolitics. Belgian soldiers wearing pith helmets approach a Rwandan chief, declaring, "King Leopold II has sent us to colonize you. We will protect you, educate you, civilize you and clothe you" (8). King Musinga, the Tutsi

monarch of Ruanda-Urundi, responds, “You bring us much, I see. But nothing you can offer us is worth Rwandan unity. We have no need of you and your offerings” (9). This sequence depicts Rwandan ethnic unity as the legacy of the Tutsi monarchy, a legacy broken only by the racism of Belgian colonialism. With Musinga’s kingdom colonized by force, the next frame shows Belgian colonists measuring the noses of Rwandans. The accompanying narration explains,

the colonizers looked for something to divide the Rwandan people, who had lived together peacefully for over a thousand years. The Belgians split the Twas, Hutus and Tutsis into different ethnic groups. Those whose physical characteristics didn’t fit into any particular division were ranked according to the number of cattle they owned: people owning less were considered Hutu. Children born of the same parents suddenly found they belonged to different “races.” (9)

This articulation of Rwandan history asserts that colonialism alone shattered over a millennia of Tutsi-ruled *pax Rwandana*. While the scientific racism of Belgian colonialism did have a tremendous impact on Rwanda—giving scientific support to colonial-sponsored Tutsi elitism and its correspondent, Hutu extremism—an idealized vision of Rwandan history underwrites the notion that no significant differences or inequities existed among Rwanda’s ethnic groups before colonialism. Such a perspective erases Tutsi oppression of the Hutu, as well as Tutsi and Hutu oppression of the Twa, from the historical record. This gesture denies the possibility of Rwandan historical agency and places that agency solely in the hands of colonialism, an iteration of “history as sorcery” similar to that of Boubacar Boris Diop’s in *Murambi: The Book of Bones*. Acknowledging Rwandan complicity in Rwandan political crises should not lead to “blaming the victims” for the very crimes perpetrated against them. Instead, such acknowledgement should highlight how elision of certain historical factors can reiterate the colonial mythos that modern African history begins only with colonialism. In this

schema, the political grievances of precolonial Rwanda disappear, eclipsed by the grievances that can be attributed exclusively to colonialism, an articulation of Rwandan history that supports the restoration of Tutsi dominance in Rwanda.

This Tutsi-centric narration of Rwandan history begins with the opening frame of *Smile Through the Tears*. As described above, this densely packed frame provocatively asserts a relationship between Rwanda's status as a tourist destination and the nation's status as a "non-place" unworthy of productive intervention during the genocide. However, this frame allows these international implications to overshadow the intranational and regional complexities that also facilitated Rwanda's descent into genocide. Bazambanza focuses on the Western tourist's ignorance of Tutsi deaths in the early-1990s and the failed attempts of Tutsis exiled between 1959 and 1973 "to return to the land of their ancestors." This opening frame initiates a pattern prevalent throughout *Smile Through the Tears* of emphasizing Hutu violence against Tutsis while omitting Tutsi aggression against Hutus from its narration of Rwandan history. If Westerners ignored Tutsi deaths while simultaneously consuming Rwanda as a tourist commodity and the subject matter of media like *Gorillas in the Mist*, they also ignored Hutu casualties in Rwanda as well as its neighboring, ethnic mirror, Burundi. Between 1990 and 1993, military incursions into Rwanda from the RPF, the militarized Tutsi exiles Bazambanza refers to in this frame, yielded both Hutu and Tutsi civilian deaths. These RPF invasions of the early-1990s fueled a heightened atmosphere of national insecurity that increased violence against Tutsis within Rwanda. Events within Burundi also fueled this atmosphere of Rwandan insecurity, with the 1972 Tutsi-led "partial

genocide” of Hutus (Lemarchand 146) precipitating decades of Tutsi-Hutu strife that have often mirrored Rwanda’s ethnic strife.

Certainly, Tutsi rather than Hutu trauma can and does serve as the relevant, legitimate, and necessary focus of many genocide narratives, and this critique of *Smile Through the Tears* wishes in no way to undermine the need, especially for a genocide survivor, to narrate Tutsi experiences of Hutu brutality. However, Bazambanza’s complete evasion of Tutsi complicity in the fostering of Rwandan ethnic strife obfuscates the politico-economic complexities that led to the genocide, an obfuscation counterproductive to Bazambanza’s stated goal of preventing future conflict. As Bazambanza explains in his introduction to *Smile Through the Tears*, awareness of the genocide must be spread so that future genocides become less likely. With the goal of genocide prevention thereby inscribed directly into *Smile Through the Tears*, Bazambanza asks himself, “Why me? Why did I survive, when so many loved ones around me perished?” After years of wrestling with this question, Bazambanza concludes, “I was spared so that I could be a witness” (1). Bazambanza assumes the role of witness to genocide so that such violence may never be repeated, but the novel’s Tutsi-centric narration of events immediately undercuts his achievement of this goal. With the complexities of Rwandan history reduced to a simplistic narrative of Hutu brutality against Tutsis, the actual social processes that led to the genocide remain opaque and the dichotomy between Tutsi victims and Hutu victimizers remains intact.

The Hutu Revolution of 1959 serves as the first relevant date in Bazambanza’s timeline of the genocide. Instantiating a major shift from the Tutsi dominance of precolonial and colonial Rwanda to the Hutu dominance of independent, postcolonial

Rwanda, the Hutu Revolution sets Rwandan history on the ideological and social track that makes the 1994 genocide possible. The Hutu Revolution does, therefore, serve as a logical starting point for understanding the historical trajectory of the genocide, but *Smile Through the Tears* presents the Revolution in conspicuously reductive terms. To construct his narrative, Bazambanza distances himself from his text by writing from the perspective of the Rwangas—survivors of the anti-Tutsi violence of the Hutu Revolution—and their children, Wilson, Degroot, and Hyacinthe. As Bazambanza explains,

My story is told from the point of view of a family very dear to me whose near-total annihilation I witnessed: the Rwangas. . . . Only Rose Rwanga, the mother, has survived. Orphaned during the first—and largely forgotten—Tutsi genocide of 1959, she is today without her husband and children because of the same murderous folly, become more monstrous still. (1)

Major atrocities accompanied the Hutu Revolution, but by characterizing it as “genocide” and “murderous folly” Bazambanza evades explicating why the Revolution occurred in the first place. Bazambanza’s authorial absentia from the narrative allows Rose Rwanga to serve as the novel’s voice of historical authority, and she frequently references the Hutu Revolution as the first installment of the 1994 genocide. In an early sequence that takes place in 1977, four years after Habyarimana’s successful coup against Kayibanda, Rose prays to God, “Please spare our children from a tragedy like the one we knew in 1959” (5). Later, as the story approaches the events of 1994, Rose will admonish her grown children, “You’re too young to know how Tutsis have been brutally and unjustly killed throughout this country’s history” (14). While both history and personal experience legitimate Rose’s prayer and her cautioning of her children, Bazambanza’s reliance on Rose as historical explicator allows him to disavow the

crucial fact that Tutsi oppression of the Hutu had prompted the Revolution of 1959 and that Hutus as well as Tutsis have been unjustly killed throughout Rwanda's history.

Acknowledgement of the Tutsi monarchy's precolonial and colonial infidelities neither exonerates nor legitimates the excesses of the Hutu Revolution. But omission of the Tutsi monarchy's subjugation of the Hutu peasantry does reify a mythological and problematic view of Rwandan history, a view in which the monolithically malevolent Hutus continually and inexplicably slaughter the homogeneously benevolent Tutsis. Rose's son Wilson reiterates this notion when a school friend turns on him for being Tutsi: "Wilson! We can't play with you anymore. You're a Tutsi! My dad says you're all vermin" (11). Harkening to Rose's narration of Rwandan history as a recurrent genocide of the Tutsis, Wilson thinks to himself, "What's his father got to be so mad about, anyway? It was the Tutsis who got killed!" (12). Wilson, illustrated as a young school boy in a khaki uniform, sits pensively and sorrowful beneath a tree, imbuing his statement with the authority of innocence. As a child, Wilson, serves as an apolitical figure providing a positively naïve, i.e., non-partisan account of Rwanda's racial politics. With his reductive articulation of Rwandan history supported by Rose's appeal as a voice of reason and Wilson's appeal as an innocent, Bazambanza participates in a dangerous and divisive mythology, a reversal of the Manichean narrative that underwrote the excesses of the Hutu Revolution in 1959 and the genocide of the Tutsis in 1994. Where Hutu power ideology asserts that the alien Tutsi have senselessly butchered the indigenous Hutu ever since the Tutsi monarchy usurped the sovereignty of Hutu rule, Bazambanza's narrative asserts that it is the Hutu who have senselessly butchered the Tutsi ever since colonialism usurped the sovereignty of Tutsi rule.

The need to historicize the genocide, therefore, introduces the pitfall of replacing one ethnically dichotomized articulation of Rwandan history with another. *Deogratias* evades this pitfall by focusing on the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide and using flashbacks to provide necessary glimpses of events before and during the genocide. One of these flashbacks depicts a school house scene strikingly similar to that of *Smile Through the Tears*, revealing a common concern between the two novels with the impact of colonial race science on Rwandan ethnopolitics. “Who here is a Hutu?” the teacher asks, while the blackboard behind him reads: “–Hutu / –Tutsi / –Twa.” Dashes once again separate each word and the vertical ordering of the list evokes a devolutionary schema from Hutu to Tutsi to Twa (17):

The Hutu are the majority people. These proud and honest farmers, of Bantu stock, are the ones who cleared the country for cultivation. With courage and care, they turned it into the wonderful garden that feeds us all. You can say that they are the true Rwandans. And now . . . Who here is a Tutsi? . . . The Tutsi are a Nilotic race who arrived much later from their faraway north. . . . With their cows and their weapons, the Tutsi took advantage of the natural integrity of the poor Hutu peasants, and treacherously enslaved them. (18)

Like the teacher in *Smile Through the Tears*, the teacher in *Deogratias* presents an ethnically radicalized version of Rwandan history, one that narrates the past along starkly divided ethnic lines.

But comparison of these scenes reveals a significant divergence in how *Smile Through the Tears* and *Deogratias* conceptualize Rwandan history. In accordance with its Tutsi-centric vision of Rwandan history, *Smile Through the Tears* makes the teacher’s discussion of Tutsi subjugation of the Hutu seem like a complete fabrication, a ludicrous invention *in toto* of Hutu extremism. *Deogratias* departs from a Tutsi- or Hutu-centric narration of Rwandan history by interspersing *Deogratias*’s school house

flashback with a conversation between Deogratias and Bosco, an RPF soldier. Dark blues and blacks color the frames depicting Bosco and Deogratias, imbuing their meeting at Bosco's house with an ominous and depressive tone. Bosco wears fatigues on his lanky body and a sinister grin on his face, his arm draped around the shoulders of the diminutive Deogratias. When Bosco offers Deogratias some banana beer, Deogratias replies, "Taste the Urwagwa, Bosco," a customary exchange meant to demonstrate that Bosco has not poisoned Deogratias's drink. Bosco takes Deogratias's hesitation as an affront to his trustworthiness, replying, "What you don't trust me, Deogratias? Because of what I said yesterday?" Bosco then refers to a previous conversation in which he had threatened to arrest Deogratias for being a Hutu by charging him as a genocidaire: "You know I was joking. . . . You're not all guilty, you lot. And you, you poor crackpot, you're not suspected of anything in particular. Besides, the jails are full, there's no more room. . . . certainly no room for dogs" (17). Although the novel will ultimately reveal that Deogratias has, through coercion, participated in genocide, Bosco made his threat of arrest in ignorance of Deogratias's crimes. This scene depicts one of the unsettling factors characterizing the postgenocide rule of the RPF in Rwanda: large numbers of Hutu prisoners arrested on spurious or fabricated charges of genocide complicity now overpopulate Rwanda's prisons.

Paradoxically, this policy of ethnically profiling Hutus and charging them with genocide stands side-by-side with another RPF policy abolishing the public use of ethnic identities. This policy of compulsory "ethnic amnesia" (Lemarchand 106) accords with the RPF version of Rwandan history, one in which colonialism alone afflicted Rwanda with ethnic divisions. Much like Wilson's father in *Smile Through the Tears*,

Bosco, his eyebrows raised in scorn and his left hand raised in exclamatory gesticulation, claims that European colonialism invented Rwanda's three ethnic identities out of whole cloth: "Hutu, Tutsi . . . The whites made up those differences between us! They wrote those words on our ID cards! Before they came, before they sowed the seeds of division, before they enslaved us, we lived peacefully here."

However, unlike Wilson's father's narrative, which serves as an authoritative historical perspective in *Smile Through the Tears*, Bosco's historical narration exemplifies a partisan idealization of the past in *Deogratias*. To Bosco's assertion that before colonialism "we lived peacefully here," Deogratias, who stares dejectedly off-frame, sardonically replies, "in a land of milk and honey" (19). Where the school teachers depicted in *Smile Through the Tears* and *Deogratias* demonize the Tutsi by exaggerating the excesses of the Tutsi monarchy, the Rwangas and Bosco romanticize Tutsi rule by erasing ethnic strife from Rwandan history. *Smile Through the Tears* builds upon such pro-RPF sentiments in its depictions of RPF soldiers. One frame depicts Paul Kagame, then an RPF general, in a soldier's cap and uniform. He points at a heap of dead bodies, saying, "Each time Habyarimana's troops lose a battle, they retaliate by killing Tutsi civilians, thanks to their deep-rooted notion of ethnic discrimination" (29). Another frame shows a young soldier asking his commanding officer for permission to avenge the murder of his father. Composed, and sagacious the officer responds, "It's more important to combat the source of whatever it is that makes civilians start murdering each other. When you begin killing civilians, you're no longer a soldier." In these frames, *Smile Through the Tears* depicts ethnic discrimination and human rights abuses as the sole property of Hutu extremism, despite

the well-documented reprisal massacres and civilian casualties that tarnish the record of the RPF. *Deogratias* departs from this RPF/Tutsi nationalist historical perspective by interrogating both the dangerous ethnic romanticism embodied by Bosco and the ethnic hatred embodied by the school teacher. Through juxtaposition of the school teacher's and Bosco's ethno-narratives, *Deogratias* calls attention to the lacunae present in the Hutu extremist and Tutsi nationalist versions of Rwandan history.

While each work mobilizes the graphic novel form to render complex temporal associations and effectively challenge the animalization of the genocide victim, *Deogratias* and *Smile Through the Tears* differ greatly as articulations of Rwandan history, with the former emphasizing the ongoing trials of post-genocide Rwanda and the latter emphasizing a more closed narrative beginning in 1959 and ending in 1994. This distinction manifests in the disjuncture between the *Rwagas* and *Deogratias*: where the *Rwagas* become unambiguous figures of moral heroism metonymic of the Rwandan Tutsi population, *Deogratias* remains a complicated and tortured figure whose eventual transformation into a dog disallows easy narrative closure. While Stassen avoids problematic memorialization, Bazambanza, despite his direct experience of the trauma he narrates, engages in a mode of commemorative appropriation, wherein the Rwandan genocide becomes the sequel of the Hutu Revolution and, in turn, Rwandan history becomes a Manichean narrative of "good Tutsis" versus "bad Hutus." There may be, as Dominick LaCapra notes, a legitimate hesitancy to critique "a text written by a victim" because "it places the reader in a double bind between the desire to criticize and the fear of its inappropriateness . . ." (*Writing* 18), but the author-victim, through the act of writing, nevertheless participates in political and historical discourses in ways that

necessitate respectful evaluation. While the irreducible, nontransferable trauma of the genocide survivor should be taken seriously and never conflated with more distanced experiences of crisis, assuming that the survivor has access to a more privileged understanding of the broader structural realities governing mass political violence is not only problematic but highly dangerous, as such a gesture can imbue regressive, partisan narratives with a sense of virtuous victimhood that shields them from significant criticism. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, reductive and partisan accounts of the Rwandan genocide have served the politically instrumentalist ends of Rwandan and Western elites and, in the process, yielded incalculable casualties nationally in Rwanda and regionally in the Congo. In this regard, the memorializing impulse of *Smile Through the Tears* bears more in common with the mass produced Hollywood film *Hotel Rwanda* and the anti-imperialist African novel *Murambi*, which both commemoratively situate the Rwandan genocide in politically reductive discourses, than with the closure-resistant and works *The Shadow of Imana* and *Deogratias*. Failure to recognize the broader, ongoing implications of the Rwandan genocide serves to freeze the effects of the crisis within a narrow historical and geographical frame, a frame that emphasizes the violence of the past over the strife of the present and the future.

CHAPTER 5  
*DIS-COMMEMORATING HAITIAN INDEPENDENCE: ARISTIDE, INTERVENTIONISM,  
AND GHOSTS OF CITÉ SOLEIL*

In this chapter, I examine Asger Leth's documentary *Ghosts of Cité Soleil*, a film that situates recent Haitian political strife in a reductive, sensationalized, and hegemonic discourse on Haiti that, much like *Hotel Rwanda* in the case of Central African political violence, serves the interests of Western and postcolonial elites. Even as it memorializes recent events, *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* also commemorates, or rather *dis-*commemorates, Haitian independence by implicitly narrating Haiti's 2004 bicentennial as a profound failure of Haitian sovereignty. Two-hundred years in the making, the failed Haitian sovereignty that Leth envisions is the sole product of Haitian ineptitude and criminality, as *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* deftly obscures the global politico-economic dynamics in which Haitian politics have been imbricated since the dawn of independence. In this regard, the "failed state" thesis implicit in *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* resembles the African tribalism trope in its evacuation of external factors such as foreign intervention from its narration of postcolonial political crisis.

**The Bicentennial and the Symbolics of Sequels**

On New Year's Day 1804, revolutionary leader Jean Jacques Dessalines rechristened the French colony of Saint-Domingue *Ayiti*, the original Arawak name for the island of Hispaniola. This renaming signified the establishment of Haiti as a sovereign nation free from colonial domination. Haitian Independence, however, dramatically challenged the Eurocentric assumption that Africans and their New World descendants were predisposed to servitude, instantiating a rupture within the episteme of nineteenth-century colonial discourse. Two hundred years later, Haiti's status as the "poorest country in the Western hemisphere" seemingly corroborated the colonialist

notion that Haitian Independence was an oxymoron, an insolvent concept that inevitability yielded an insolvent political reality. As New Year's Day 2004 approached, an impending coup and allegations of corruption against President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a Catholic priest who had rose to prominence as a populist alternative to Haitian dictatorship, vexed Haiti's bicentennial with a series of grim questions: Had the nineteenth-century narrative of illegitimate Haitian sovereignty become a self-fulfilling prophecy? Had Haitian despotism destroyed the dream of a free and independent Haiti? Or had Haiti become the victim of a colonial revenge fantasy exacted by the former imperial powers and their peers among the postcolonial Haitian elite?

These questions throb, largely unaddressed, at the margins of Danish director Asger Leth's documentary *Ghosts of Cité Soleil*, winner of the Directors Guild of America's "Documentary Feature" award in 2007. Praised for its intimate portrayal of Haitian gang life, "a new high-water mark in the relationship between director and subject" (Gilbey 47), *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* functions as the "personal portrait"<sup>1</sup> of two Haitian brothers, Bily and 2Pac, leaders of pro-Aristide gangs from Cité Soleil called *chimères* ("ghosts"). Filtered through an editing style reminiscent of rap music videos, Leth's film follows the lives of Bily and 2Pac as they rap, smoke, tote guns, feud with each other and other gang members, and engage in an interracial love triangle with a French relief worker in Cité Soleil, "the most dangerous place on earth" according to the UN.<sup>2</sup> For reviewers such as Ryan Gilbey, Leth's heavily stylized, fast-paced editing serves only to enhance the ghetto realism of *Ghosts of Cité Soleil*: "If he keeps the

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<sup>1</sup> As Bill Nichols explains, documentaries in the mode of the "[p]ersonal portrait place their focus on the individual rather than the social issue. At their best they reveal the one by means of the other" (244).

<sup>2</sup> In the words of the film's opening screens, "This is the story of two brothers, Chimeres leaders in Cite Soleil—described by the UN as the most dangerous place on earth."

editing frenzied, and if he cranks up the rap-heavy soundtrack, he is only being true to the rhythms of gang life” (47).

But *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* is not quite the raw-yet-heavily stylized document of Haitian gang life that Gilbey applauds. Leth, son of Jorgen Leth, the renowned Danish film-maker and honorary Danish Ambassador to Haiti, garnered funding for *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* from the Danish Film Institute and Nordisk films after shooting and distributing a “really hardcore trailer” cut from footage shot by Leth’s three-person film crew (Leth qtd. in Leffler). The trailer also impressed Haitian-American rap star Wyclef Jean, who Leth met with in New York at a private screening arranged by 2Pac and co-director/cinematographer Milos Loncaveric. Wyclef, now one of the film’s executive producers and a co-composer of the film score, and Leth flew to Haiti the next day and reentered Cité Soleil with Leth’s film crew. It remains unclear how much of Leth’s access to his subjects can be attributed to his family associations with Haiti (it is unlikely that Jorgen Leth has any direct connections or interests in Cité Soleil) and his allegiance with Wyclef (it is also unlikely that Wyclef spent much time with the film crew). But the crew left Cité Soleil many weeks later with more than four hundred hours of intimate and harrowing footage, the raw material from which *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* would be crafted (Leffler). A seductive blend of fast cuts, candid footage, archival material, and interviews with participants and observers, *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* carefully constructs its own reality, blurring the line between the spontaneous and the orchestrated in many of its frames. The lives of Bily and 2Pac are pieced together through a suggestive and oftentimes disorienting editing style that juxtaposes scenes of

purportedly candid gang violence with archival footage of riots and mass political demonstrations.

Amidst this juxtaposition of the immediate and the archived, Bily and 2Pac, as the documentary's protagonists, maintain centrality. As Leth explains, the lives of Bily and 2Pac provided the perfect vehicle for creating a documentary that has the energy of a fictional narrative: "I'd been looking for a documentary film that could be pushed toward the feel of a fiction film, with a dramatic structure and strong, strong characters—a character-driven story. So this was perfect" (qtd. in Leffler). By design, then, explication of the documentary's political content takes a backseat to Leth's intended emphasis on Bily and 2Pac. Both brothers have dreams, Bily of becoming a Haitian politician who can finally bring peace to Cité Soleil, 2Pac of becoming a rapper under the tutelage of Wyclef. As they oscillate between allegiance and rivalry, Bily and 2Pac lead their respective gangs and sections of Cité Soleil with a mixture of terror and benevolence, ruling with violence in some instances, charity in others. These methods yield Bily and 2Pac large doses of fear as well as respect from the inhabitants of Cité Soleil, illustrated in the documentary's many scenes of celebration, often block party-style affairs shot in night vision. But mounting tensions between gangs quickly eclipse such episodes of revelry, culminating in Bily's death at the hands of a rival *chimère* and the disappearance of 2Pac, now also presumed dead.

*Ghosts of Cité Soleil* is never simply about Bily and 2Pac, however, as these *chimères* become a metonym for broader Haitian political realities, a metonym that reduces the complexities of Haitian politics to mere street thuggery and romanticizes the 2004 coup against Aristide. Beneath Bily and 2Pac's story of personal struggle, sibling

rivalry, and unfulfilled dreams, *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* captures an evocative temporal palimpsest in its frames: the past-in-present convergence of the bicentennial of Haiti's first independence with a second coup against Haiti's "Second Independence," as Aristide supporters had nicknamed his administration. But the symbolic import of sequels in visions of Haitian history precedes Aristide's administration by nearly sixty years, originating with Haitian President Sténio Vincent in 1934, the year in which US forces abandoned their eighteen-year occupation of Haiti (1915-1934). By declaring 1934 the beginning of Haiti's "Second Independence," Vincent drew a parallel between the end of French colonization and the end of the American occupation. In this schema, the US Occupation represents an eradication of Haitian independence, a regression back to the era of colonial dominance, only with a change in the names of the colonizers. However, as Matthew Smith notes, "if 1934 marked an end to the struggle for *désoccupation*, it was the beginning of a long and intense ideological and political conflict that would ultimately lead, in 1957, to one of the most brutal dictatorships the Caribbean has ever experienced: the regime of François 'Papa Doc' Duvalier" (1). Like the US occupation, the regimes of François Duvalier and his son Jean-Claude represent yet another retraction of the advancements of 1804. In fact, so little had changed between 1934 and 1957, that Vincent's declaration seems to have been premature, especially for those who locate Haiti's "Second Independence" not in the post-Occupation era but in the post-Duvalier administration of Aristide.

Whether or not Aristide's administration deserves this appellation remains a controversy, as can be seen in how differently *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* and Aristide narrate the "Second Independence" and, in turn, commemorate the Haitian bicentennial.

Aristide's own bicentennial rhetoric explicitly narrates his presidency as a progressive revolution against the *international* forces of imperialism, the second coming of Haitian revolutionary hero Toussaint Louverture, while *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* implicitly commemorates Haitian Independence as a profound *intranational* failure serialized in the failures of Aristide and all who came before him. Partial truths reside in both these narratives, but what do these opposing commemorations conceal?

To promote the bicentennial, Aristide directly linked his presidency with the legacy of Haitian Independence on billboards featuring “back-to-back images of himself and Toussaint.” The billboards read, “Two Men, Two Centuries, The Same Vision.” (Jenson 167). Some Caribbean Community (CARICOM) member nations and Haitian intellectuals, including many from throughout the Haitian diaspora, expressed disapproval over Aristide's plans to go forward with the bicentennial celebrations, seeing it as a misdirection away from the sociopolitical crises mounting under his administrative watch (Jenson 163). For these detractors, Aristide was no Toussaint Louverture. But Aristide sustained the comparison once in exile, describing his supposed 29 February resignation as a US-sponsored “geopolitical kidnapping” akin to Napoleon's kidnapping of Louverture in June 1802. About to embark for France from a dock in Gonaives, Louverture declared, “In overthrowing me, they have uprooted in Saint-Domingue only the trunk of the tree of the liberty of the blacks; it will grow back because its roots are deep and numerous.” Aristide's paraphrase describes his capture as a sequel to Toussaint's: “I declare in overthrowing me they have uprooted the trunk of the tree of peace, but it will grow back because the trees of the trunk are Louverturian” (qtd. in Jenson 166-67). Since only the most militant among his Haitian detractors had ever

considered coup d'état a legitimate response to his presidential shortcomings, this "coup-napping" made Aristide's self-identification with Louverture less egregious. With speculation over Aristide's resignation/kidnapping growing, equivalency between Aristide and Louverture assumed a new dimension: if Aristide's commemoration narrative concealed his possible culpability in the embattlement of his administration, his bad faith was monumentally eclipsed by the convergence of ex-military officers, death squad militiamen, narcoterrorists, business elites, and former Duvalierists (many of whom had directly participated in Aristide's first ouster), in a foreign-supported coup that masqueraded as a liberation mission.

*Ghosts of Cité Soleil* presents an entirely different sort of bicentennial commemoration, one that emphasizes Aristide's alleged corruption, conceals the impact of foreign intervention on Haitian politics, and subsequently paints a reactionary portrait of Haitian revolutionary history, one that amounts to a *dis*commemoration of Haitian Independence. Where Aristide's commemoration explicitly narrates the historical coupling Aristide-Louverture, *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* implicitly corroborates a coup-justifying narrative that equates Aristide with Duvalier, the most notorious of all Haitian despots. While many of the allegations against Aristide are quite serious and deserve further investigation, even sociologist Alex Dupuy, one of Aristide's staunchest critics, recognizes that "Aristide could not transform himself into a dictator even if he had wanted to," since, unlike the Duvaliers, he was opposed by the US, the UN, France, and Canada, had abolished the military, and had not created a formal paramilitary like the *tonton macoutes* (146). In its reductive portrayal of Aristide, *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* goes well beyond mere criticism of his administration to further a fatalistic vision of Haitian

sovereignty that justifies and romanticizes the coup of 2004 as well as foreign intervention, in general. To elucidate this latent political narrative, I will explore the interpretive frames that *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* activates, the elliptical historical narrative the film constructs, and the actors and agents that Leth uses to populate his vision of Haitian political history.

### **Interpretive Frames, Invisible Citations**

Leth's film does not explicitly couple Aristide with Duvalier; instead, *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* implies such an equivalency through the activation of interpretive frames. In narrative modes of communication, interpretive frames serve as discursive landmarks, or informational guideposts, that report facts in ways that encourage readers or viewers to rely on prior knowledge—preconceptions, biases, stereotypes, myths—to fill conceptual gaps and render narratives comprehensible. As Amy Potter explains in her analysis of news media reporting on Haiti, “[f]rames convey [the] values and ideological convictions of a group, and they often depend on references to other information within [a] cultural framework. . .” (213). In journalism, whether print or televisual, “[f]rames tend to make news accounts simpler and more understandable” by alluding to readers’ preconceptions through a sort of invisible citation (213). The visible narrative content of a text is always accompanied by the latent narrative content that the text omits but ideologically engages through allusion and invisible citation. Through quantitative content analysis of a year’s worth of US news coverage from 2004, Potter deduces that the media habitually notes Haiti’s impoverishment, “The Poverty Frame,” and instability, “The Violence and Political Unrest Frame,” without noting the impact of foreign intervention and the systemic economic disadvantages that cripple Haiti’s chances of developing a solvent infrastructure (217, 216). Furthermore, the relationship between

social dynamics such as poverty and political unrest goes largely unexamined. Correspondingly, “The History Frame” narrates Haitian Independence as a remarkable short-term feat that has failed to translate into long-term success because of Haitian incompetence, again without mention of “how other countries [have] contributed to Haiti’s political strife” (219). These frames omit instances of foreign intervention from their descriptions of Haitian political crisis and instead invisibly cite the myths and narratives that populate the reader’s cultural framework. In this regard, Potter’s examples from the news media are exceedingly relevant to other representations of Haitian political crisis, especially *Ghosts of Cité Soleil*, which combines the sights and sounds of archived news media, formal interviews, and original footage to compose a highly suggestive and erratically edited audiovisual document.

While Leth sees himself as “interested in studying the human being” rather than the political, using “art . . . as a bridge [that can] guid[e] us to a higher sphere, above muddy politics” (Leth 36), film reviews for *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* reveal the latent political orientation that this ostensibly apolitical, humanistic meditation invisibly cites regardless of the director’s conscious intentions. Reviewing *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* for *Sight and Sound*, Nick Funnell begins with an introductory paragraph that invokes the History Frame, the Political Unrest Frame, the Poverty Frame, and a vague allusion to sensationalist accounts of *vodou*, complete with inaccurate historical dates and a tone of condescension, in the space of two sentences:

Despite auspicious beginnings as the world’s first independent black republic in 1804, Haiti has since seemingly grown only as a nexus of horror. Brutal dictators (notoriously “Papa Doc” and “Baby Doc” Duvalier during the 1960s and 1970s),<sup>3</sup> military occupations and trade embargoes have left it

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<sup>3</sup> Here, Funnell unintentionally erases nine years of Duvalierism from Haitian history: the Duvalier dynasty began with Papa Doc’s ascendance in 1957 and ended with Baby Doc’s flight into exile in 1986.

the poorest nation in the western hemisphere, while voodoo infamy, political instability and the United Nations' tagging of Port-au-Prince's Cité Soleil slum as "the most dangerous place on earth" have seen it become the grim, ugly face of the smiling, sun-kissed Caribbean. (53)

*New York Times* writer A. O. Scott, in a review titled "*Ghosts of Cité Soleil: Hip-Hop Gangsters on an Isle of Chaos*," follows suit, accepting the exploits of Bily and 2Pac as an accurate metonym for Haiti, the "Isle of Chaos." Scott also properly identifies, and accepts at face value, *Ghost of Cité Soleil's* implicit political theme, "Mr. Aristide's decade-long decline from hero of democracy to belligerent strongman. . ." (7). Writing for *Mother Jones*, Julia Klein reiterates this simplistic political premise, describing Aristide as "a one-time democrat gone bad" (78). Similarly, Ryan Gilbey follows *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* in denouncing Aristide as a "corrupt and shambolic leader" that used "a gangster army . . . as his unofficial death squad" (47). Reviewing the film for *Variety*, Todd McCarthy makes a similar inference, referring to the *chimères* as Aristide's "slum-based minions" (122), while *Entertainment Weekly's* film reviewer Owen Gilberman takes the premise a step further, calling 2Pac not just a gang leader but "a secret-police fascist using rhymes and machine guns" (118). Of all the *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* film reviews surveyed, only Malcolm Lewis's review in the *New Internationalist* departs from reification of the Political Unrest Frame by noting that while *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* works hard to establish irrefutable connections between Aristide and the *chimères*, the nature of those connections has never been substantiated: "They [Bily and 2Pac] *claim* to be working for liberation theologian and former priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's first democratically elected president. . . . This is voyeurism. It's a sad, bad film whose makers have little interest in how economics and politics affect everyday life" (30; emphasis added). As these reviews demonstrate, while *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* may

function on the surface as a personal portrait of Bily and 2Pac, pushing some of the film's political content to the background, interpretive frames work to fill in those contextual gaps by invisibly citing preexisting colonial narratives of Haitian politics and history.

### **Framing History**

The activation of these interpretive frames derives from the particular narrative of Haitian history that *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* constructs. The film opens with aerial shots of the Haitian countryside, all adorned with text summarizing an important historical moment. These screens culminate in an idiosyncratic historical narrative comprised of four time periods. "On Christmas Eve of 1492," the first screen explains, "Christopher Columbus discovered the 'Earthly Paradise' now called Haiti." As the second screen continues, "In 1804, African slaves successfully revolted and Haiti became the world's first black republic." While these first two initiating events, *de rigueur* for historical understandings of Haiti, are given dates, the third screen encompasses the two hundred years that followed Haitian Independence. Lacking precise historical dates, the third screen summarizes the period between Independence and the bicentennial in one sentence: "A string of dictators and foreign trade embargoes have since left Haiti in a state of desperate poverty and political turmoil." This elliptical description implies a chain of causality: an internal action (dictatorship) provokes an external reaction (embargo). This sleek equation underwrites the temporal logic of *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* and makes more dynamic understandings of the post-independence period inoperable within the hermeneutics of the film. The third historical date thereby orients the viewer toward a singular interpretation of the fourth historical date: "In 2004," the next screen explains, "with demonstrations in the streets and rebels closing in, President Aristide

and his Lavalas party enlisted the support of armed gangs from the slum of Cite Soleil. These gangs are known as Chimeres.” The prelude to Aristide’s second ouster in February 2004 is thereby filtered through the prism of embattled dictatorship. Thus, from the outset, the “rebels” are legitimized, Aristide delegitimized, and the *chimerés* made an official extension of his administration. The participation of the very same “rebels” in the 1991 coup, Aristide’s electoral legitimacy in 1990 and 2000, and the autonomy of the *chimères*, as well as the interference of foreign governments with both of Aristide’s administrations, are dismissed out of hand. In its disavowal of the external factors that led to Aristide’s embattlement, the historical narrative produced by these opening screens exemplifies the Political Unrest frame. Tellingly, in Potter’s estimation, the worst example of the Political Unrest frame occurred in *USA Today’s* coverage of the second coup because “[i]t did not adequately acknowledge that Aristide claimed he was kidnapped, whereas both the United States and France said he resigned” (216-17). *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* duplicates this omission, adhering to the script offered in these opening screens for the duration of the film. This elliptical historical narration introduces two centuries worth of major lacunae, erasing the fact that democratic Haitian elections took place in the 1990s and 2000s as well as the negative effects of foreign intervention in Haiti, including the hypocrisy of embargoes. The US embargoes against Lieutenant General Raoul Cédras’s 1991-1994 junta are a case in point. The US Office of Foreign Assets Control selectively enforced the embargo by failing to seize American “homes owned by coup supporters,” continuing to purchase “baseballs and black-market gasoline from alleged backers of the regime,” “training military men who worked for” the coup regime, and waiting until “almost 15 months after the coup” to “freez[e] Haitian

leaders' assets" (by which time only five dollars remained in Brig. Gen. Philippe Biamby's account with the Bank of Boston), and turned a blind eye to Texaco's fuel distribution in Haiti (Freedberg and Swarns).

There is, in fact, much more to Haiti's first two hundred years than dictatorships and embargoes. While many dictators did rise and fall in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Haiti, they did not operate in a national or even regional vacuum. Nor did they operate within the simplistic moral economy implied by the contrasting terms of dictatorship, which signifies *internal corruption*, and embargo, which signifies *external virtue* (even if that virtue is oftentimes misguided, as screen three also seems to imply).<sup>4</sup> In the nineteenth-century, Haiti was denied national recognition from its fellow Western nation-states until it submitted to certain economic demands, first by paying the French indemnity of 1825, a reparations package for French losses—read: land and slaves—in the Haitian Revolution. This failure to consider the implications of the French indemnity is consistent with what Potter calls "The Economy Frame" that characterizes much commentary on Haiti. Foreign imposition of similarly predatory economic programs in recent decades also suffers from a lack of widespread recognition:

Very few people, it seems, know that in 1825 the young nation of Haiti had to pay reparations to France in the form of 90 million gold francs in order for its independence to be acknowledged. In more recent times the media have failed to acknowledge the industrial development initiatives of the 1980s, which favored U.S. investors who sought to take advantage of Haiti's cheap labor. These initiatives only made Haiti more dependent on imports. Such ideas are missing from the discussion of Haiti's bankrupt state and failed economy. (217-18)

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<sup>4</sup> Such a statement views "foreign policy toward Haiti as well-intentioned, but ineffective," a perspective Paul Farmer describes as a myth designed to justify foreign policies that intentionally exploit Haiti in favor of Euro-American interests (355).

By paying the French indemnity, Haiti earned French recognition of its national sovereignty but became re-enslaved through the manacles of debt. Haiti became dependent on loans from French banks, fostering the institutionalization of a state system that exploits its citizenry to service debt payments while pocketing enough capital to furnish the lifestyles of the Haitian elite. National recognition, as well as more bank loans, soon followed from Germany, Britain, and the US. Despite its long history of trade and political relations with Haiti, the US was the last of these nations to recognize Haitian sovereignty, waiting until 1862. This cycle of loans further entrenched the Haitian kleptocracy and eventually led to an American consolidation of Haiti's debts in the early-twentieth century. In 1914, an uprising against Haitian dictator Vilbrun Guillame Sam and fears of a German occupation threatened the guarantee that Haiti would be able to make its loan payments. In December of that year, the US responded by sending "a detachment of marines to escort \$500,000 of Haitian government funds from the Haitian National Bank, via gunboat, to the National City Bank in New York" (Renda 99). The marine occupation that followed in 1915 facilitated a rewriting of the Haitian constitution to allow foreign property ownership and the training of a new Haitian army intended to suppress popular insurgency against the occupying US forces. By the end of the occupation, fifteen to thirty thousand Haitians had been killed in combat, executed, or worked to death through forced labor, and a string of compliant dictators and a coup-ready military were left to fill the vacuum left by the US marines (Hallward 14). But the French indemnity and the US Occupation of Haiti, as examples of exploitive foreign interference, do not fit the third screen's simplistic calculus of internal corruption ("a string of dictators") versus external virtue ("foreign trade embargoes").

The dictatorship/embargo narrative gestures elsewhere, toward the conclusion that Aristide is simply another Haitian dictator, Duvalier in a priest's frock.

By evacuating foreign exploitation and democratic elections (internal virtue and the legitimacy of black sovereignty) from its narration of Haitian history, the opening sequence of *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* conflates past dictatorships with the presidencies of Aristide. To accomplish this task, the documentary avoids sustained discussion of Aristide's first presidency by relying on an unattributed US radio broadcast that discusses both of Aristide's administrations but with the glaring omission of the 1991 coup: "Aristide was a preacher to the poor who became Haiti's first democratically elected president in 1991. Now, three years into his second term, his Lavalas government is in big trouble." Leth couples this radio commentary, which serves as an anonymous and disembodied voice of authority on Haitian politics, with grainy images of Aristide as a politician that alternate with images of Aristide as a priest. Presented through the darker hues of this archival footage, these images of Aristide giving impassioned speeches as both a politician and a preacher paint Aristide as the essence of the Third World dictator who freely mixes and manipulates political and religious rhetoric. This sequence is then followed by archival footage of protestors running through Port-au-Prince, chanting "Aristide to prison, *chimères* to school," images which add the aura of popular support to the official discourse of the radio commentary.

This glaring omission of the circumstances surrounding Aristide's first administration, including the widespread support that secured his election and the violent coup that replaced his administration with a repressive military junta, facilitate the construction of the film's coup-justifying narrative. When Aristide became Haiti's

first democratically elected president on 16 December 1990, he beat out heavily funded opponents such as Mark Bazin, the International Republic Institute/World Bank-supported candidate, with a 67% share of the vote. The US also “invested a staggering \$36 million in Bazin’s campaign, and . . . invited the outlawed Macoute chief Roger Lafontant to return to Haiti and pose as an ultra-right candidate” (Hallward 31). For his supporters, Aristide was precisely what his bicentennial billboards would claim thirteen years later: a Louverturean figure who would deliver the Haitian people from Duvalierism, macoutism, military juntas, and foreign exploitation. For his detractors, Aristide was nothing more than a radical socialist who would impede the economic growth of the Haitian business sector and roll back the advances of free market enterprise in Haiti. International support for Aristide’s opposition was so strong that “[o]n the very day of the election, in December 1990, a high-level US delegation fronted by ex-president Jimmy Carter tried to persuade Aristide ‘to renounce his success in favor of’ Bazin (Hallward 37). Once in office, Aristide worked to raise the minimum wage, create human and women’s rights initiatives, and increase literacy. Aristide’s interest in literacy promotion, which dates back to his community work as a priest, was especially divisive because widespread literacy would enhance the access of the Haitian peasantry to the institutions of formal democracy (Ballard 218).

By September 30, 1991, Aristide’s detractors had seen enough: Raoul Cédras, with support from the Haitian business elite, their partners in Europe and America, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), deposed Aristide in a military coup. As *de facto* ruler, Cédras presided over a three year military junta characterized by widespread political suppression and the murder of four thousand civilians, many of whom were

Aristide supporters residing in Cité Soleil and other Port-au-Prince slums (Kausen 158, Hallward 155). The coup was reported as a popular uprising, a legitimate expression of outrage from the citizenry, allowing misattribution of the violence to Aristide's administration (Farmer 352, 364). This misrepresentation of the coup also obscured the fact that Aristide supporters comprised the majority of the death toll. By 1993, the Front for Revolution and Progress in Haiti (FRAPH), a paramilitary death squad led by CIA informant Emmanuel Constant, had begun methodically massacring opponents of Cédras's junta. While 99.8% of human rights abuses were attributable to the coup regime and only .2% were attributable to Aristide's party Fanmi Lavalas (FM), US media reporting consistently cast Cédras as a sensible moderate and Aristide as a violent militant (Farmer 2006, 186). Under this mounting pressure, Aristide was forced to negotiate with the very regime that had overthrown him, as if legitimate political opposition rather than a violent and illegal military coup had caused his ouster. Negotiations for Aristide's return to office operated under the false premise that the "Haitian crisis" was a conflict between "two equal and opposed forces unable to resolve their differences" (Farmer 353). Subsequently, when President Clinton's Operation Restore Democracy reinstated Aristide in 1994, it was only after he had agreed to a host of concessions, including the provision that he would only preside over the remaining year of his original term. Aristide, succeeded by his more neoliberal-minded Prime Minister Rene Preval, left office with a fraction of his tenure served, his policies compromised, and a large number of his political base massacred. In spite of these circumstances, Aristide's resolve and popularity among poor Haitians never waned,

leading to his reelection on 26 November 2000 by an even greater margin: 91.7% of casted votes.

### **Image and Ethos: “*Chimères*” vs. “Political Opposition”**

The film’s use of the personal portrait mode of documentary facilitates this elision of events prior to Bily and 2Pac’s exploits in February 2004. The film’s focus on Bily and 2Pac also allows for a dichotomy to be drawn between “The Political Opposition,” who enter the film through formal interviews and archival footage, and Aristide supporters, represented by Bily and 2Pac, the gangster/thugster *chimères* who enter the film through ostensibly “raw” footage. While Leth structures *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* as a tale of sibling rivalry, for most of the film, Bily takes a back seat to 2Pac, the more sensational and music video-ready of the two brothers, as indicated by his name alone—an homage to African-American rap legend Tupac Shakur. Blurring his role as documentary participant and documentary producer, Wyclef enters the film in a well-orchestrated scene, wherein a cell phone conversation is filmed from 2Pac’s location in Cité Soleil and Wyclef’s location in New York City, a feat necessitating either the coordination of two cameras and microphones or a *post facto* recreation of at least one side of their dialogue. During the conversation, 2Pac tells Wyclef that he nicknamed himself after Tupac Shakur because “Tupac was a smart mother fucker.” Wyclef responds: “When I say I’m talking to 2pac, I have to say it’s not American Tupac. I tell them the real 2Pac is from Cité Soleil, partner.” 2Pac plays his song “The Life of our Youth” through a car stereo and raps directly into his phone. Wyclef puts the call on speaker phone and enthusiastically bobs his head in approval. After concluding his call with 2Pac, Wyclef addresses the camera, explaining, “Rap music influenced them people deep over there. . . . They will live by it, and they will die by it. And it ain’t no

Hollywood movie. It's just the truth." Wyclef draws a distinction between Hollywood fiction and documentary truth, but the staging of this scene has more in common with reality TV production than with documentary film-making. With this statement, however, Wyclef, as participant/producer patches this seam in the film text, gesturing toward the conclusion that *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* documents reality in the raw—"it ain't no Hollywood movie."

This gangster rap frame is amplified by scenes that suggest but rarely show the *chimères* perpetrating excessive violence, including another curiously constructed scene in which Bily shoots Ghana, one of 2Pac's "soldiers," for "talking shit" while Bily and his gang oversee food distribution from the back of a relief truck. With a crowd assembled around the truck, Bily hands out large bags of food. An atmosphere of confusion and tension starts to mount as the frames cut back and forth between the truck and Ghana, who seems to shake his head in disapproval from the back of the crowd, as shouting grows louder among the gathered. For reasons that remain unclear, an unnamed gang member suddenly fires a machine gun into the air. The gang members who had been inside the food truck run and jump down to the ground, but the crowd below only stirs—curiously, they neither scatter nor duck in response to the deafeningly loud gun shot. A second shot follows from somewhere off camera. In response, Bily draws his pistol, climbs back onto the truck with assistance from one of his followers, points downward at a forty-five degree angle, and pulls back his arm and torso, implying the pull of a trigger. In the split-second gap that exists between this frame and the next, no gunfire exits Bily's pistol. Instead, the extradiagetic sound of a reverberating gunshot synchs with the next frame, which features Lele—the French

relief aid worker 2Pac has been sleeping with—turning around, in front of a surprisingly unfazed group of people, with a shocked look on her face. Lele then directly addresses the camera in the next shot, explaining that Bily has shot Ghana in the foot, as X-rays of a wounded foot flash intermittently on the screen. Lele then visits Ghana to offer medical assistance and shows his foot to the camera. While Ghana's wound appears to be real, the discrepancies between image and sound suggest heavy editing or even partial reenactment of the actual shooting.

This quick cut away from the site of violence (Bily's firing of the gun) to a tenuously related screen (Lele's shocked visage) is reminiscent of another scene in which 2Pac threatens to kill a woman with a rock for stealing from him. 2Pac lifts the rock and begins to walk toward the woman. He aggressively strikes the rock against the ground twice and just as he begins to move closer to the woman, the film cuts to archival footage of riots and demonstrations in Port-au-Prince. This editing maneuver implies that 2Pac has indeed struck the woman—even though the film gives no visual, auditory, or textual hint of confirmation—and then juxtaposes this petty, cruel, gender-based violence with the political turmoil ensuing in the capital. This highly suggestive editing technique, pervasive throughout the film, works to link support for Aristide with criminality, outlandish acts of barbarity, and the thuggish connotations of US hip hop that 2Pac and Bily idolize, invisibly citing and conflating colonialist myths of Haitian savagery with the spectacle of American gangster rap. If, like Tupac Shakur, 2Pac and Bily employ gangster rap as a politico-aesthetic stance against racial injustice, *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* minimizes this element of their lives, favoring instead criminality and violence.

Aristide supporters and their political imperatives are summarily reduced to mere street thuggery, which the film contrasts with Aristide's "Political Opposition," represented by businessmen such as industrial factory owner Andy Apaid and his brother-in-law Charles Henri Baker, a presidential candidate in 2006 and 2010. Andy Apaid first appears on camera in his office, where he explains directly to the cinematographer that the metal plates covering his office walls protect him from gunfire. He calmly holds a glass jar of bullets in his hand and comments, "twenty-four shells," the number of bullets that have passed through his office walls. This interview is followed by archival footage of Apaid leading an orderly political rally. Surrounded by a dozen silent and respectful supporters, Apaid, microphone in hand, serves as a stark contrast to Bily, 2Pac, and the other gang members that represent Lavalas in the film, legitimating Apaid's claim that Aristide has "put in place an occult criminal machine to help [him] control the formal institutions."

To further this contrast between the criminality of Aristide's supporters and the professionalism of Aristide's opposition, *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* omits mention of Apaid's background as a supporter of both the 1991 and 2004 coups, as owner of Alpha Industries, a sweatshop conglomerate founded under Duvalier, as the patron and protector of Labanye, the anti-Lavalas gang leader who murdered 2Pac in late 2004,<sup>5</sup> and as the head of the Group of 184 (G-184), an International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)- and United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-

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<sup>5</sup> According to Griffin's investigation, "in July 2003, Andy Apaid invited several Lavalas street leaders in Cité Soleil (Amaral, Dred Wilme, Tupac, Billy, and Labanye) to a meeting. . . . Apaid asked the young men to become the violent arm of his movement to undermine the elected government, and to crush the democracy movement in Cité Soleil. Only Labanye agreed" (7).

supported<sup>6</sup> political association comprised of former Duvalierists, Haitian aristocrats, and media elites allied in their support for ousting Aristide because of his economic reform policies (Griffin 5, 35, 36). As human rights attorney Thomas Griffin notes in a report for the Miami School of Law's Center for the Study of Human Rights, "[i]n combination with the violent band of armed attackers closing in on Port-au-Prince, [G-184] provided the political force in Haiti that led to President Aristide's ouster in February 2004" (36).

However, the 2004 coup cannot be completely understood outside the context of its 1991 prequel, and in the figure of Apaid, the continuity between Aristide's first and second ouster materializes with crystalline clarity. Shortly after the first coup against Aristide, Apaid made no secret of his distaste for the deposed president, publicly declaring at a Miami business conference that, if Aristide returned to Haiti, he would "strangle him!" At the time, Apaid held supervisory and administrative control of a 12.7 million dollar USAID Promotion of Investment and Exports (PROMINEX) project designed to attract American and Canadian firms to the cheap labor bastion of Haiti.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>As Griffin explains, IFES "is a U.S.-based tax-exempt organization that claims to provide 'targeted technical assistance to strengthen transitional democracies.'" IFES "has worked in Haiti since 1990" and procures much of its funding from USAID "contracts for millions of dollars, often as the sole bidder. . . ." (27). With their USAID funding, "IFES formed new associations and established relationships with existing ones. . . . Through various programs—that included catered meals, accommodations, entertainment, and payment of a cash 'per diem'—IFES 'sensitized' attendees to the problems with the justice system under Aristide and insisted that they act as a united group for greatest effect" (28). IFES also used "sensitization" among "media and journalist groups," with the intent of converting "all the radio stations in Haiti" into anti-Aristide mouthpieces. This strategy extended into "'human rights' efforts," including the formation of "the Fédération des Etudiants Universitaires d'Haïti (FEUH), a 'student group' based at the state university in Port-au-Prince." In October 2003, as efforts to legitimize the ouster of Aristide escalated, IFES "began a campaign to use human rights abuses as a way to highlight Aristide's purported corruption," enlisting the Lawyer's Committee for Individual Rights (CARLI), a "small, volunteer-based organization." IFES granted CARLI a \$54,000 budget for creating and implementing a human rights abuse "telephone 'hotline'" that would be used to gather and distribute the names "of alleged abusers to the police, the U.S. Embassy, the OAS, and other domestic and international organizations" (28-29).

<sup>7</sup> See Kernaghan.

Aristide threatened Apaid's successful proctoring of PROMINEX by raising the minimum wage to approximately two dollars a day. Apaid's support for the 1991 coup derived directly from this wage increase, as did his involvement in the 2004 coup. But Apaid deflected the motivation for deposing Aristide away from labor issues, claiming instead that Aristide had fostered his own downfall by not addressing what Apaid calls the "fraudulent legislative elections" of May 2000. Apaid tried to use this argument to delay the elections until January 2001, warning Aristide that "if you (the Lavalas government under President Preval) hold the elections before we are ready in January [with a G-184 candidate], you will mortgage this country" (qtd. in Griffin 37n33). Despite their efforts at consolidation under the opposition umbrella association Convergence Démocratique, Apaid and his allies were unable to prepare a candidate that could compete with Aristide's landslide victory. Through the voice of Charles Baker, *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* portrays Aristide's second presidential win as electoral theft: "He stole the elections in 2000. He stole the presidency." Subsequently, in 2004, much like in 1991, coup d'état served as election by other means.

The material effects of the "fraudulent elections" narrative continue to be felt in Haiti, where the geopolitics of the 1990s and 2000s continue to impact the post-earthquake Haiti of 2010-2011. In 2000, for example, the administration of US President George W. Bush and the Inter American Development Bank (IADB) invoked electoral fraud allegations similar to those of Apaid and Baker as a pretense for suspending water and sanitation development loans that had been allocated to Haiti. A decade later, these water, sanitation, and health projects remain incomplete. In late 2010, cholera began to spread in post-earthquake Haiti through unsanitary water from

the Artibonite region, one of the intended sites of the stalled water treatment project (Mukherjee). If proper water treatment facilities had been allowed to develop, as initially planned, the spread of cholera would have been curtailed if not completely contained within the Artibonite. Elucidating the continuity between the opportunism of the IADB loan suspension and the condescending irresponsibility of the UN Stabilizing Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), French epidemiologist Renaud Piarroux reports that the cholera strain, originally from Asia, was most likely introduced to Haiti through human waste dumped by Nepalese MINUSTAH troops into the Artibonite River, the area's major water supply. However, fears that this revelation may "potentially embarrass the United Nations" has slowed further inquiry and put Piarroux's findings under scrutiny (Enserink 388-89). As Piarroux notes in response to this hypocrisy, "if an epidemic killed 4,000 people in Europe or the US, we would want to know exactly where it came from. . . . So why not the same when it happens in Haiti?" (qtd. in Enserink 389). In its grossly reductive portrayal of recent Haitian politics, *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* helps sustain the narratives of Haitian incompetence that not only seek to legitimate the 1991 and 2004 coups, as well as the military junta and UN occupation that respectively followed them, but also the irresponsible intervention and aid strategies that have contributed to the creation and spread of Haiti's cholera epidemic.

### **Romanticizing the Coup**

Along with Apaid and Charles Baker, *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* also contrasts the military and paramilitary forces who led the coup against Aristide with Bily and 2Pac, imbuing the coup forces with an aura of professionalism and justice that distinguishes them from the connotations of criminality and pettiness that characterize the *chimères*. The film presents Louis Jodel Chamblain and Guy Philippe, both career militarists

charged with massive human rights violations, as patriotic heroes who have come to liberate Haiti from the government of Aristide. Once again, such a warped depiction is contingent on the film's omission of the 1991 coup from its narration of recent Haitian history. Chamblain's notoriety as a war criminal began in 1987, when, as a sergeant in the Haitian Armed Forces (FADH) he massacred thirty voters who were waiting to participate in the first Haitian election since François Duvalier's fraudulent electoral victory in 1957. With Haiti under the military rule of General Henri Namphy due to the ouster of Jean-Claude Duvalier in 1986, Chamblain's terrorism against voters was part of a larger effort to extend the hegemony of the Haitian military.

Aristide's electoral victory in 1990 brought this military interregnum to a temporary end. Now under the leadership of Cédras, Chamblain played a major role in the 1991 coup and co-founded FRAPH with Emmanuel Constant. Under the direction of Constant and Chamblain, FRAPH massacred approximately 5,000 Aristide supporters (Horvitz and Catherwood 193). Continuing this pattern of militarism against Aristide, Philippe, a former Haitian police chief and FADH soldier trained by the US Special Forces in Ecuador, led a failed coup attempt against Aristide's second administration in 2001. In response to his orchestration of the 2001 coup attempt, the Aristide government issued a warrant for Philippe's arrest, causing him to flee to the Dominican Republic (Kovats-Bernat 134). In late 2003, from their mutual refuge in the Dominican Republic, Chamblain and Philippe led an invading force comprised of exiled FADH and FRAPH militants over the Haitian border to begin "instigating the crisis that led to Aristide's departure in February 2004" (Bronfman 34).

In *Ghosts of Cité Soleil*, however, the violence that Chamblain and Philippe instigate appears to precede them as the sole product of Aristide's administration, once again imbuing the coup with connotations of virtue and justice. For instance, a US radio broadcast (the same disembodied, anonymous voice of authority used earlier in the film) describes the return of Chamblain and Philippe as a pacifying and heroic affair:

Guy Phillippe and Louis Jodel Chamblain received a hero's welcome from thousands of jubilant Haitians, as the rebel leaders and several dozen armed fighters triumphantly drove through Port-au-Prince. The men who days ago pledged to take the capital by force to oust former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide drove past the national palace without having to fire a single shot.

This sequence is followed by sympathetically constructed interview footage of a teary-eyed Chamblain. Foregoing the hip hop soundtrack that characterizes most of the film, an ambient score composed by British musician Brian Eno accompanies Chamblain's interview. The score, "An Ending (Ascent)," originally appeared on Brian Eno's 1983 album *Apollo: Atmospheres and Soundtracks*. In the liner notes to *Apollo*, Eno describes the album as a more meditative counterpart to the excessive exposition and melodrama that characterized television reporting of the Apollo 11 landing in 1969. "An End (Ascent)" has since appeared in nearly two dozen films, television shows, and commercials, including *Traffic* (2000), *28 Days Later* (2002), numerous episodes of *Nip/Tuck* (2003-2010), and even a Liberal Democrats UK television ad (Lopez). Like these other examples from film and television, *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* uses Eno's "An End (Ascent)" as a musical signifier for redemption and triumph. Thus, the soundtrack gives Chamblain's words a sympathetic and virtuous aura: "I want to say—with a trembling voice—that this warm welcome this morning makes me feel very good. Because I'm back in my country, I'm with my people." If the preceding radio commentary renders

Chamblain a pacifier rather than a fomenter of violence and injustice, this redemptive soundtrack grants Chamblain's words an irreproachable sense of ethos and authority. These rhetorical devices grant Chamblain's speech an impregnable power, galvanizing his self-posturing as a returning exile and liberator who has rightfully overthrown the tyrant who unjustly banished him.

Following this archival interview footage, the film moves back to Cité Soleil via impromptu footage of an anonymous Aristide supporter whose manic speech, erratic body language, and facial disfiguration make him the perfect foil for Chamblain, the virtuous exile/liberator. Through this man's speech and accompanying subtitles, invocation of the Haitian bicentennial directly reenters the film:

From 1804 to 2004, that's 200 years! 200 years of independence. 200 years! What did you ask me? We are the people of Cite Soleil. We fought hard to get Aristide as our President. Tell little Bush we need three things. The Haitian people have three prayers: School for our kids. Food. Sleep. We don't need peace. We need the Chimeres to fight—the extravagant systems right here in Cite Soleil. Look at us today. I feel like killing you to take your camera.

The man's reference to Haitian Independence seems nonsensical, especially after the man asks for the question to be repeated by the cinematographer or film crew (the question itself is never heard, and the questioner is never seen). Subsequently, his leap to Aristide's election associates his administration with his absurd invocation of the Haitian bicentennial: a serialization of failed Haitian sovereignty that serves to discommemorate Haitian Independence. Through his reference to George H. W. Bush, this man also comes to embody the stereotype of the impoverished person who refuses to take responsibility for his own actions, especially in the film's omission of external factors from its depiction of Haitian politics. The violence of his gestures soon becomes a feature of his words, as the man calls for continued fighting from the *chimères* against

the “extravagant systems,” another idiosyncratic turn of phrase that distinguishes his speech from the composed and sincere eloquence of Chamblain’s. Ending with a threat of violence against the cinematographer, as if driven mad by poverty and starvation, this Aristide supporter benefits not from the sympathetic portrayal given to Chamblain.

At this point, Aristide has long since vanished from the film. A brief comment, once again from the anonymous and authoritative voice of a US radio broadcaster, provides only the faintest explanation for his departure: “Haiti’s embattled president has fled into exile and left Port-au-Prince at dawn.” This commentary is accompanied by images of an upturned piano outside the presidential palace and an overflying plane. The upturned piano, as an imagistic allusion to the overthrow of aristocratic power, gives the coup connotations of popular revolt, as if Chamblain and Philippe have perpetrated their own *jacquerie* against the Haitian royal court. Subsequently, the overflying plane comes to signify the tyrant’s cowardly retreat and escape from justice—a suggestive succession of images that elides the controversy surrounding Aristide’s resignation/kidnapping as well as the broader geopolitical mechanics that forced him into exile.

Through its use of interpretive frames that invisibly cite neo/colonialist narratives of illegitimate Haitian sovereignty, its elliptical and elusive narration of Haitian history, its consistent elision of the external factors that have compounded Haitian political strife, and its sensationalized contrasting of thuggish Aristide supporters with professional and “Westernized” opposition forces, *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* forwards a pro-interventionist perspective on recent Haitian politics that romanticizes the coup of 2004 while erasing its direct relationship with the coup of 1991. “While the ‘Aristide question,’” as Mark

Schuller notes, “will undoubtedly be debated for years to come, there is little disagreement among the vast majority of Haitian people living in Haiti at the time” that the UN occupation and interim government that followed Aristide’s departure were worse. Characterized by increased violence and “a worsening of the economic crisis . . . this violent interim period set the stage for the promotion of private capital interests” at the expense of “everyday Haitian people struggling to make sense of the events and make ends meet” (192). The very same could be said for the conditions that followed Aristide’s departure in 1991, but *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* participates in obscuring these details and perpetuating a reductive “failed state” thesis that omits the adverse impact of foreign intervention and neoliberal development schemes in favor of exotic depictions of impoverished Haitians from the “most dangerous place on Earth.” Through its discommemorating subtext on the Haitian bicentennial, *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* inscribes its fatalistic vision within a larger vision of Haitian history that delegitimizes Haitian sovereignty and associates the inception of Haiti’s Independence with the criminal exploits of Bily and 2Pac, who come to embody a hip hop-inflected update of the Afro-Haitian savage of colonial discourse.

CHAPTER 6  
FROM DUVALIERISM TO DECHOUKAJ IN *THE DEW BREAKER*

This chapter addresses Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* as a text that offers a more humane and complex depiction of Haitian political violence than *Ghosts of Cité Soleil*. In its interrogation of the sensationalistic and primitivizing "Idea of Haiti" put forth by hegemonic sources like *Ghosts of Cité Soleil*, *The Dew Breaker* demonstrates not only the geopolitical ramifications of reductive accounts of postcolonial political violence but also, much like *The Shadow of Imana* and *Deogratias* in the Rwandan context, the ways in which they obstruct efforts at reconstruction, reconciliation, and forgiveness by reifying the political and moral dichotomization of post-crisis populations. Danticat constructs this redemptive frame by rehumanizing the figure of the *tonton macoute*, a figure dehumanized and demonized most famously in Graham Greene's novel and screenplay *The Comedians* (1966, 1967), a founding text of Euro-American discourse on Duvalierism/macoutism. To highlight the discursive force of *The Comedians*, Danticat also quotes a particularly ominous passage from Greene's preface to the novel and thereby strengthens the intertextual resonance between *The Dew Breaker* and *The Comedians*. Rather than replacing the discommemoration and dehumanization of texts like *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* and *The Comedians* with honorific memorialization, however, *The Dew Breaker* eschews exclusive focus on a particular moment of Haitian political crisis or on a single political personality such as Aristide or Duvalier. Instead, Danticat stresses the migratory, transnational, and cyclical dynamics of Haitian political strife as well as its effects on ordinary Haitians and Haitian Americans and thereby resists the political instrumentalization that often accompanies narrowly

construed accounts of crisis such as *Hotel Rwanda*, *Murambi*, *Smile Through the Tears*, and *Ghosts of Cité Soleil*.

### The Frame of Evil

In 1957, François “Papa Doc” Duvalier, a doctor and anthropologist from the Haitian countryside, ascended to power through a rigged presidential election. Running on a platform of *noiriste*, a *négritude*-influenced counter-ideology to mulatto elitism, Papa Doc held significant sway with the rural black peasantry, the urban black middle class, and the largely black Haitian military. Despite this widespread popularity, however, Papa Doc saw fit to ensure his election through intimidation and electoral manipulation (Lundahl 266), strongman tactics that foreshadowed the coming totalitarianism of his self-decreed presidency for life. A key feature of Duvalier’s reign was his creation in 1962 of a personal secret police force, the *Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale*, commonly known as the *tonton macoutes*, “a 10,000 man terror corps that was used to intimidate real or imagined adversaries . . .” (257). Across Europe and North America, British author Graham Greene popularized the image of the *tonton macoutes*, with their denim uniforms and ever-present dark sunglasses, in his novel and subsequent Hollywood screenplay *The Comedians* (1966/1967). In the dedication note to the novel, Greene asserts the unmitigated realism of his work, describing Duvalier and the *tonton macoutes* through the symbolics of darkness and evil: “Poor Haiti itself and the character of Doctor Duvalier’s rule are not invented, the latter not even blackened for dramatic effect. Impossible to deepen that night. The Tontons Macoute are full of men more evil than Concasseur,” Greene’s fictionalized *macoute* captain (2). *The Comedians* depicts Haiti’s descent from an impoverished but relatively stable tourist destination to a totalitarian state through the eyes of Mr. Brown, a British

expatriate who owns and operates a hotel in Port-au-Prince. Based largely but by no means completely on Greene's two visits to Haiti—once before Papa Doc's election, once after—*The Comedians* illustrates an oppressive and brutal period of Haitian history requiring, as Greene argues, no sensationalism—"Impossible to deepen that night." In J. Michael Dash's estimation, however, *The Comedians* renders Haitian politics a spectacle of "black lunacy" by favoring "betrayal, injustice and human failure" over "nobility and goodness" (111, 106). While much of the violence and oppression depicted in *The Comedians* was a common feature of the Duvalierist state, what is at stake in such a depiction of Haitian politics, a depiction that emphasizes darkness and attributes the brutality of Duvalier's *tonton macoutes* to the transcendental signifier of evil, a concept associated with an intrinsic spiritual essence, the soul?

This question lies at the center of my reading of Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*, a novel that also depicts the violence and depravity of Duvalierism but in a markedly different way—through a humanizing rather than a demonizing portrayal of a *tonton macoute*. *The Dew Breaker* dramatizes the social and political links that connect Haiti and the United States through the relation of numerous Haitian and Haitian-American characters to the central figure of the Dew Breaker, a *tonton macoute* who once tortured political prisoners for Papa Doc but now, thirty-seven years later, tries to live a peaceful and anonymous life of exile in Brooklyn, New York. Through the force of allusion, Danticat makes the connection between *The Dew Breaker* and *The Comedians* all the stronger. In her concluding chapter, "The Dew Breaker: Circa 1967," Danticat imagines "Human Rights people . . . gathered in hotel bars at the end of long days of secretly counting corpses and typing single-spaced

reports . . .” These human rights workers quote from the dedication note to *The Comedians* as they write, illustrating the discursive power of Greene’s novel: “‘Impossible to deepen that night.’ These people don’t have far to go to find their devils. Their devils aren’t imagined; they’re real” (186). While a full reading of *The Comedians*, which does have more to offer than mere sensationalism, is beyond the scope of this chapter, Danticat’s citation of Greene’s dedication note—which announces both the veracity and moral absolutism of his work—situates *The Dew Breaker* as an intervention in the Euro-American discourse on Duvalierism/macoutism that was profoundly shaped by Greene’s novel.<sup>1</sup> This allusion demonstrates Danticat’s desire to confront the frame of evil that serves as an explanatory device for Haitian political violence in a wide array of media, including novels and films like *The Comedians* and even humanitarian reporting. Invoking Greene, these human rights workers depict men like the Dew Breaker as devils, intrinsically evil beings who, in accordance with their essential malevolence, inevitably perpetrate evil deeds. This Manichean moral schema (good versus evil) evacuates structural concerns from consideration of Haitian politics and dehumanizes the victims and victimizers enmeshed in such systemic political violence.

Departing from the explicatory frame of evil, the multi-voiced and chronologically fragmented narrative of *The Dew Breaker* elucidates the geopolitical inequities that foment Haitian political strife and depicts the *tonton macoute* not as a demonic embodiment but as a human figure corrupted by harrowing social conditions. Nine short stories comprise *The Dew Breaker*, each story interweaving with the others to create a

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<sup>1</sup> As Dash notes, “[t]here is no American equivalent to Greene’s novel about Haiti, no work that has spawned so many different versions, rewritings or interpretations of itself. American attitudes to Haiti from the 1960s onwards are marked by the singular influence of *The Comedians* and its debt to Conrad’s earlier imaginative fixing of Africa” in *Heart of Darkness* (101).

novel from originally autonomous parts.<sup>2</sup> The characters of each story, from the diasporic characters living in Brooklyn to those living in rural Haiti, are connected to one another through Mr. Bienaime, the dew breaker of the book's title. The consequences of the dew breaker's actions reverberate throughout the United States (US) and Haiti and span the administrations of Francois and Jean-Claude Duvalier (1957-1986) as well as Jean-Bertrand Aristide, their democratically elected successor (1991, 1994-1996, 2001-2004), and the first administration of René Préval (1996-2001), revealing the transnational and cyclical dynamics that perpetuate Haitian political violence. This transnational and broadly periodized narrative thereby resists the commemorative process of fixating on a particular moment of crisis or a particular political figurehead, often for partisan, politically instrumentalist ends. Through these narrative strategies *The Dew Breaker* rehumanizes the *tonton macoute* and demonstrates that Haiti is neither isolated from Western hemispheric politics nor anterior to North American modernity.

### **“What did they do to you?”: The Making/Unmaking of a *Macoute***

The establishing story of *The Dew Breaker*, “The Book of the Dead,” presents Bienaime thirty seven years removed from his life as a *macoute*, a temporal and spatial distancing from the scene of his crimes that fosters empathy for the now elderly family man and Brooklyn barber whose name itself—Bienaime means “well loved”—calls attention to his progression. Narrated by Ka, Bienaime's daughter and an aspiring sculptor, “The Book of the Dead” begins in a Lakeland, Florida hotel office, where Ka

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<sup>2</sup> As indicated on the book's copyright page, all but two of the stories comprising *The Dew Breaker*—“The Bridal Seamstress” and “The Funeral Singer”—appeared in periodic publications as short stories, albeit not always in identical form.

has gone to report her father missing from their hotel room. As Ka explains to the hotel manager and a police officer, she and her father have been travelling from Brooklyn to deliver one of Ka's sculptures to a buyer in Tampa. The sculpture, a wood-carving of Bienaime depicted as a prisoner in a Haitian jail, has also gone missing from the hotel. As the hotelier and police officer question Ka about her father, she leads them to believe that she was born in Haiti, despite being an American citizen by birth. In a retrospective narration, Ka explains why she has lied about her birthplace: "I was born and raised in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, and have never been to my parents' birthplace. Still, I answer 'Haiti' because it is one more thing I've always longed to have in common with my parents" (3-4). A first generation Haitian-American, Ka registers a feeling of dislocation, of severed origins. She wishes to have Haiti in common with her parents, but her birth and upbringing in America make Haiti a lost, irretrievable homeland. This generational gap between Haitian-born parents and their US-born daughter also manifests in Ka's greater facility with English, leading to conversations where Bienaime chooses to speak certain phrases in Creole while Ka answers "defiantly in English" (17). This feeling of dislocation leads Ka to create a mythic mental image of her parents' Haitian past from the stories she has heard of their lives: this idealized family history grants Ka access to the national-cultural origins from which she feels estranged.

Ka creates a concrete embodiment of this idealized past in the form of her wood-carved sculpture of her father. Throughout Ka's life, Bienaime had explained the "ropelike scar that runs from . . . [his] right cheek down to the corner of his mouth," as a wound inflicted upon him by a Haitian prison guard during his year of incarceration (5). In accordance with these stories, Bienaime's revised past, Ka's sculpture depicts her

father as a beaten yet still noble and pensive prisoner: “my first completed sculpture of him was the reason for our trip: a three-foot mahogany figure of my father, naked, kneeling on a half-foot-square base, his back arched like the curve of a crescent moon, his downcast eyes fixed on his very long fingers and the large palms of his hands. . . . It was the way I had imagined him in prison” (6). The sculpture connects Ka to an imagined family past, one based on idealization of her father’s victimization (via state-sanctioned torture) and survival (in diasporic exile). But, as will be revealed to her when Bienaime returns to the hotel, this family narrative is an inversion of her father’s actual relationship with the Duvalierist torture state. Bienaime has thrown the sculpture away in shame because it embodies the fallacy of his revised life story—Bienaime was not the victim but the victimizer, a state-appointed torturer, during his time in the Haitian prison. As he explains to his bewildered daughter, “One day for the hunter, one day for the prey. Ka, your father was the hunter, he was not the prey. . . . Ka, I was never in prison. . . . I was working in the prison. . . . It was one of the prisoners inside the prison who cut my face in this way. . . . This man who cut my face . . . I shot and killed him, like I killed many people” (21-22). Ka experiences Bienaime’s confession as “a monologue” told “in one breath” and wishes she “too had had some rehearsal time, a chance to have learned what to say in response” (22). The rehearsed character of Bienaime’s confession, like his recurrent nightmares (23), demonstrates the gravity of his crimes, their manifestation as a burdensome family secret he has long wished to share with his daughter. Recalling her Egyptophile father’s performance of “The Negative Confession” from The Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, Ka realizes that Bienaime had, in fact, been giving a circumscribed confession to her for many years, if only she

had “removed the negatives”: “I am not a violent man’ he had read. ‘I have made no one weep. I have never been angry without cause. I have never uttered any lies. I have never slain any men or women. I have done no evil” (23).

Ka, however, is wary of her father’s wish for understanding: “It was my first inkling that maybe my father was wrong in his own representation of his former life, that maybe his past offered more choices than being either hunter or prey” (24). Susana Vega González reads Ka’s statement as an invocation of the vodou principle of Marasa, represented by the twins of the *lwa* family: “Once she knows the true situation of her father in the Haitian prison, Ka, the daughter, opts for a dialectic position, as if applying the Marasa principle of doubleness from voodoo lore, seeing her father as both victim and victimizer” (González 185). While a provocative reading, I suggest that Ka actually critiques Bienaime’s bifurcation of the world into hunters and their prey as a fallacy, a reiteration of a kill or be killed binary. Bienaime, in other words, speaks as though his conscription into the *macoutes* negated the fate of certain death—he was a man with no choice but to become a killer. Ka provides a perspective of shock and abhorrence but one that is not devoid of sympathy, as she tries to reconcile the father she had idealized as a virtuous victim with the father who has just been revealed to her as a brutal torturer. Rather than dialectically synthesizing father-as-victim with father-as-victimizer, however, Ka sees her father’s retreat to the narrative of “being either hunter or prey” as an inauthentic reduction of the other paths he could have chosen.

Ka’s image of her father is hence shattered, as exemplified by her exchanges with Gabrielle Fonteneau, the Haitian-American actress who purchased Ka’s sculpture, and her mother Anne. After explaining to Fonteneau that Bienaime has thrown the sculpture

away, Ka considers making the actress a new sculpture but admits to herself, “I don’t know that I will be able to work on anything for some time. I have lost my subject, the prisoner father I loved as well as pitied” (31). This loss of her subject signifies a loss of her imagined link to Haiti as a place of origin. For González, in keeping with the Marasa principle, Ka sees her father as a victim of the Duvalierist state as well as a victimizer: “Far from justifying her father’s violent actions, Ka sees him as one more victim of a dictatorship which engendered violence, persecution and oppression but also a great deal of fear on the part of those who had to follow orders to kill and torture. There is no justification, the daughter knows, but maybe there is a door open to redemption” (185). *The Dew Breaker* does indeed demonstrate the systemic brutality that creates a *tonton macoute* and asks us to ponder the possibility of redemption, but it does not do so through the character of Ka but rather through Anne, Bienaime’s wife. When Ka confronts her mother about Bienaime’s confession, asking, “Manman, how do you love him?” Anne replies, “You and me, we save him. When I meet him, it made him stop hurt the people. This is how I see it. He a seed thrown in rock. You, me, we make him take root” (25). However, Ka remains resistant to Anne’s explanation and her redemptive proverb about seed thrown in rock. Instead, she reimagines the sculpture of Bienaime as “a praying mantis, crouching motionless, seeming to pray, while actually waiting to strike” (26). This image of the mantis feigning prayer while preparing to strike at its prey conveys Ka’s new conception of her father as a deceptive predator. She no longer sees her father as a noble victim but as a duplicitous victimizer who hides his predatory intentions behind a mask of kindness.

Contrasting Ka's hesitance to forgive Bienaime, Anne's proverb emphasizes redemption and atonement, and while this may initially seem merely the sentiment of a wife standing by her husband, we learn in the final chapter that Anne is equally haunted by a tortured past, as her own brother-in-law was murdered by Bienaime. A Bel-Air priest preaching Liberation Theology-influenced sermons at his church and on his radio show, Anne's brother-in-law becomes one of Duvalier's targets because he "was not sticking to the 'The more you suffer on earth, the more glorious your heavenly reward' script" (184-85). This concluding story depicts the events leading up to the murder of the priest but also follows Bienaime's memory as he flashes back to the childhood events that led him to join the *tonton macoutes*. While waiting outside the preacher's church, the Dew Breaker sends a young boy to buy him cigarettes. Noticing a tattered textbook in the boy's arm, Bienaime remembers his own impoverished past and gives the boy "three gourdes of his change in honor of a past he couldn't deny" (191). This exchange leads Bienaime to think back on the first factor that contributed to his descent into *macoutism*, tellingly, the theft of his parents' land by some of his future Duvalierist peers: "His family had lost all their land soon after the Sovereign One had come to power in 1957, when a few local army officials decided they wanted to build summer homes there. Consequently his father had gone mad and his mother had simply disappeared" (191). Effectively orphaned, disenfranchised, impoverished, and hopeless, the young Bienaime becomes a perfect candidate for Volunteers recruitment. At age nineteen, he "joined the Miliciens, the Volunteers for National Security . . . when the Volunteers came to his town bussing people to a presidential rally in the capital. They needed bodies to listen to one of the president's Flag Day speeches" (191).

Duvalier's staging of public support at his Flag Day speech impacted Bienaime with a sense of grandeur, filling him with awe for the President's show of extravagance.

Along with this awe-inspiring display of political power, poverty induced starvation also influences Bienaime, making him a promising candidate for conscription into the *tonton macoutes*. Bienaime recalls the hunger he felt on the day of his recruitment after noticing that the boy he gave three gourdes has used the money to buy goat meat, plantains, and a few loose cigarettes. Watching from his car as the boy shares his food with a group of friends, Bienaime is once again transported back to the scene of that fateful Flag Day:

And so he watched the boys suck the marrow out of the fried goat bones until the bones squeaked like whistles and clarinets and he thought of how hungry he'd been after the president's speech, when the crowd was left to find its own way home and when one of the many men in denim who were circling the palace that day had approached him and asked him whether he wanted to join the Miliciens, the Volunteers, what later would be called the macoutes. (195)

Joining the *macoutes* assuages Bienaime's hunger and also gives him a myriad of privileges. With his Volunteers identification card he gets free clothes from "the rich merchants' shops" and "enormous amounts of food" from local restaurants. He takes full advantage of these privileges, especially the free meals "because he enjoyed watching his body grow wider and meatier just as his sense of power did." His Volunteers status also earns him free boarding and enough status to indulge in many sexual partners of all classes (196). Enjoying unfettered access to sex, fancy clothes, and extravagant meals, the Dew Breaker gorges and satiates his many appetites, the internal weight of his many lusts physically mirrored by his corpulence.

With the present frame of the narrative moving forward toward the Dew Breaker's assault of the preacher, these interspersed flashbacks to Bienaime's childhood serve

not to exonerate him but to elucidate his humanity by exposing the systemic exploitation that led him to this moment, the scene of his final crime. Rather than one of Graham Greene's "expressionless . . . golliwogs" in *The Comedians* (132), Bienaime is depicted as both a subject constrained by structures of social and political power as well as an agent who still makes decisions within those constraints. For instance, the precariousness of the Dew Breaker's position within the very system that created him is illustrated by Bienaime's need to flee into exile after murdering the preacher. After failing to follow orders twice (first by arresting rather than assassinating the preacher, then by maiming and killing rather than torturing and releasing him) Bienaime rightly fears for his life because he has breached the constraints of his position with the Duvalierist state: "When he looked down at the preacher's corpse, his arms and legs spread out, a puddle of blood growing around his torso, the fat man wanted to vomit. Since he'd disobeyed the palace's orders twice now, it was possible that he would be arrested, even executed" (229). As Bienaime runs from the Casernes prison, vomiting fits overtake him, suggesting not only fear of retribution but also a moral purgation of past sins. Bienaime expresses the desire to purge himself of his prior life when he meets Anne, who had been running toward the prison just as Bienaime had been running away from it. Fearing the worst for her brother after hearing of his arrest, Anne, dressed only in "a white satin nightgown . . . entirely soaked with sweat that glued it to her bony body," races through the night and collides with Bienaime. The two collide and fall to the ground, the dew breaker's face covered in blood from the fresh wound inflicted upon him by the preacher. Anne's sweaty and bedraggled appearance testifies to the depth of her concern for her brother, and her white satin nightgown demonstrates

the spontaneity of her reaction to the news of her brother's arrest. Her sweat-soaked white nightgown, a sort of wedding dress born of despair, also imbues Anne's collision with Bienaime with the connotations of a marriage ceremony—a marriage predicated on the imperative of survival and founded on the basis of a consensual lie.

Their collision marks the genesis of Bienaime's new life and its foundation in a revised narrative of his past. The inversion of fact that informs Ka's statue of Bienaime as a victim rather than a victimizer originates in Anne's initial mistaking of Bienaime as a prisoner escaping from Casernes. After escorting him back her house, Anne nurses his wound. As the dew breaker convalesces, Anne asks him a powerful question, unaware of what the dew breaker's answer really means:

“What did they do to *you*?” she asked.

This was the most forgiving question he'd ever been asked. It suddenly opened a door, produced a small path, which he could follow.

“I'm free,” he said. “I finally escaped.” . . .

One day he would try to make her understand why he'd put it like that. In many ways it was true. He had escaped from his life. He could no longer return to it, no longer wanted to. (237)

While Anne believes she is asking the tortured what his brutalizers have done to him, she is actually asking the torturer about *his* brutalizers. The dew breaker takes this, “the most forgiving question he'd ever been asked,” as an opportunity to escape from the structural violence that preyed on his childhood disenfranchisement and lured him with every vice imaginable to a life of killing. He can now rewrite his life in exile, and as Anne and Bienaime help each other build new lives in a foreign land, they develop an unusual bond based on a revised past: “He endorsed the public story, the one that the preacher had killed himself. And she accepted that he had only arrested him and

turned him over to someone else. Neither believing the other nor themselves. But never delving too far back in time, beyond the night they met” (241). Anne and Bienaime both consent to centering their wedded life around a lie, ultimately an act of survival based on a shared attempt to transcend the past and begin anew. Through Anne, *The Dew Breaker* attempts to grapple with Bienaime’s actions and consider the implications of allowing him to start life over, anonymously atoning for his sins in exile. Over time, as Anne’s awareness of Bienaime’s true past as well as her love for him grow, her attitude of forgiveness and sympathy persists even with complete knowledge of his life as a dew breaker. Haunted by nightmares and prone to ritualistically perform the Negative Confession, transcending the past is easier said than done for Bienaime, just as it is for his victims. Even for Anne, the character most willing to grant Bienaime the possibility of atonement, there is no complete settling into the founding lie of their family, creating an internal dissonance she experiences as a “pendulum between regret and forgiveness” (252).

If “The Book of the Dead” and “The Dew Breaker: Circa 1967” present Anne’s capacity for forgiveness as a potential model for moving forward and healing old wounds, another chapter, “The Book of Miracles,” challenges Anne’s stance by forcing her to confront the possibility of encountering another man guilty of politically motivated acts of violence against the Haitian people—Emmanuel “Toto” Constant. Constant, as co-founder and leader of the anti-Aristide death squad FRAPH (Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti), oversaw the rape, torture, and massacre of nearly 5,000 Aristide supporters during the military junta of 1991-1994 (Horvitz and Catherwood 194). Taking place years before “The Book of the Dead,” Constant

appears in “The Book of Miracles” as a spectral symbol of injustice, an absence perceived as present, when a much younger Ka mistakes an anonymous parishioner for him at a Christmas Eve Mass. The man resembles the wanted flyers Ka has seen posted around the neighborhood. Below the flyer’s heading, “WANTED FOR CRIMES AGAINST THE HAITIAN PEOPLE,” are a picture of Constant and “a shorthand list of the crimes of which he had been accused” (78). Alerted by Ka of Constant’s possible presence, Anne recalls the print, television, and radio news reports through which she had learned of FRAPH’s campaign of terror during Aristide’s first exile:

Constant’s thousands of disciples had sought to silence the president’s followers by circling entire neighborhoods with gasoline, setting houses on fire, and shooting fleeing residents. Anne had read about their campaigns of facial scalping, where skin was removed from dead victims’ faces to render them unidentifiable. After the president returned from exile, Constant fled to New York on Christmas Eve. He was tried *in absentia* in a Haitian court and sentenced to life in prison, a sentence he would probably never serve. (79)

By situating this false sighting of Constant at a Christmas Eve Mass, Danticat calls attention to the date of Constant’s flight into exile in the US. Christmas Eve, a day reserved for family celebration and religious observance, and a Catholic church, a location associated with worship and sanctuary, are haunted by Constant and the international breach in justice that his exile in the US represents.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Despite requests from the Haitian government for his extradition and his *in absentia* conviction for murder by a Haitian court, Constant remains in the US to this day (Horvitz and Catherwood 194). To obstruct US deportation efforts against him, Constant publicly described his role as a CIA informant on 60 *Minutes* in December 1995 and threatened to reveal more in a wrongful imprisonment law suit against Janet Reno and Warren Christopher (Davis 267-268), effectively blackmailing his way to impunity. Constant subsequently enjoyed a life of freedom among New York’s Haitian émigré population (many of whom were exiled as a result of Constant and FRAPH in the 1990s) until as recently as October 2008, when Constant was sentenced to twenty-seven years in prison—not for his long record of human rights violations in Haiti but for his participation in a mortgage fraud scam in the US (Friedrichs 208).

Ka's false sighting of Constant, a Haitian war criminal whose role as a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) informant shields him from sentencing in Haiti, elucidates the transnational US-Haiti scope of Haitian political violence and forces Anne to compare Constant's crimes with those of her husband: How different are these two men? If Bienaime deserves forgiveness, does Constant as well? Or is the breach of justice embodied by Constant also embodied by Bienaime? When Anne recalls seeing Constant's wanted posters around town, she is clearly distressed by the implications that this campaign for justice bring to bear on her secret life of exile with Bienaime, including the risk that "even though her husband's prison 'work' and Constant's offenses were separated by thirty-plus years, she might arrive at her store one morning to find her husband's likeness on the lamppost rather than Constant's . . ." (80). While the wanted poster provokes in Anne a protective impulse toward her husband, Constant's prospective presence at Christmas Eve Mass leads Anne to a broader questioning of her life with Bienaime: "What if it were Constant? What would she do? Would she spit in his face or embrace him, acknowledging a kinship of shame and guilt that she'd inherited by marrying her husband?" (81). Here, Anne wonders if it is even possible to extend her model of forgiveness beyond her own husband, demonstrating that what may constitute redemption for one party may constitute a failure of justice for another. If Constant deserves Anne's spit/spite while Bienaime deserves her forgiveness, where does the difference between the militia leader and the dew breaker lie, in Anne's detachment from one and intimacy with the other or in the severity of their crimes? Conversely, if Constant deserves Anne's compassion, do the differences in Constant's

and Bienaime's crimes as well as the differences in how each man accepts accountability for those crimes lose all meaning?

In this regard, the spectral presence of Emmanuel "Toto" Constant illuminates the limits inherent in Anne's model of forgiveness. From the outset, Anne's ability to offer Bienaime redemption seems contingent on Bienaime's anonymity in Brooklyn, as knowledge of his whereabouts would expand the interest of justice beyond Anne to the dew breaker's many victims. While Anne can offer forgiveness as the sole witness to Bienaime's penance and unmaking as a *macoute*, public knowledge of his life in Brooklyn would open Anne's deliberation up to contestation. Beyond the issue of anonymity versus public visibility, however, the cases of Bienaime and Constant diverge in two important ways: first, unlike Bienaime, Constant held a state- and CIA-sponsored leadership position from which he oversaw the mutilation, rape, and murder of exponentially more victims than Bienaime; second, and perhaps more importantly, Constant has never demonstrated the desire to repent and begin life anew, a desire that defines Bienaime's evolution in *The Dew Breaker*.<sup>4</sup> If, as Greene suggests of Haiti, "[o]nly the nightmares are real in this place" (172), there truly would be no room for justice, forgiveness, or redemption, only vengeance, inhumanity, and the answering of evil with more evil. But *The Dew Breaker*, however, by rehumanizing the *tonton macoute*, forces us to consider difficult questions concerning the nature of justice, vengeance, forgiveness, and redemption. It is precisely these questions that offer a

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<sup>4</sup> As Constant declared in 1997, "I am still the leader of FRAPH," a remorselessly ambitious attitude also reflected in his presidential aspirations: "I've been prepared since young for a mission . . . I'm either going to be president of Haiti or I'm going to be killed" (qtd. in Horvitz and Catherwood 194).

means for deferring judgment and suspending retribution, and it is precisely these questions that the frame of evil disallows.

**“It was the dread of being wrong, of harming the wrong man”: Justice, Retribution, or Revenge?**

The remainder of this chapter will focus on how *The Dew Breaker* demonstrates the importance of such deferred judgment through its depictions of reprisal killings and the devolution of justice into cyclical violence. In “Night Talkers,” for instance, Danticat exposes the fine line that exists between retributive justice and mere vengeance. Dany, the protagonist of “Night Talkers,” is a Haitian émigré who lives in Brooklyn but has returned to the rural Haitian village of Beau Jour to visit his elderly Aunt Estina. Orphaned at the age of six by the dew breaker, Dany has since been consumed by the desire for retribution. He has returned to Beau Jour to tell Aunt Estina that he has found his parents’ killer, a barber from whom he rents a basement room in Brooklyn (97). Dany decides to rent the room after realizing that the owner is his parents’ killer and begins to fantasize about murdering Bienaime, who had shot his parents and blinded Aunt Estina by setting fire to their house in Port-au-Prince (104-105). Interrupted during the day by visiting neighbors, Dany only manages to convey his message to Aunt Estina through his dreams, as both aunt and nephew are *palannits* or night talkers, those who speak their “dreams aloud with words” (98). As Dany explains to his “dream aunt,” he had come close to exacting his revenge two nights before his trip to Beau Jour, sneaking into Bienaime’s bedroom while Anne was out of town at a church event. As he looks down on the sleeping Bienaime, Dany imagines choking or smothering him, but an unexpected realization stays his hand:

Looking down at the barber’s face, which had shrunk so much over the years, he lost the desire to kill. It wasn’t that he was afraid, for he was

momentarily feeling bold, fearless. It wasn't pity either. He was too angry to feel pity. It was something else, something less measurable. It was the dread of being wrong, of harming the wrong man, of making the wrong woman a widow and the wrong child an orphan. It was the realization that he would never know why—why one single person had been given the power to destroy his entire life (107).

Bienaimé's change in appearance registers his humanity (the effects of time, travel, and circumstance on his body) and this change dissipates Dany's thirst for revenge by visually implying that this barber may not be the same man he was four decades ago—if he even is the right person and not another one of the novel's recurring instances of mistaken identity. Whether or not Bienaimé is the actual killer Dany has been searching for all these years, the fear of killing the wrong man grows to overshadow his quest for revenge. Dany comes to realize that even if he could find assurance that Bienaimé is, in fact, the dew breaker, murdering him will never assuage his sorrow or provide an explanation for "why one single person had been given the power to destroy his entire life." By seeking retribution, Dany only risks bringing more harm and sorrow into the world, afflicting not only his primary target but the family members with which his target is inextricably linked. He will never know why the dew breaker had been able to destroy his life and killing him will not change that. Dany thereby realizes that vengeance is not justice and that if he were to kill Bienaimé, rather than lessening his own sorrow, he would pass it on to others. It is this realization that stays Dany's hand, leading him to defer judgment and suspend, indefinitely, his pursuit of retribution.

Dany only experiences this provisional form of closure by returning to Beau Jour, a necessary journey indicative of the transitory and transnational causes and effects of Haitian political violence. Due to the diasporic fragmentation that has sent Dany to the US, reconnecting with Aunt Estina—who offers Dany a connection to his deceased

parents—can only be accomplished by travelling back to Haiti, the site of his family origins as well as the violence that destroyed his family and forced him into exile. Speaking to Aunt Estina through his dreams allows Dany to share his internalized anger, fear, and sorrow, and through this process Dany's emotional wounds are, at least partially, healed. After this ameliorative exchange, for instance, Dany wakes to find Aunt Estina dead (110), and while her passing brings great sorrow, it also brings a modicum of peace for Dany: "Perhaps she [Aunt Estina] had summoned him here so he could at last witness a peaceful death and see how it was meant to be mourned. Perhaps the barber was not his parents' murderer after all, but just a phantom who'd shown up to escort him back here" (116).

In this regard, "Night Talkers" depicts rural Haiti as transitory and transnational through the migratory exile and return of Dany and the many others who return willingly or through deportation to Beau Jour (96). Setting "Night Talkers" in Beau Jour also demonstrates how the systemic violence of Duvalierism links country and city as well as postcolony and metropole. For J. Michael Dash, this visit to Beau Jour undercuts the idealized rural space that the Haitian émigré hopes to find: "The village to which Dany returns is called Beau Jour, suggesting the romanticized space of home that the migrant cherishes. However, it is the space of the brutal murder of Dany's parents. . . ." ("Fictions" 41). While I am apt to agree that "Night Talkers" disrupts a romanticizing of rural Haitian space, it cannot be due to the murdering of Dany's parents in Beau Jour, since their assassination actually takes place in Port-au-Prince. As Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw notes, Danticat often draws such a distinction between the city as a site of strife and the country as a site of peace: "[i]n Danticat's works . . . there is often a clear

distinction between a return to the capital and to the countryside. The capital, Port-au-Prince, is the site of violence where nightmares are created, whereas the Haitian countryside is edenic . . .” (80). While Beau Jour does figure as a site of healing and Port-au-Prince as a site of trauma, the dichotomy between idyllic, rural space and violent, urban space is ultimately blurred, as the violence perpetrated by Bienaime follows Dany intra- and internationally. Rather than a rural Haiti cut off from the modern world, “Night Talkers” presents Beau Jour as a migratory hub linked to Haiti’s urban centers as well as North America.

The type of retributive violence Dany forgoes is most directly addressed in the chapter “Monkey Tails.” Extending these issues of judgment and retribution to a macro-political scale, “Monkey Tails” depicts the waves of reprisal killings that accompanied the end of the Duvalier dynasty. Subtitled “February 7, 1986/February 7, 2004,” the story is bookended by the fall of one dictatorship and the impending emergence of another. On 7 February 1986, Baby Doc, under the pressure of a popular uprising, renounced his power and went into exile. On 5 February 2004, the Cannibal Army, an anti-Aristide militia comprised of former soldiers and FRAPH members who had participated in the 1991 coup, captured the city of Gonaives. Within three weeks, the Cannibal Army, along with reinforcements from exiled military cadres invading from the Dominican Republic, had successfully executed a second coup against Aristide. A multinational, 45,000 strong occupying force led by the US quickly filled the governance vacuum created by Aristide’s ouster, foregoing the Haitian constitution and creating a multiparty “Council of the Wise” that would name retired technocrat Gerard Latorture Haiti’s interim Prime Minister (Schuller 192). “Monkey Tails” elucidates the cyclical

nature of these historical moments through the narration of Michel, a soon-to-be father whose father was killed for political reasons. Speaking into a cassette tape recorder, Michel recalls the events of February 1986 for his unborn son, whose due date in February 2004 is fast approaching. Michel's subjectivity as a fatherless male who is now an expectant father imbues the cyclicity of modern Haitian political strife, from Baby Doc's exile in 1986 to Aristide's exile in 1991 and again in 2004, with the symbolics of patriarchal crisis:

three months before my birth I had lost my father to something my mother would only vaguely describe as "political," making me part of a generation of mostly fatherless boys, though some of our fathers were still living, even if somewhere else—in the provinces, in another country, or across the alley not acknowledging us. A great many of our fathers had also died in the dictatorship's prisons, and others had abandoned us altogether to serve the regime. (141)

The political violence Michel describes shatters families, making orphans and sending fathers into exile. This description characterizes such political strife as deriving from a kind of patriarchal dysfunction, a dysfunction Michel strives to overcome by communing with his son *in utero*. It should be noted that this emphasis on father-son relationships does not reveal a phallogocentric tendency in *The Dew Breaker*. When considered in tandem with the rather affirmative and gynocentric example of Aunt Estina's community leadership in "Night Talkers," the patriarchal register of "Monkey Tails" serves as merely another means for symbolically articulating the personal impact of Haitian political crisis, particularly in its effect on young males.

The patriarchal dysfunction depicted in "Monkey Tails" resonates not only as a symbol of insolvent and corrupt governance but also as an example of just how profoundly the political can affect the personal, with each recurrent regime, coup, and junta creating cyclical violence and scores of fatherless children. There is much more,

therefore, to “the darkness and terror” that Greene’s protagonist Mr. Brown sees in “the Tontons Macoute in their dark glasses. . .” (304); there is a dramatic human cost, systemically perpetuated by an entrenched cycle of poverty, violence, and reprisal rather than a manifestation of metaphysical evil. As Michel’s remembrance of the chaos and confusion following Baby Doc’s departure demonstrates, even the tyrant-father Duvalier has children orphaned by his exile, and their orphaning rather than their reintegration into Haitian society has grave consequences. In Michel’s words, the departure of Baby Doc “orphaned a large number of loyal militiamen, who had guarded the couple’s command with all types of vicious acts. Now the population was going after those militiamen, those macoutes, with the determination of an army in the middle of its biggest battle to date” (140). This popular mobilization against the now “orphaned” macoutes can be seen as part of the complex Haitian political concept of *dechoukaj*, Creole for “uprooting.” *Dechoukaj* describes the process of renewal and regeneration that follows the demise of political tyranny, in this case Duvalierism, and can refer to attempts at reconciliation, public grieving, and political restructuring (Averill 161). The political will manifested in *dechoukaj* can and has also led to retributive torture and reprisal killings, exemplified most graphically by “necklacing,” the practice of burning a tire that has been placed around a person’s neck. Michel alludes to necklacing with olfactory imagery: “There was the stench of kerosene and burning tires wafting through the air. It was only a matter of time before the rubber smell would be replaced with that of flesh” (149). The insatiable brutality of *macoutism* and the attendant outrage it has created in the Haitian citizenry should not be trivialized through myopic readings of such retributive violence; just as the actions of the dew breaker are rendered systemic in the

aforementioned stories, so too are these episodes of popular retribution in “Monkey Tails.”

Systemic understanding, however, does not equal exoneration or justification, and Danticat critiques “necklacing” and other extreme manifestations of *dechoukaj* through the reactions of Dany and Michel, who abstain from taking vengeance against former *tonton macoutes*. In “Monkey Tails,” Romain, an older boyhood friend of Michel’s, provides a metaphor of self-vampirism for such retributive violence. When Romain remarks, “I tell you that in Europe they eat sugar with our blood in it,” Michel replies, “It seems to me we consume a lot of sugar here too. Does that mean we’re drinking our own blood?” Romain responds as if this is a self-evident question: “Imbecile, you’re like that baby pig who deigns to ask its mother how come her nose is so big and ugly” (153). Necklacing and other forms of retributive violence can be seen as such an act of self-vampirism, as reprisals of torture and murder fuel a recurring cycle of violence within the Haitian body politic. *The Dew Breaker’s* rehumanization of a *tonton macoute*, as well as its many scenes of attempted forgiveness, deferred judgment, and suspended retribution, demonstrate an alternative, wherein the prospect of cyclical violence might be prevented or, at the very least, diminished.

The recent reemergence of political figureheads from the Haitian past highlights the importance of fostering a migratory, cyclical, transnational, non-partisan, and reconciliation- rather than revenge-oriented vision of Haitian politics. With the recent repatriations of Francois Duvalier and Aristide to Haiti comes the possibility that hardline Duvalierists as well as militant Lavalassians may use the appearance of their once-exiled leadership, regardless of their leaders’ intentions, to incite violence, reopen old

wounds, and exert pressure on Haiti's already fragile social landscape for political gain. *The Dew Breaker*, much like *The Shadow of Imana*, disrupts such appropriative and partisan historical perspectives by using chronological fragmentation and multiple narrators to depict the complexities of postcolonial political violence. Such a refusal to reduce Haitian political crisis to a particular time, place, and administration works against political dichotomization and the retributive violence it often fuels. Staying the hand of reprisal offers a first and necessary step toward mitigating past tensions and nurturing the development of stability and reconciliation in the future, and it is only through the humanizing rather than the demonizing of the political opposition that such a context of suspended retribution can be realized.

CHAPTER 7  
(RE)HISTORICIZING THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION IN *THE KINGDOM OF THIS WORLD* AND *THE SALT ROADS*

This chapter turns more directly toward the Haitian Revolution, the world's first successful large-scale slave rebellion and war for independence, as the ground zero of postcolonial violence in historical as well as discursive/symbolic terms. For the slaveholding nations of Europe and North America, the revolting slaves of Saint Domingue represented a material threat to the slave trade economy and a discursive threat to the founding myths of colonial racism, namely, that Africans and their descendants were incapable not only of governing themselves but also of envisioning and yearning for freedom altogether. Hence, for many Europeans and North Americans, the Haitian Revolution was an outpouring of African bloodlust, not a war for independence and sovereignty, that could eventually be contained once the slaves had been reconquered and reacclimated to their natural position of passivity and servitude within the colonial order. This primitivizing view of the Haitian Revolution has provided fodder for the colonial stereotypes of African and Afro-Caribbean violence that inform texts such as *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* and *The Comedians* and, even more recently, commentators such as Pat Robertson and Haiti's General Consul to Brazil, who both attributed the earthquake of 2010 to the Satanic African magic they associate with the Haitian Revolution (Obenson).

The ascendance of Caribbean literature in the twentieth century provided a significant vehicle for contesting the colonial logics of race and modernity that posit the Haitian Revolution as merely a primitive and shortsighted revolt led by savage and irrational African and African-descended slaves. This chapter focuses on a recent text within this Caribbean literary tradition, Caribbean-Canadian writer Nalo Hopkinson's *The*

*Salt Roads*. Blending the genres of speculative fiction and magical realism, Hopkinson confronts the assumptions of colonial discourse by spiritually and culturally connecting three African-descended women through the subaltern religion of *vodou*. Ezili, a female *vodou lwa* or spirit, links these women across time and space (the three protagonists reside in pre-revolutionary Haiti, nineteenth-century France, and fifth-century Egypt) to imaginatively center the marginalized history of the Haitian Revolution as well as the lives of these African-descended women as integral aspects of modern world history. This radically periodized historical vision also revises the Caribbean literary canon from which *The Salt Roads* derives by launching a feminist critique of the masculinist Caribbean nationalism exemplified by Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World*, a founding text of magical realism that confronts the assumptions of colonial discourse but also minimizes the contributions of slave women to Haitian revolutionary history and exoticizes and glamorizes the reprisal rapings of the wives and daughters of the French colonizers.

### **Silencing the Haitian Revolution**

An ironic drama of cinematic proportions unfolded at the La Rochelle naval port in France, midsummer 1792. Three years since the uprising of Parisian revolutionaries against their despotic monarchy, the French Republic's volunteer soldiers awaited inspection before journeying to the colony of Saint Domingue, where they would join a French military contingent unsuccessfully attempting to quell a colony-wide slave rebellion. The irony lies in the revolutionary mottos these young troops had affixed to their caps and flags: "Virtue in action," "I am vigilant for the country," "Live Free or Die" (Scott 1-2). La Salle, the infamous French general, found no fault with the first two inscriptions, but "Live Free or Die" posed a problem. This slogan, a staple of the French

revolutionary repertoire, could, like a hero's weapon in the hands of a criminal, be dangerous in the minds' of the revolting slaves. La Salle argued that if they inherited such ideas in Saint Domingue, "a land where all property is based on the enslavement of Negroes," the slaves "would be driven to massacre their masters and the army which is crossing the sea to bring peace and law to the colony" (Scott 2-3). He convinced the troops to compromise with less provocative slogans, such as "The Nation, the Law, the King," or, even more banal, "The French Constitution" (Scott 3). For La Salle, the slave revolt constituted an eruption of African irrationality fomenting in rebellious violence against the institution of slavery. If those slaves acquired the French Enlightenment principles of liberty, equality, and brotherhood—through proximity to the slogans borne by La Salle's troops—this irrational and fleeting revolt might achieve political consciousness and become that much harder to contain.

La Salle's assessment of the slave revolt in Saint Domingue exemplifies what Michel-Rolph Trouillot describes as the "unthinkable" character of the Haitian Revolution. Even though the slaves of Saint Domingue had begun revolting en masse the previous year, La Salle clung to the idea that this revolutionary uprising was a mere spasm of violence born of temporary discontent. Hence, the tenets of French republicanism remained dangerous ideas, ideas that could instill a yearning for freedom in these otherwise docile slaves: a firm hand would quell the revolt and return the slaves to their typical state of happy obedience, so long as they were not corrupted by the ideals of European equality. Due to this widespread colonialist "contention that enslaved Africans and their descendants could not envision freedom," the Haitian

Revolution “entered history with the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as it happened” (Trouillot 73).

While abolitionist and anticolonial movements had gained popularity by the late-eighteenth century, colonialism and slavery as well as the racism that underwrote them were typically treated as separate subjects in the realms of philosophical, political, and legal debate; hence, abolitionists often protested the Atlantic slave trade on pragmatic and economic rather than moral and ethical grounds (Trouillot 80). In other words, even though abolition was thinkable, the universal equality of all humanity, Africans and Europeans alike, was not. More fundamentally, then, “the Haitian Revolution was unthinkable in the West not only because it challenged slavery and racism but because” it demonstrated “the humanity of the enslaved” (Trouillot 87). Such unthinkability has introduced structural “silences,” epistemological gaps, in both professional and popular histories of the Haitian Revolution, which emphasize some facts while minimizing or ignoring others (Trouillot 26). Subsequently, many commentators and writers of varying political persuasions have continued in La Salle’s footsteps, silencing the agency and humanity of the revolting slaves by treating the Haitian Revolution as a subordinate rather than a related event to the French Revolution, excising it from “The Age of Revolutions,” and focusing on European players at the expense of African and Haitian ones (Trouillot 98, 106).

Despite these epistemological prejudices, the Haitian Revolution remains historically and symbolically important as the originary moment of postcolonial/ anticolonial violence in the Caribbean and the Global South, more generally. For this very reason, twentieth- and twenty-first century Caribbean literature has been a major

site for contesting reductive, colonialist understandings of the Haitian Revolution and the sensationalized image of black violence they promote in texts as far ranging as *The Comedians* and *Ghosts of Cité Soleil*. As Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert explains in *Literature of the Caribbean*, the Haitian Revolution plays “[s]econd [only] to the history of the plantation as a central element in Caribbean literature” (3). Caribbean literary and intellectual luminaries such as C. L. R. James, Aimé Césaire, and Derek Walcott, to name but a few, have all put their imaginative mark on Haitian revolutionary history, rendering it an event of modern, global, and ongoing importance by confronting the notion that the revolt in Saint Domingue was a mere outbreak of African savagery.

This chapter focuses on a recent work within this literary tradition, Caribbean-Canadian writer Nalo Hopkinson’s novel *The Salt Roads* (2003), which confronts both the primitivizing gaze of colonial discourse and the masculinism of postcolonial nationalist appropriations of the Haitian Revolution. Exemplary of the latter, Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of This World* (1948), a primary intertext of *The Salt Roads*, seeks to recover the historical “silences” produced in the La Sallean view of the Haitian Revolution but replaces them with a masculinist Caribbean nationalism that silences the participation of women in Haitian revolutionary history. A founding text of magical realism, *The Kingdom of This World* takes an important detour away from the historical tradition of focusing on the revolutionary leadership (canonized figures such as Toussaint Louverture or Jean Jacques Dessalines) and instead emphasizes Makandal, a prerevolutionary figure, and an obscure slave, Ti-Noël. This shift away from the leadership of the Revolution instantiates a subaltern approach to narrating the Haitian Revolution, one that allows for a broad periodization of the Haitian Revolution

(from the 1750s to 1826) that dismantles the impulse of subordinating Haiti's revolution to France's and engenders a critique of the revolutionary leadership. Despite the novel's broad periodization and subaltern approach to history, however, *The Kingdom of This World* continues to assert a masculinist Caribbean nationalism that minimizes the importance of women to the Revolution. Violent acts of machismo also characterize *The Kingdom of This World*, manifest in Carpentier's highly stylized portrayals of reprisal rapes of women colonists and inattention to the revolutionary contributions of slave women.

In *The Salt Roads*, Hopkinson challenges such nationalist *machismo* as well as colonialist condescension by using the subaltern religion of *vodou* to connect three female protagonists living in three distinct historical periods. Influenced by magical realism as well as speculative fiction, Hopkinson's radical/transhistorical periodization not only reclaims the Haitian Revolution as an important aspect of world history but also emphasizes the agency and importance of the historically marginalized African-descended women "silenced" by colonial discourse as well as Caribbean nationalism. Facilitated by her fabulist/speculative approach to literature, Hopkinson's protagonists are connected across time and space by Ezili, a female *Iwa*, a spirit of the *vodou* religion. Throughout the novel, Ezili possesses Mer, a slave in eighteenth century Saint Domingue, Jeanne Duval, Charles Baudelaire's mulatto mistress in nineteenth century France, and Thais, a prostitute in fifth-century Egypt. Mer, Jeanne, and Thais are women who have—like the Haitian Revolution itself—been "silenced," paralleling the epistemological process of historical silencing on a personal level. As a female slave in eighteenth century Saint Domingue, Mer represents an historical absence, a figure

omitted from dominant historiography and minimized in Caribbean nationalist writings such as *The Kingdom of This World*. Jeanne Duval also suffers from the biases of dominant historiography, entering the historical record through Baudelaire scholarship, a critical tradition that has effectively silenced Duval's humanity, reductively depicting her as Baudelaire's lazy, stupid, and leeching dependent. Similarly, Thais, Catholicism's "dusky" Saint Mary, comes into historical being through Catholic hagiography, which describes her as a formerly sex-addicted prostitute saved from her self-induced debauchery by a miracle of conversion. *The Salt Roads* historically recovers these absent, silenced, or misrepresented women and places them in the context of Haitian history through their connection to each other and Saint Domingue through Ezili. If Western epistemology subsumes other histories into its fabric, constructing events like the Haitian Revolution as ideological byproducts of events like the French Revolution, Hopkinson produces a reversal of this relationship by connecting eighteenth-century Haiti, nineteenth-century France, and fifth-century Egypt through a *vodou lwa*.

### **Narrating the Haitian Revolution in *The Kingdom of This World***

In the Saint Domingue sequences of *The Salt Roads*, Hopkinson engages in a Caribbean literary tradition that claims the Haitian Revolution as a symbol of Caribbean resistance to modern neocolonialism. Within this tradition, *The Kingdom of This World* intertextually relates to *The Salt Roads* with special potency due to their shared use of a subaltern approach to history and the genre of magical realism. In *The Kingdom of This World*, Carpentier assumes a subaltern emphasis by focusing on the *prerevolutionary* figure of Makandal, who led poisoning campaigns across the plantations of Saint Domingue in the 1750s, and his unknown peer Ti-Noël. Crafting his novel through

meticulous historical research, Carpentier seems to have constructed Ti-Noël from records of an actual slave owned by the French planter Lenormand de Mézy. While Makandal is frequently featured in traditional accounts of the Revolution, conventional periodization tends to create a gap between Makandal's activities and the Revolution proper (1791-1804)—Makandal becomes prerevolutionary rather than a contributor to the actual Revolution itself. Carpentier's treatment of Makandal challenges this periodization, allowing Makandal to be an early and enduring figure in Haitian revolutionary history.<sup>1</sup>

This subaltern perspective engenders a critique of a hypocritical, Europhilic revolutionary leadership epitomized in the novel by King Henri Christophe. Christophe was a major figure of the Revolution but Carpentier focuses on his reign as a dictator during the early years of Haitian independence instead of his role in the Revolution. Through the eyes of Ti-Noël, Carpentier depicts Christophe's use of forced labor to construct the Citadelle La Ferrière, the largest fortress in the Western hemisphere and now a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) world heritage site. Having just returned from Cuba sometime during Christophe's reign (circa 1819), Ti-Noël is astonished to find that construction of the Citadelle "had been going on for more than twelve years, and that the entire population of the North had been drafted for this incredible task. Every protest had been silenced in blood." For Ti-Noël, this amounts to "a slavery as abominable as that he had known on the plantation of M. Lenormand de Mézy" (116). In fact, Christophe's forced labor campaign is

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<sup>1</sup> While other Caribbean writers do reference Makandal in their works on the Haitian Revolution, he typically plays a subordinate if not inferior role to the canonical heroes of Louverture and Dessalines. As Adélékè Adéèkò notes, C. L. R. James renders Makandal a "fearless rascal," a "charlatan," akin to an "Oriental despot" in his prophetic visions in *The Black Jacobins*, while Carpentier depicts Makandal as a "rebellious scientist" and "experimenter in poisons" (105).

perhaps even worse than the slavery that preceded it since “the colonists—except when they had lost their heads—had been careful not to kill their slaves, for dead slaves were money out of their pockets. Whereas here the death of a slave was no drain on the public funds” (117). Carpentier’s depiction of King Christophe’s abuses disrupts idealization of the revolutionary leadership and illustrates the Haitian Revolution as an unfinished liberatory project obstructed by the postcolonial elites who all-too-willingly filled the power vacuum left by the vanquished colonists.

Carpentier also portrays Toussaint Louverture, the most famous Haitian revolutionary figure, in an idiosyncratic fashion. Toussaint appears only once in *The Kingdom of This World*, depicted as a cabinetmaker carving wood replicas of the three wise men for a nativity display at de Mézy’s plantation. Toussaint’s incorrectly fashioned wood carvings invoke a sense of terror, foreshadowing the impending slave revolt:

Toussaint, the cabinetmaker, had carved the Three Wise Men in wood, but they were too big for the nativity, and in the end were not set up, mainly because of the terrible whites of Balthasar’s eyes, which had been painted with special care, and gave the impression of emerging from a night of ebony with the terrible reproach of a drowned man. (39)

Toussaint becomes a major force in the Haitian Revolution a few years later, but we do not see these events in *The Kingdom of This World*, since Carpentier follows Ti-Noël to Cuba just as Toussaint assumes leadership of the slave rebellion. Paravisini-Gebert sees this turn to Cuba as a symptom of Carpentier’s pessimism (119-20 “Haitian Revolution”), but this narrative trajectory seems to further Carpentier’s subaltern principles by amending the gaps of periodization and “silences [that] enter the process of [traditional] historical production” (Trouillot 26) with scenes from Ti-Noël’s life as a Haitian slave exiled yet still in bondage. In Santiago de Cuba, for instance, Ti Noël

meets to swap news with other French-owned slaves (84), creating a sense of subaltern solidarity that exists beyond the borders of Saint Domingue—the site of revolution is thereby extended from Haiti to Cuba, exemplifying Carpentier’s pan-Caribbean nationalism.

However, this sole depiction of Toussaint, though subordinate to the narrative importance of Makandal and Ti-Noël, is still significant to the anticolonial thematics of *The Kingdom of This World*. Toussaint’s carving of unusable wise men signifies an anticolonial sentiment of cultural misappropriation, as Balthasar, described as a black magus in the Book of Matthew, emerges like “a drowned man” from the darkness of history, the “terrible whites of his eyes” vexed by the horrors of colonialism and slavery. Cultural misappropriation becomes a trope within the anticolonial genre of magical realism, with the colonized’s misreading of the colonizer’s culture signifying a crack in the armature of empire. Another example of such cultural misreading occurs when Madame Floridor, Lenormand de Mézy’s second wife, forces her husband’s slaves to watch her perform a monologue from French playwright Jean Racine’s *Phaedra*, a play adaptation of the ancient Greek tragedy: “*My sins are heaped / already to overflowing. I am seeped / At once in incest and hypocrisy. / My murderous hands, hot for avenging me, / Are fain to plunge themselves in guiltless / blood*” (55). Unaware of the context of this performance, the slaves mistake Floridor’s monologue for a confession, making her a licentious criminal who has come to Saint Domingue to escape imprisonment in France:

the Negroes came to the conclusion that the lady must have committed many crimes in days gone by, and that she was probably in the colony to get away from the police of Paris, like so many of the prostitutes in the Cap, who had unsettled accounts with the metropolis. . . . In the face of such

immorality, the slaves of the Lenormand de Mézy plantation continued unshaken in their reverence for Macandal. (55-56)

Floridor's monologue, as a performance from a French play adapted from Greek mythology, derives from a Hellenic vision of European history that sees ancient Greece as the bedrock of Western culture. As high art, a cultural signifier of European supremacy, drama should invoke reverence for the colonizer's culture in the colonized. But, by misreading Floridor's monologue as a confession of her crimes, the slaves disrupt the illusion of French sophistication and moral superiority and reinvigorate "their reverence for Macandal." The slave's misappropriated version of the *Phaedra* thereby invalidates the mystique of European civility and bolsters their own sense of moral decency.

Carpentier's use of magical realism also corresponds to his subaltern approach to historiography, as it gives life to the *vodou* cosmology of the slave masses rather than subjugating it, as "superstition," to the Western rationalism of the planters and the more literate among the revolutionary leadership. In his preface to *The Kingdom of This World*, titled "On the Marvelous Real in America," Carpentier outlines the necessary goals and characteristics of the genre and reveals that a trip to Haiti inspired his conceptualization of *lo real maravilloso*, the "marvelous real":

I was in a land where thousands of men, anxious for freedom, believed in Mackandal's lycanthropic powers to the extent that their collective faith produced a miracle on the day of his execution. . . . I breathed in the atmosphere created by Henri Christophe, a monarch of incredible zeal, much more surprising than all of the cruel kings invented by the Surrealists, who were very much affected by imaginary tyrannies without ever having suffered one. . . . Furthermore, I thought, the presence and vitality of this marvelous real was not the unique privilege of Haiti but the heritage of all of America, where we have not yet begun to establish an inventory of our cosmogonies. (86-87)

The marvelous real manifests in *The Kingdom of This World* in Makandal's ability to assume the shape of animals and insects. At the site of his execution, the slaves witness Makandal's metamorphosis into a mosquito (45-46), a "miracle" produced by "their collective faith" in the cosmology of *vodou*. Their belief in Makandal's miraculous survival solidifies him as an enduring symbol of resistance, despite the fact that his executioners pushed his head directly into a fire mere seconds later (45-46). Where the realist text (literary or historical) must subjugate the faith-based perception of Makandal's execution to rationalist accounts, the magical realist text can dramatize the beliefs of the slaves, granting it equal cosmological value with the scientific rationalism of his executioners. As Carpentier explains, magical realism should not be confused with Surrealism, fantasy, and the Gothic, which are genres that invent supernaturalisms (86). Rather, magical realism trades in excessive naturalism, depicting the marvelous that exists in the everyday as filtered through the cosmologies of human belief and perception.

Broad periodization and the use of magical realism also enable Carpentier to elucidate under-recognized historical contingencies, thereby retrieving silenced aspects of the Haitian Revolution. As Patrick Bellegarde-Smith explains, *vodou*, the Bois Caiman ceremony, marronage, previous revolts, and cooperation between African- and Caribbean-born slaves were continuous and key features of an evolving Haitian revolutionary ideology. For instance, the 1791 revolt led by the Jamaican *houngan* Dutty Boukman, Makandal's revolt in 1757, and earlier revolts in 1691 and 1697 were all related in a chain of revolutionary inspiration (41). By linking Dutty Boukman, who is believed to have led the Bois Caiman ceremony that ritualized the start of the 1791

revolt, and Makandal, a *vodouisant* maroon from Africa who led poisoning conspiracies against white plantations in the 1750s, scholars like Bellegarde-Smith and Carpentier in his fiction writing, highlight a continuity between a series of seemingly disparate revolutionary activities (clandestine poisoning/herbal warfare; violent uprising), ideologies (*vodou*, *marronage*) and origins (the Caribbean, Africa) that reaches back at least a full century—to 1691—before the advent of the French and Haitian Revolutions. Highlighting these continuities breaks the silences introduced by standard periodization and decimates the assumption that the revolting slaves of Saint Domingue could only envision freedom after coming into contact with French Enlightenment ideals.

While *The Kingdom of This World's* broad periodization and subaltern approach to history dismantle the impulse of subordinating Haiti's revolution to France's, the novel continues to assert a masculinist Caribbean nationalism that minimizes the importance of women to the Revolution and trades in *machismo* and sexual violence. For example, Makandal's "deep, opaque voice ma[kes] him irresistible to the Negro women," testifying to his masculinity and sexual prowess (13). Likewise, Ti-Noël, who "had fathered twelve children by one of the cooks" (54), is an avatar of virility and potency. While such displays of erotic power might be unproblematic or even life-affirming in a more egalitarian context, the libidinal energy of Carpentier's revolutionaries climaxes in a wave of reprisal rapes against the wives and daughters of the colonists. Amidst a mob scene of slave men and women raiding de Mézy's liquor cellar, Ti-Noël ascends the stairs to Madame Floridor's room so that he may fulfill his longstanding rape fantasies: "For a long time now he had dreamed of raping Mlle Floridor. On those nights of tragic declamations she had displayed beneath the tunic with its Greek-key border breasts

undamaged by the irreversible outrage of the years” (68). Lenormand de Mézy later finds Floridor “on the rug, legs sprawled wide, a sickle buried in her entrails” (69). Madame Floridor’s is but the first in a multitude of such “Negro rapings,” as the revolting slaves go on to “violat[e] nearly all the well-born girls of the Plaine” (76, 71). These highly stylized portrayals of mob revolt and reprisal rape position black women as insignificant to the revolt, participating only to loot and binge on alcohol, and white women as mere objects of revenge, casualties of a masculine war between black slave men and their former white male masters.

### **Beyond Makandal: Haitian Revolutionary History and *The Salt Roads***

*The Salt Roads* follows Carpentier’s subaltern approach to history and use of magical realism, but Hopkinson’s novel ultimately dismantles the hypermasculinism of *The Kingdom of This World* by emphasizing the roles of women in a transhistorical, global narrative of Haitian revolutionary history. *The Salt Roads* utilizes broad periodization to include the prerevolutionary figure Makandal, but unlike Carpentier’s Makandal—a macho, *vodouisant* Christ figure who “complete[s] the cycle of his metamorphoses, and st[ands] poised . . . sinewy and hard, with testicles like rocks . . .” (37)—Hopkinson’s Makandal is powerful yet marred by arrogance. Rather than the lone hero accountable to no one that Carpentier depicts in *The Kingdom of This World*, Hopkinson’s Makandal is situated within a community of slaves, a community engaged in political debate over how best to deal with the predicament of enslavement. In *The Salt Roads*, therefore, the revolutionary ideology Makandal spearheads is contested terrain, as the slaves “argue and argue about the best way to get freedom in this wicked world” (107). Makandal recurrently delivers speeches that outline the nature of his poisoning conspiracies, schemes that offer hope of freedom. Makandal’s peer

Patrice in *The Salt Roads* counters the position occupied by Ti-Noël in *The Kingdom of This World* by publicly contesting Makandal's schemes and disengaging from the aggressive sexuality of Ti-Noël's trysts and outright rapes. At an important midnight slave meeting, Patrice offers incisive debate against Makandal's plot:

"[They] [b]ought us like goats. And here we find ourselves, breaking back every day. But why? Anybody tell me why we put up with it?"

Patrice couldn't keep quiet any longer. "But what you want us to do, man? Eh? Tipingee told me what Simenon [the plantation owner] did to Milo,<sup>2</sup> how he blanched him dead, just for talking his mind. Just for talking, Makandal. And they have guns." (106)

Makandal hints at the growing revolutionary power of the slaves—"Anybody tell me why we put up with it?"—as their numbers increase and their solidarity deepens. But Patrice's counterargument is an astute caution about the terror and torture the whites wield as well as their weapons/technology advantage, guns. And while Makandal offers a countertechnology, the chemical/herbal warfare of poison, Patrice recognizes their disadvantage against the colonists: "'Poison.' So many times Patrice had had this argument, he was fed up of it. 'You give one backra belly running, they'll hang ten of us and import twenty more to replace the dead ones'" (107). Exchanges such as these render the enslaved of Saint Domingue thinking, feeling, political agents rather than the prepolitical subhumans La Salle feared indoctrinating with the liberatory rhetoric of the French Revolution. This debate among the slaves of Saint Domingue also contrasts

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<sup>2</sup> Patrice refers to an earlier scene narrated by Mer that Hopkinson uses to highlight the sadistic results of Enlightenment-influenced policies like the Code Noir: "Milo he made to be tied to stakes in the ground to scream out his life while Master Simenon peeled the skin from his twitching body with a knife. Peeled away all the skin, leaving the White fat glistening, quivering. 'You want to be White?' the master shouted over Milo's howling as he cut his ears off. I had heard about this blanching of Black people before" (63). For a discussion on how the Code Noir extends from Enlightenment thinker Rene Descartes' mind/body split, see Dayan 199-212.

Carpentier's reduction of the slave revolt into Carnavalesque mob scenes and reprisal rapings.

Furthermore, *The Salt Roads* also departs from the masculinist Caribbean nationalist tradition in which Carpentier participates by depicting slave women as influential political agents. Hopkinson imaginatively recovers the silenced voices of revolutionary slave women through Mer, who becomes Makandal's chief political opponent. While away on marronage, Makandal spreads hope among the slaves on other plantations and terror among the colonists who have fallen prey to his acts of subterfuge. But Mer expresses suspicion toward Makandal and his intentions: "Bad-minded man, making mischief, spreading doubt and fear. . . . 'You cause trouble, you and your big ideas. Make people take risks for your dreams. If Marie-Claire gets caught, it's she will feel Simenon's knife, not you. . . . Why do you stir the Ginen up so?'" (67). Mer responds to Makandal's plan for Marie-Claire, a slave with access to the plantation house, to add Makandal's poison to the planters' water supply. If caught, Marie-Claire will face torture and possibly death from the hands of Simenon, the malicious owner of the plantation. While Makandal's scheme intends to serve the welfare of all the enslaved of Saint Domingue, Mer questions whether a desire to "mak[e] mischief" and realize "big ideas" comprises the true motivating force behind Makandal's plots. For Mer, Makandal exhibits a great arrogance poignantly evident in his abstinence from eating salt, a practice said to give a mortal the powers of a *lwa* in Vodou lore: "Makandal never eats salt. He, a living man, giving himself powers like a *lwa*. That's why he couldn't hear the voice of the *lwas*" (69). Cut off from the voice of

the *lwas* by his arrogance, Makandal and his plots assume a sinisterly self-serving quality to Mer.

Mer's critique of Makandal registers a suspicion of the revolutionary who uses charisma and persuasion to enroll others in life-threatening activities, activities that may serve the revolutionary's gratification of personal ideals more than the ultimate goal of attaining a better life for the oppressed. Even calling him "the killer Makandal" (68), in reference to the revenge killings by colonists that his schemes have already caused, Mer finds Makandal dangerous and egocentric in his willingness to haphazardly risk lives other than his own. As *vodou* practitioners, the clash between Mer and Makandal corresponds to their differing uses of their medicinal-spiritual knowledge: Mer emphasizes healing, Makandal warfare. While Mer admits that Makandal is "a powerful bokor, wise with herbs" when Marie-Claire becomes poisoned by the great house's drinking water, she disdains having to ask Makandal if he can cure her, since his poisoning scheme put Marie-Claire at risk in the first place (202). Mer distinguishes Makandal's "tricks," his "'Ouanga.' *Bad science*" (61), from her strict use of *vodou* as a healing practice. Mer describes her role as community healer as a vital duty she can never forsake: "Plantation doctor white man didn't know the herbs, the prayers. If I denied to help my people, then my spirit wouldn't fly home" (63). Here, Mer characterizes the Western medicine of the planters as inadequate to the needs of her fellow slaves, leaving her with the duty of filling the role of doctor/healer. Mer registers the importance of this role through her belief that she will not be able to "fly home" to Guinea in the afterlife if she abandons the needs of her community. These fundamentally variant perspectives undergird Mer and Makandal's rivalry. A spiritual

rivalry between Ezili, the *lwa* of love, and Ogu, the blacksmith *lwa* of war, parallels this human confrontation between Mer and Makandal.

Although Mer will come to seek reconciliation with Makandal, the adversity between Mer/Ezili and Makandal/Ogu persists. The spiritual and physical aspects of this rivalry come into direct contact during a *vodou* ceremony in which Mer and Makandal are both possessed by their respective *lwas*, Ezili and Ogu. Ezili describes this process of possession, also known as mounting, as being “like a rider on a horse” (208). As Makandal dances around the ceremonial fire, Mer notices a change in his face as Ogu takes possession: “The flames on Makandal’s face made him look like a thing born in fire. Tempered. It’s truth he was speaking to me just now. Makandal wanted to clear us a path to freedom too, just like I wanted to do. We should chop that clear road together” (314). Mer considers the possibility of working together with Makandal but becomes disheartened when Ogu becomes visible to her: “The blacksmith ancestor will free us? The warmaker? Mama, is it this you want me to see? I stood and stared at dancing Makandal. My stomach turned in me, sick” (316). Just as this vision of the spirit realm fills Mer with trepidation, Ezili’s viewing of Makandal fills her with concern: “A strong man, with vision. A fierce and necessary man. He can burn Saint Domingue clean and free like brush fire clears the bush for planting. But what is he doing here tonight? It was folly to come! He should bide his time, let his generals do his work” (318). Ezili sees Makandal as “fierce and necessary” but also foolish in his hastiness and lackadaisical leadership, harkening to Mer’s assessment of Makandal as impetuous.

Distressed by Makandal's behavior, Ezili moves closer and tries to possess him. Ogu pushes her away, saying, "he's not for you, O fish. He fights for me. With iron. With steel. With fire. Back away" (319). As Ezili grows aware of Makandal's plan to set fire to the great house, risking the lives of the house slaves, she uses Mer to attempt dissuading Makandal from following through on his plan. When Mer is unsuccessful, Ezili decides to have Mer run to the great house and warn the slaves of the fire: "Makandal wouldn't listen to Mer my horse, but . . . I could see a thing I could do. Mer could warn the slaves in the great house of the fire. She could protect those my people. And she could mislead the whites, send them away from this bush meeting" (326). This antagonism between Mer/Ezili and Makandal/Ogu bears deadly consequences when Mer begins to run toward the great house and Hector, a supporter of Makandal's plan, fires a rifle on her. Marie-Claire jumps in front of Mer to protect her from the bullet and falls to the ground, "her chest covered in blood." Makandal's remorse for the death of Marie-Claire quickly changes to vengeful anger directed toward Mer: "Makandal looked at her, griefstruck, then staggered. Stood again. He pointed at me. 'She was going to warn the blancs! Hold her!'" (327). With Ezili still in possession of Mer, Makandal and Ogu work synchronously against their coupled physical/spiritual adversaries: "Ogu in Makandal's body used his good hand to draw my tongue out from my mouth. Then, smiling, he used the arm that was not there and sliced the spirit machete across my tongue" (330). Makandal/Ogu silences Mer/Ezili by slicing off her tongue. Mer's physical wound destroys her ability to speak, while Ezili's spiritual wound sends her adrift through the ether of the spirit world, severed from Mer, her "horse" or human vessel.

This violence against Mer/Ezili derives from a communicative breakdown, a refusal on Makandal/Ogu's part to negotiate the terms of the plan to set fire to the great house. For Makandal, the assured death of the colonists justifies the death of the sleeping house slaves as collateral damage. For Mer, who views the potential deaths of the house slaves as much more than simple collateral damage, the human cost of the plan is too high. With Makandal refusing to negotiate a more nuanced strategy, Mer attempts to adjust the plan herself by warning the house slaves and misleading the colonists. Makandal reduces Mer's intentions to "warn[ing] the blancs," a treasonous act against Makandal's self-assumed leadership. Mer's "crime" is punishable by the mutilation of her tongue, the severing of her ability to speak. Through this physical silencing of Mer and spiritual silencing of Ezili, Makandal/Ogu demonstrate a hegemonic and masculinist politics of revolution, one that violently and needlessly assaults dissenting female voices.

This failed reconciliation between Mer/Ezili and Makandal/Ogu complicates a politics of the "revolutionary gathering" characteristic of many Caribbean writings on the Haitian Revolution. By revolutionary gathering, I refer to a ceremonious and celebratory rallying of the enslaved that precipitates revolt, a literary trope that derives historical grounding from the Bois Caiman ceremony, a commonly dramatized event in the literature of the Haitian Revolution (Paravisini-Gebert, *Literature* 3). Although Hopkinson does not directly mention the Bois Caiman ceremony, toward the novel's conclusion, a climactic revolutionary gathering of *lwa* occurs, a political and spiritual meeting of pan-African ancestors and deities. This gathering, a parallel manifestation in the spirit world of *vodou* ceremonies like Bois Caiman, is a reenactment and mystical

embodiment of the emerging revolutionary ideology of the Saint Domingue slaves that reconciles the positions of Mer/Ezili and Makandal/Ogu. This spiritual equivalent of Bois Caiman evades the sensationalism inherent in Carpentier's violence-oriented depiction of the ceremony, focusing instead on rallying as an act of cooperation. Ezili, rather than a Boukman-like figure, initiates this gathering of revolutionaries, asking her fellow *lwas*,

"I don't fight this fight alone, do I? I can be water and anger and beauty and love, but there is also iron and fire, warfare and thunder and storm." . . .

We are all here, all the powers of the Ginen lives for all the centuries that they have been in existence, and we all fight. We change when change is needed. We are a little different in each place that the Ginen have come to rest, and any one of [us] is already many powers. (387)

Ezili's question—"I don't fight this fight alone, do I?"—receives answers from Papa Legba (master of the crossroads), Ogu (blacksmith/warrior ancestor), and the accumulating *lwa* who culminate in the collective first-person "We" that completes this passage. Until this point, Ezili had been mostly alone and nascent in the spirit world, bouncing between the bodies of Mer, Jeanne, and Thais in different epochs with little comprehension of the history unfolding before her. This spirit realm approximation of a *vodou* gathering, then, ritualizes the fruition of a Haitianist revolutionary paradigm, where the variant characteristics of the *lwa*—transition/integration (Legba), war/strength (Ogu), love/beauty (Ezili), and the pantheon continues—synthesize to battle oppression with the myriad tools of revolt: marronage, warfare, *vodou*, herbalism, indolence, subterfuge, sabotage.

### **Saint Domingue as the Crossroads of History: Jeanne Duval and Saint Mary of Egypt**

If, despite its subaltern approach, *The Kingdom of This World* still engages in a masculinist minimization of women's revolutionary roles, Hopkinson intervenes through

a historical recovery of those silenced female figures, most notably in the character of Mer and her struggle against Makandal. Additionally, through Ezili's transhistorical possession of women in other countries and centuries, *The Salt Roads* constructs a radical periodization of Haitian revolutionary struggle that not only retrieves silenced aspects of its history but also imbues it with enduring, global significance. The temporal and spatial migrations of Ezili constitute a re-envisioning of Haitian historiography, a re-envisioning characterized not by a mere "postmodern disregard for conventional parameters of time and space" (Ramraj 33), but by a reinscribing of Western historical time within the *vodou* time-space concept of the crossroads. Madison Smartt Bell defines the crossroads in the historical, geographical, and cultural terms of colonization and slavery:

[Q]uantities of time and distance in [the religio-spiritual traditions of] Haiti are more likely to be recognized and understood in terms of intersections, rather than the lines between them. Historically, the island of Hispaniola is a tremendously important *kalfou*—the crossroads where Europeans, Native Americans, and Africans came together for the first time. The fundamental pattern of their relationship all over the Western Hemisphere—dispossession and extermination of the Indians by the Europeans, who go on to exploit the seized territory with African slave labor—was set for the first time here. (6-7)

The material exigencies of New World exploration, colonialism, the slave trade, transatlantic migration, and the Amerindian holocaust position Haiti as the literal crossroads (*kalfou*) of history and culture in the Atlantic world. Perhaps deriving from this material reality, the crossroads concept in *vodou* makes similar figurative connections between time and space, life and death, the physical and the spiritual. "The cosmological unity of Vodun," Bellegarde-Smith explains, "translates into a vaunted African humanism in which social institutions are elaborated and in which the living, the dead, and the unborn play equally significant roles in an unbroken historical

chain” (12). *The Salt Roads* evokes this “unbroken historical chain” through Ezili’s possession of Mer, the eighteenth-century slave in Saint-Domingue, Jeanne Duval, Baudelaire’s mulatto mistress in nineteenth-century France, and Saint Mary of Egypt, the fifth-century Egyptian prostitute written into history as a Catholic sinner-to-saint icon. Through Hopkinson’s dramatization of a *vodou* historical perspective, these women all become ancestors of one another, regardless of their chronological relation.

Jeanne Duval, as the second woman Ezili possesses, serves as a successor of Mer, a Haitian diasporic woman still enduring racism, sexism, and historical silencing despite her freedom from the literal slavery endured by Mer. Unlike Mer, whose literary presence recovers a historical absence, that of the historically invisible black slave woman, Jeanne Duval has lived on in the historical record. Duval’s historical presence has been heavily dictated, however, by her relationship with nineteenth-century French symbolist poet Charles Baudelaire. Depictions of Duval in literary criticism and biographical scholarship on Baudelaire have been anything but praiseworthy. Preeminent Baudelaire scholar, editor, and translator Wallace Fowlie describes Duval as “a stupid, unfeeling companion” in the introduction to his 1964 translation of *The Flowers of Evil* (17). This introduction has been reprinted as if by canonical decree in subsequent editions of Dover Publications’s *The Flowers of Evil and Other Works*, exemplifying the ongoing currency of Fowlie’s cursory and one-sided portrayal of Duval’s life. In *The Salt Roads*, Jeanne Duval becomes much more than simply Baudelaire’s unstable, exotic mistress, as Hopkinson imagines a more complex life for her. *The Salt Roads* depicts a Jeanne Duval who has agency, street smarts, and fiscal sense, a Jeanne Duval who bears influence on Baudelaire and navigates the

complexities of a doubled-sided relationship between two flawed human beings. *The Salt Roads* imagines Jeanne Duval as more than the draining, “stupid, unfeeling companion” of a literary and historical luminary and highlights how colonialist conceptions of Afro-Caribbean women—conceptions developed in Mer’s time—contribute to reductively denigrating accounts of Duval’s life.

Hopkinson laces *The Salt Roads* with Baudelaire poems inspired by his romance with Jeanne, occasionally using them to epigraphically bookend the novel’s Parisian chapters. One of these poems, “The Snake That Dances,” demonstrates how colonial conceptions of Afro-Caribbean women affected Baudelaire’s perception of Jeanne: “How I love to see, my dear lazy one. . . . To see your rhythmic walk, / Careless beauty / You’d think a snake was dancing / At the end of a fakir’s stick. / Under the weight of your idleness / Your childlike head / Balances with the indolence / Of a baby elephant” (127-28). Here, ideologically charged words such as “lazy,” “Careless,” “childlike,” and “indolence,” as well as the animalistic imagery of a “baby elephant” and a dancing snake charmed by a Dervish, tincture a poem expressing the unabashed desire and passion of a lover to his beloved. Baudelaire’s construction of Jeanne as lazy, careless, childlike, indolent, and exotic corresponds to the colonial stereotypes of mulatto women that found their genesis in Mer’s time and their perfection in Jeanne’s. In one of Mer’s chapters, for instance, the book-keeper expresses the colonialist notion that African and Afro-Caribbean women experience inordinately high levels of sexual desire. When Tipingee protests that Marie-Claire “is too young to breed,” the book-keeper insists, “Your child has black wench’s blood. She’ll come to like the mating soon enough” (161). The book-keeper’s sentiment duplicates eighteenth-century French colonial

administrator Moreau de Saint-Mery's contention that Haitian women of color reach early sexual maturation, leading many of them to "pledge themselves at an early age to a life of love-making" (81). According to Moreau, "the influence of hot weather, [and] a desire for luxury" contribute to making mulatto women lazy pleasure-seekers with a propensity for sexual excess (83-85). Baudelaire's "The Snake That Dances" attributes a similar sexual character to Jeanne. Hopkinson highlights this confluence between colonial discourse and Jeanne's sexual currency in France when Jeanne recounts Baudelaire's preference for "hot country women [who] always had more fire" (51).

While inhabiting Jeanne's body, Ezili witnesses the impact of this dynamic on Jeanne's self image. At dinner with Baudelaire's mother, the couple sits side-by-side as Baudelaire salivates over the scandalous nature of their public demonstrations of affection: "As you kissed the black woman's hand, you whispered in her ear, 'Isn't it delicious? Maman thinks you are a whore,' and this ginger soul case that held me quivered in shame. The ginger woman thinks *Yes, I am a whore and the daughter of a whore and a whore's whore's daughter*" (58). As Baudelaire derives sexual titillation from Jeanne being mistaken for a whore, Jeanne shamefully recalls the economic hardships that have forced her, her mother, and her grandmother to sell their affection to men as a means of survival. The disparity between Baudelaire's romanticization of prostitution and Jeanne's desire to escape it comes into stark relief when Jeanne describes her relationship with Baudelaire as a means for escaping the exploitive atmosphere of the Théâtre Porte-Sainte-Antoine, where she once sang and danced for money: "I couldn't sing at the Théâtre Porte-Sainte-Antoine any more. Couldn't face pasty manager Bourgoyne grinning at me any more, pushing his hand sly between my

legs while I waited to go onstage, while I remained quiet instead of spitting in his eye, for fear I would spoil my face paint” (49). Jeanne strove to leave and never return to her job at the Théâtre Porte-Sainte-Antoine, which, while not literal prostitution, subjected her to sexual molestation and exploitation. Life with Baudelaire offered Jeanne a means of material escape from this life, but Baudelaire’s desire to cultivate an image of debauchery—through a scandalous relationship with a sexually and racially suspect woman—prevents her from forgetting the shame of past exploitations.

Baudelaire’s friends also lust for Jeanne and the air of exoticism French colonialism bestows upon her. Jeanne wonders, for instance, if Baudelaire’s colleague Ancelle is “one of those men who dreamt in the night of brown skin moving against his” (180). While Ancelle’s gentle, polite flirtations actually make Jeanne “feel quite tender towards him,” Baudelaire’s other peers repulse Jeanne with their pretensions. Her refusal to respond to their attention makes them resent Jeanne, an object they cannot possess: “‘Bitter,’ his friends called me. I didn’t pay them no mind. Most of them were only vexed that I wouldn’t raise my skirts for them, those stingy men of money, counting every sou. *He* [Baudelaire] was generous. Lise [Jeanne’s lesbian lover] was right; he treated me well” (48). Contrasting the “stupid, unfeeling companion” constructed in Baudelaire scholarship, *The Salt Roads* presents Jeanne Duval as a complex human being subject to prejudice and exploitation but also capable of making decisions and asserting her agency despite constricting circumstances. Hopkinson’s juxtaposition of “The Snake That Dances” with scenes of Baudelaire relishing the scandalous quality of his affair with Jeanne and the resentfulness of Baudelaire’s scorned friends provide a sketch of Jeanne’s entry into the historical record. This entry into history is marked by

the historical silencings of colonial discourse, Baudelaire's attraction to the colonial fetish of the mulatress, the vindictive demonization of Jeanne by Baudelaire's jealous peers, and the naturalization of these factors in Baudelaire scholarship.

Hopkinson disrupts this reduction of Jeanne's life by depicting her relationship with Baudelaire as one of economic dependency as well as romantic love, a relationship characterized by both a deep emotional bond as well as dysfunctional abusiveness.

Ezili observes this dynamic while in possession of Jeanne, noting a contrast between Jeanne's love for Lise and her love for Baudelaire:

She loves Lise with a deep, helpless adoration. Charles she loves, when things are well between them, with a sly, mischievous air. When it is poorly with her and with him, her love is sullen, resentful. She must play the wanton for him, and withstand the way he belittles her to his friends. He mocks her speech to them, and her poor skills with a pen. . . . [S]he knows what a scandalous black feather she makes in the cap of this bohemian who revels in drawing the shocked gazes from the burghers of his city. (156)

Through her relationship with Lise, Hopkinson depicts Jeanne as a sexual agent who lives and loves outside the dictates of her life with Baudelaire. Her love for Lise, though suppressed by cultural taboos, is simple and untainted by the manipulateness of her relationship with Charles. *The Salt Roads* does not completely eliminate Baudelaire's capacity to love Jeanne from its narration of their relationship, but it does highlight the corrosive effects of his narcissistic desire to display Jeanne as an object of scandal. Making her love for him "sullen, resentful," Baudelaire exalts Jeanne's beauty while belittling her intellect to his friends, all the while reveling in the "shocked gazes" drawn by the spectacle of their interracial relationship.

*The Salt Roads* also constructs a Jeanne Duval who comprehends the broader economic implications of her relationship with Baudelaire. Jeanne may be economically

dependent on Baudelaire, but Baudelaire is also economically dependent on his mother, who, in turn, is economically dependent on her husband: “Money had us both in thrall. . . . ‘Oh, Charles, it’s all so dreary. He controls your mama, your mama controls you. . . . And you control me” (73). Marking this situation as “dreary,” Jeanne implicitly wishes for a life in which love can flourish without the impingement of economic power structures, a force that erodes the potentiality of manipulation- and abuse-free romance. This chain of dependency does not end with Jeanne, as Jeanne must use some of her meager income to provide for her mother and grandmother. In order to help raise money for shoes for her mother and medicinal alcohol for her grandmother, Jeanne considers sending her mother some of the jewelry Baudelaire had bought her: “This week I shall send some things for Maman. The emeralds, perhaps, that Charles gave me. He’s so distractable, he won’t notice if I’m no longer wearing them. Maman could get good money for them. Buy herself some new shoes, and some of the good brandy for Grandmaman. Grandmaman thinks it eases her coughing. It makes her sleep at least” (23). This dramatization of Jeanne’s life elucidates the broader power structures in which she lived and demonstrates her ability to make decisions and take action even within these harrowing constraints.

Her life with Baudelaire not only saves her from the exploitive pawing of Bourgoyne but also eases the suffering of Jeanne’s mother and grandmother through the small amounts of money Jeanne sends them. Despite these advantages, and despite the emotional bond she does share with Baudelaire, their relationship still damages Jeanne’s self-image, turning her into a scandalous trophy companion. Invoking a theme of hope, however, Jeanne transcends these constraints by novel’s

end through her relationship a black Parisian restaurateur named Achille, also known as Moustique.<sup>3</sup> As Jeanne narrates, “Moustique—Achille—was doing better than well in Paris. Has his own restaurant now. So long as he stays in the kitchen and cooks, the rich folk who come there to eat never know that the place is run by a black man’s hands. Or a mulatresse’s. They think I am but a maid, some white man’s byblow given a position out of guilt” (355). While the racist dynamics that denigrate black autonomy and entrepreneurship persist, Moustique and Jeanne still prosper, carving out a life for themselves despite adverse circumstances.

Like Jeanne, Thais represents a historical personage who has been subject to silencing by a hegemonic historical authority. In Jeanne’s case, this authority was Baudelaire scholarship; in Thais’s that authority was Catholic hagiography. An epigraph titled “Saint Mary of Egypt,” an adaptation of “various Catholic texts about the life of Saint Mary of Egypt, the ‘dusky’ saint,” provides insight into how Saint Mary is chronicled in the historical record of Catholic hagiography:

Mary came to Alexandria in Egypt at the age of twelve to pursue a life of prostitution, not because of need, but to gratify her insatiable physical desires. . . . She left Alexandria by ship, and paid for her passage by committing numerous lewd acts with the sailors. Once she had arrived in Jerusalem, she persisted in her wanton ways. . . . [A]s she attempted to enter the church, she was stopped at the door by some invisible force. Thrice she tried to enter in, and thrice was prevented. . . . Then she noticed a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, mother of our Lord, in a sconce above the place where she was standing. Abandoning pride, Mary of Egypt prostrated herself before the image of the Virgin and beseeched her help in entering the church

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<sup>3</sup> As Moustique explains to Jeanne, “My friends only call me ‘Moustique’ because I’m of small stature, like the brave mosquito” (252). This nickname subtly connects Moustique to Makandal, who sometimes takes the shape of a mosquito during his metamorphoses. Moustique therefore embodies one of Makandal/Ogu’s gentler aspects, the diminutive but courageous mosquito.

The chapter that follows this epigraph humanizes Thais, presenting her not as a sex-crazed prostitute transformed by divine intervention but as a woman who has turned to sex work as a means of survival. Much like Jeanne, Thais has hopes, dreams, and aspirations and exhibits agency through her choices. While Catholic hagiography defines her journey from Alexandria to Jerusalem as a voyage born of her craven lust, *The Salt Roads* depicts Thais's voyage as an attempt to experience life more broadly by abandoning the routine and boredom of Alexandria. Accompanied by her friend Judah, a male prostitute also from Alexandria, Thais earns passage on their ship through prostitution, but she does so not "to gratify her insatiable physical desires" but to subsidize their journey. Prostitution is therefore not a debased compulsion for Thais but an economic necessity that she utilizes in order to navigate the hardships of life. Additionally, Hopkinson's Saint Mary of Egypt is not prevented from entering the church by a mysterious force but by the incredible pains of a miscarriage.

In imagining a life for Thais outside the textual confines of Catholic hagiography, Hopkinson draws attention to the constructed nature of "Dusky" Saint Mary as a historical figure. From where did this portrait of "Dusky" Saint Mary originate? Who conferred it with historical authority? Catholic hagiography attributes the story of Saint Mary to a Christian monk named Zosimus, who in turn achieved sainthood by sharing his story of meeting the converted prostitute (Guiley 239). In *The Salt Roads*, Zosimus discovers Thais in a cave, where she has been convalescing after her miscarriage. Possessed by Ezili, Thais experiences heightened awareness and can sense Zosimus's approach. Thais calls out Zosimus's name and warns him not to enter the cave until she has covered her nakedness. Once Thais allows Zosimus to enter the cave, she

recounts her voyage to him, but his presuppositions lead him to misinterpret her story as a miracle of conversion rather than an arduous journey from Alexandria to Capitolina:

“I came here, and I went to the church, and I thought it would be so wonderful, but I didn’t like Capitolina, and when I tried to go into the church, I got sick, right there at the door.”

He looked at me as if I were a leper. “You couldn’t enter the house of our Lord,” he whispered, “because you debauch your body with men.”

I didn’t know what he meant. “I fell right at the feet of the statue of that Meri woman, and I started bleeding, bleeding. Then I heard a woman’s voice, and she told me . . .”

But Zosimus had leapt to his feet, a look of reverence on his face. “Our Holy Mother spoke to you?” . . .

He nodded slowly, signaled me to continue. I don’t think he was really hearing me. . . .

“Meritet,” he said, but his gaze on me looked right through me. “When last did you eat?”

“Oh, I don’t eat any more. Except some beans sometimes.”

“And you don’t drink,” he said, staring at the water bottle in his hand that I had refused. . . . “Our mother Mary talks to you, and you’ve been out here for years, and you neither eat nor drink,” said Zosimus. . . . “Holy Lady . . . please bless me.” (385)

This conversation bears the seeds of the Catholic legend of Saint Mary of Egypt. As Thais tries to convey her story, Zosimus reads religious significance into all of her words. Sick and bleeding from her miscarriage, Thais had fallen before the statue of the Virgin Mary, but Zosimus fails to question why Thais bled and fell and attributes her suffering and subsequent inability to enter the church to divine intervention. Zosimus then attributes the voice Thais heard to be the Virgin Mary herself. Rushed on in her narrative by Zosimus, Thais is unable to explain to him that she had actually heard the voice of an elderly woman asking her if she was alright as she entered the church rather than the voice of the Holy Mother. Zosimus has effectively ceased to fully listen to

Thais's story and instead misinterprets and misappropriates her statements to create his mythic portrait of a debauched prostitute-turned-saint. When Zosimus leaves to return to his monastery, Thais can hear his thoughts due to her possession by Ezili, and the monk has already begun fashioning his interaction with Thais into a legendary encounter: "My keen hearing was fading, but I could hear the great huge stories he was inventing to tell about me and Judah when he got back to the monastery. Me, a pious Christian saint, repentant of her wanton ways, expiring as she achieved the pinnacle of her holiness. Judah a fierce lion guarding my corpse" (392). Through this passage, Hopkinson not only imagines a life for Saint Mary as a woman but also depicts her construction as a historical personage by the misinterpreting, presupposing, and self-aggrandizing Zosimus.

In *The Salt Roads*, Catholic hagiography, Baudelaire scholarship, and masculinist Caribbean nationalism all exemplify the ways in which women like Thais, Jeanne Duval, and Mer have been historically silenced. By connecting these women through Ezili, a *vodou lwa*, Hopkinson relates their silencing to the broader epistemological silencing of Haitian revolutionary history, a silencing that derives from and perpetuates the "Idea of Haiti" as a premodern site of African-derived primitivity. Much like Haiti itself, the African-descended prostitutes, slaves, and women of color depicted in *The Salt Roads* have been denigrated by colonially-inspired views of race and gender that assign them lower human status. More than a simple imaginative act with no implications beyond the realm of entertainment, Hopkinson confronts the socio-cultural effects of this epistemological prejudice by restoring Thais, Jeanne Duval, and Mer as female agents rather than objects. In *The Salt Roads*, Haiti also becomes the locus through which

these women are connected, thereby restoring the Haitian Revolution, as the historical and symbolic genesis of anticolonial resistance and postcoloniality, as an important aspect of world history rather than a supposed testament to the illegitimacy of black sovereignty. This mode of supplementing, challenging, and re-envisioning the historical record serves to reconfigure how we view modern world history.

In a personal anecdote from her time working at a Toronto museum, for instance, Hopkinson shows just how expansive the influences of official historical, anthropological, and scientific discourses have been on public conceptions of African-descended peoples and cultures, in particular, and modernity, in general. Attesting to her interest in linking Haiti and Egypt in *The Salt Roads*, Hopkinson explains how students touring the Egyptian exhibit at her museum were frequently shocked to learn that Egypt is located in Africa. Nowhere in the exhibit, Hopkinson adds, could the word “Africa” be found, not even on the gigantic floor map of the Ancient Egyptian territory:

The map of Egypt that covered the floor of one space showed only Egypt, as though it exists in a vacuum. In fact, I’m told that in that particular museum’s permanent gallery of Egyptian artifacts, it was only a few years ago, and with much trepidation, that the word “Africa” in tiny letters finally got affixed below the word “Egypt.” It’s easy for people to assume that Egypt is a European civilization; by omission, they’re being led to believe that it is. By omission, they’re being told that ancient Egypt was “Greco-Roman” or “the near east.” It’s anyplace but Africa. (“Address” 107)

This blanching of Egypt relates to a Eurocentric vision of modernity and civilization that renders Africa anterior to Western developmental progress. If Europe signifies the modern and Africa the primitive, how can Egypt be a part of Africa, “the colonial paradigm of anachronistic space” (McClintock 41)? This contradiction registers in the Toronto museum’s hesitance to locate Egypt within the African continent as well as the confusion of visitors who learned the troubling fact that Egypt challenges the

comfortable binary of modern Europe versus primitive Africa. This narrative of Western history, which coopts Ancient Egypt as a part of Caucasian rather than African civilization, supports primitivizing views of Africa and, in turn, Haiti. In fact, this contradictory excision of Africa from Eurocentric narratives of modernity parallels Haiti's excision from the Age of Revolutions and its attendant narratives of New World modernity, which champion the American and French Revolutions while ignoring or minimizing the importance of the Haitian Revolution. *The Salt Roads* reveals and reverses these contradictions by connecting Haiti, Egypt, and France through the personal stories of historically silenced African-descended women and envisioning Haitian revolutionary history as foundational to global political modernity.

## CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

The narratives of postcolonial political crisis examined in the preceding chapters exemplify the double-edged nature of the commemorative impulse: while commemoration may serve the important task of preserving a tragedy in cultural memory, commemorative narratives can also freeze or embalm a historical event in a discrete time and place, a dangerous tendency that enables the production of reductive, politicized, partisan, and reactionary appropriations of crisis. Such a freezing or embalming of political crisis is facilitated through the narrow periodization of events, which can serve politically instrumentalist ends by omitting larger historical and geographic considerations, severing causal links between the past and the present, as can be seen in the award-winning, widely distributed films *Hotel Rwanda* and *Ghosts of Cité Soleil*.

*Hotel Rwanda's* memorialization of the Rwandan genocide focuses so narrowly on the personage of Paul Rusesabagina that no substantive explanation of the genocide's causes nor of its effects is given. The memory of the Rwandan genocide that *Hotel Rwanda* constructs is thereby cut off from its prelude as well as its aftermath. The absence of significant political and historical context in this filmic memorial of the Rwandan genocide as well as its emphasis on the exceptional, i.e., Westernized/modernized, African figures of Rusesabagina and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) allows stereotypes of African tribalism, primitivism, and cultural underdevelopment to go unchallenged. The memory of crisis presented by and crystallized in *Hotel Rwanda* rather stands in full accord with a wider Euro-American discourse on the Rwandan genocide that willingly admits guilt for failing to intervene in the slaughter of countless

Rwandans while ignoring the countless more Rwandans and Congolese who have died due, in large part, to the pivotal role of the RPF in the Congo crisis.

Like the Rwandan government's "official memorialization of the genocide," which "functions as a powerful rebuttal to any interference from foreign powers," the commemoration narrative inherent in *Hotel Rwanda* serves to "legitimize Kagame's aggressive military activity within the Great Lakes region" by using "the memory of the genocide as a shield against any criticism of his politics" (Dauge-Roth 91). Perhaps more importantly, seeking penance for the sins of the past while silently participating in the sins of the present sates Western material needs for the lucrative resources that Rwandan military operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) help extract, distribute, and secure. As the widely circulated and lauded public memory of an event that participates in a discourse of Western guilt that continues to impact Rwanda and the Congo, *Hotel Rwanda* clearly demonstrates how narratives can contribute to the shaping of material realities. For this very reason, we should strive to confront "the false dichotomy between the objectivity of structures and the subjectivity of representations—a distinction allowing all that is cultural and symbolic to be put on one side, all that is economic and material to be put on the other" (Mbembe, *Postcolony* 6).

Despite being a documentary, and therefore formally expected to more accurately represent reality, *Ghosts of Cité* similarly memorializes Haitian political crisis but in a more complicated relationship with Haitian history. Much like *Hotel Rwanda*, *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* narrowly construes its subject material (the coup of 2004) and therefore extracts it from its relevant timeline (especially its prelude in the coup of 1991 and its aftermath in the UN occupation/transitional government era of 2004-2006). Unlike *Hotel*

*Rwanda*, *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* does refer back, in a commemorative or discommemorative fashion, to an earlier event in history, Haitian independence (1804). 1804 and 2004, however, become associated not causally but symbolically as failures of Haitian sovereignty, demonstrating that narrow periodization may also include references to the past but in ways that actually reduce rather than complicate the meaning of more recent events. The two hundred years between the inception of Haitian independence and the second ouster of Aristide receive short shrift, dispatched in a series of four introductory screens that emphasize the impact of dictatorships on Haitian socio-politics while minimizing the implications of foreign intervention. By serializing this grim appraisal of 1804 in the events of 2004 while ignoring the more relevant timeline (1991-2006), *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* constructs Aristide, the first freely, fairly, and democratically elected president in Haitian history, as just another dictator and romanticizes and justifies the coup against him.

The film's fatalistic vision of Haitian independence recalls Western reactions to the Haitian Revolution, which the slave-holding nations of Europe and North America saw as an irrational paroxysm of violence rather than a rebellion for freedom. Atop this historical landscape, as in *Hotel Rwanda*, a dichotomy is drawn between exceptional, Westernized/modernized subjects (the businessmen Andy Apaid and Charles Baker and the coup leaders Guy Philippe and Louis-Jodel Chamblain) and their more indigenous, savage foils, who have failed to assimilate to modernity (the *chimères* leaders Bily and Tupac). Through the criminality, pettiness, violence, and posturing of Bily and Tupac, the colonial construct of the Haitian savage is re-embodied in the garb of US gangster rap (albeit a negrophobic interpretation of gangster rap that either

ignores or misunderstands its progressive anti-racist elements). With Aristide supporters reduced to mere street thugs, the coup forces of Chamblain and Philippe take on a heroic and virtuous aura, much like that given to the RPF in *Hotel Rwanda*. In this dimly lit memorialization of the 2004 coup and its negative commemoration of Haitian independence, *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* participates in a neoliberal discourse poised against the ascendance of postcolonial economic reformers like Aristide as well as a much older discourse on Haitian independence that saw the establishment of a New World black republic as a cosmological breach of the natural order. In this regard, the old and new narratives of Haitian ineptitude that *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* reflects and refashions, much like the exoticism and mystification of *The Comedians*, have profoundly contributed to Haiti's strained and impoverished material reality, from the French Indemnity of 1825, the United States (US) occupation of 1915-1934, and US support for the Duvalier dynasty (1957-1986) to the foreign-supported coups against Aristide (1991, 2004), the mismanagement of earthquake relief efforts (2010-2011), and the Inter American Development Bank's withholding of the water treatment loans that could have prevented Haiti's cholera epidemic (2010-2011).<sup>1</sup>

To intervene in the hegemonic discourses exemplified, refigured, and propagated by texts like *Hotel Rwanda*, *Ghosts of Cité Soleil*, and *The Comedians* many of the literary works examined in this project counter narrow periodization with broad periodization, i.e., an attentiveness to the complex timelines that accompany moments of crisis, and multiple narrators/voices or, in the case of the graphic novels *Deogratias* and *Smile Through the Tears*, complex visual-literary renderings of time, space, and

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<sup>1</sup> On earthquake relief, see Dupuy, "Beyond" and Ulysse. On the IADB and the cholera epidemic, see Mukherjee.

memory. These narrative strategies also serve to debunk tribalism and savagery as causes of postcolonial political violence by exposing the transnational and modern implications of social, political, and economic structures. Most of these texts utilize broad periodization while still engaging in commemoration by maintaining a substantive focus on a particular moment of crisis, while others, *The Dew Breaker* and *The Salt Roads*, eschew commemoration altogether by refusing to highlight one given time, place, administration, or crisis. Despite the merits of these narrative strategies, however, some of the texts I examined (*Murambi* and *Smile Through the Tears*) replaced the neo/colonial discourses of post/colonial inferiority with their own reductive, at times partisan, narrations of postcolonial political violence, demonstrating once again the pitfalls of commemoration.

Despite having much broader articulations of Rwandan history than *Hotel Rwanda*, *Murambi* and *Smile Through the Tears* also produce narratives of the Rwandan genocide that harmonize with the official narrative of the RPF. The historical script that emerges in *Murambi* and *Smile Through the Tears* firmly roots the events of 1994 in the Hutu Revolution of 1959, which Diop's and Bazambanza's Tutsi characters often treat as a historical aberration that mars the pre-independence normality of Tutsi-dominated Rwanda. What is given scant attention in *Murambi* and ignored altogether in *Smile Through the Tears* is that the Hutu Revolution, which did initiate deplorable and egregious waves of anti-Tutsi violence, originated as a response to the hegemony of the Belgian-supported Tutsi monarchy. Evacuation of such complexities from their narrations of the genocide leads *Murambi* and *Smile Through the Tears* to reiterate a Tutsi-nationalist vision of Rwandan history that conceals Tutsi complicity in Rwandan

strife in favor of an emphasis on the forces of colonialism. For Bazambanza, precolonial Rwanda was an ethnic Eden, where the harmony between Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa was only broken by the interference of Belgian colonialism. While Belgian colonialism did exacerbate and crystallize ethnic distinctions in Rwanda through the use of race science and population control (the census of 1933), the notion that no antagonisms existed in precolonial Rwanda serves to erase Tutsi complicity from Rwandan history and further legitimate the authoritarianism of the RPF. For Diop, however, the history of the Rwandan genocide has more to do with French imperialism in Africa than with a heroic appraisal of the RPF or the monstrous scientism of Belgian colonialism. French imperialism did play a devastating hand in creating the Rwandan genocide, but, as with Bazambanza's emphasis on Belgian colonialism, Diop's critique of French policy in Africa, while quite justified, leads to an appropriation and reduction of the Rwandan genocide into a metonym for the African Francophonie. Such a disavowal of African agency serves to exonerate the RPF from accountability for their national and regional activities, even as other Africans, namely the Congolese, are subjected to their military power and ordinary Rwandans struggle on with a lack of substantive reconciliation or justice among the living.

In *Deogratias* and *The Shadow of Imana*, such partisan impulses are curtailed through an evasion of narrative closure and attentiveness to the complicities of Hutus, Tutsis, and Europeans in fomenting Rwandan political crisis. Traumatized by the genocide, the titular character of *Deogratias* suffers from alcoholism, post-traumatic stress-induced flashbacks, and hallucinations of his own metamorphosis into a groveling dog. Graphically rendered juxtapositions of Deogratias's past and present

reveal that he was forced during the genocide to murder his Tutsi girlfriend after her rape at the hands of the Interahamwe and rape his girlfriend's sister. After finally escaping from the Interahamwe as they flee into the Turquoise zone, Deogratias returns to the site of his crimes to find dogs eating the bodies of his girlfriend, her sister, and their mother. This scene of horror implants the image of the dog in Deogratias's psyche and leads him to murder a former Interahamwe leader (Julius), a former RPF soldier (Bosco), and a former French general who has returned to Rwanda as a tourist by poisoning their drinks. This closure resistant narrative highlights the difficulties that continue to obstruct reconciliation in Rwanda by refusing to reduce the genocide to a simple case of good Tutsis versus bad Hutus, a pattern also employed in *The Shadow of Imana*. In *The Shadow of Imana*, reportage and personal essay blend to create a mosaic of voices and impressions that is divided into a bifurcated structure composed of "The First Journey" and "The Second Journey." In "The First Journey," Tadjó tries to make sense of the genocide and replaces narratives of tribalism and savagery with an existential understanding of mass-violence as stemming from a universally human fear of the Other. By "The Second Journey," however, Tadjó's own commentary begins to give way to an increasing number of testimonies from perpetrators and survivors, Hutus and Tutsis, often in an unmediated fashion. The injustices of post-genocide Rwanda, from its numbers of spuriously accused, its overpopulated prisons, and reprisal massacres that have gone untried, are subsequently revealed. *The Shadow of Imana* thereby demonstrates the cyclicity of postcolonial political violence so that, as in *The Dew Breaker*, a context for reconciliation rather than retribution might be created.

The most radically periodized text examined in this study, *The Salt Roads*, reconfigures time and space, geography and history, to fundamentally link Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean even as it narrates Haitian revolutionary history, the primal scene of postcolonial violence. Hopkinson's unique historical vision is enabled through her speculative/fabulist/magical realist use of a *vodou lwa* as the central character who connects three female protagonists in three distinct locations (pre-Independence Haiti, nineteenth-century France, and fifth-century Egypt). In its disruption of global divisionism (Global North/South, East/West, colony/metropole, developed/underdeveloped, temperate/torrid), this schema expresses a similar concern with the other texts over the enduring influence of colonial tropes of primitivism and savagery but in a more profound and fundamental assault on raced and gendered conceptions of modernity and world social history. Through the subaltern religion of *vodou*, a fifth-century Egyptian prostitute (Thais/St. Mary of Egypt), nineteenth-century French poet Charles Baudelaire's mulatta mistress (Jeanne Duval), and a slave women in prerevolutionary Saint Domingue/Haiti (Mer) are connected across time and space and made integral to world social history, reclaimed from the historical silencing(s) that subordinated them as well as the Haitian Revolution and *vodou* itself to European history and culture. In *The Salt Roads*, not only is the divisionism between France and Haiti broken but also divisionism between Haiti and Egypt, which Napoleonic France tried to claim as the property of Western/Caucasian civilization rather than African and, in turn, African diasporic civilization. Furthermore, Hopkinson's emphasis on marginalized women in her radical revisioning of global modernity grounds Gayatri Spivak's contention that "the typecase of the foreclosed native informant today is the

poorest *woman* of the South” (6) in a broader temporal-spatial milieu, an emphasis on the agency of women within the context of postcolonial violence that is paralleled in Danticat’s depiction of Aunt Estina as an invaluable community leader rather than a mere objectified victim in *The Dew Breaker*.

Beyond France and Haiti, Egypt also bears relevance to discursive reckonings of Rwanda via the Hamitic Hypothesis, elucidating how Eurocentric modernity excises Sub-Saharan Africa as well as Haiti, as a sort of Sub-Sahara of the Americas, from the narrative of Western developmental time. Once Napoleon’s excavation of Ancient Egypt had troubled colonial discourse’s tidy distinction between modern Europe and backwards Africa, the Hamitic Hypothesis required reworking to account for the existence of an “advanced” civilization within the borders of the Dark Continent. Now, instead of the tribe of Ham as a whole being black, “[o]nly Ham’s youngest son Canaan was black; his cursed progeny populated sub-Saharan Africa” (Zachernuk 428). This mythos further provided Belgian race science with the fodder it needed to separate Hutus and Tutsis into distinct racial classifications and also crystallized a conception of indigenous blackness as the epitome of primitiveness, more generally. Egypt thereby serves a pivotal symbolic function as “not-black” Africa in the developmentalist discourse of Eurocentric modernity. In this regard, Hopkinson’s intervention in developmentalist modernity confronts colonialist notions of Africa, the Afro-Caribbean, and the African diaspora itself. Hopkinsons’ emphasis on slaves and prostitutes also differs significantly from earlier black culturalist reappropriations of Egypt that, in Gilroy’s words, “identify far more readily with the glamorous pharaohs than with the abject plight

of those they held in bondage” (*Black Atlantic* 207), an idolatry of pharaonic Egypt also embodied by Bieniame’s rehearsal of the “Negative Confession” in *The Dew Breaker*.

As these recurrent allusions to Egypt in discourses of African and Caribbean culture demonstrate, the connections between Egypt, race science, and developmentalist modernity are, in fact, quite profound. Georges Cuvier, the father of comparative anatomy and Napoleon’s chief biologist, theorized humanity’s “many different degrees of development” along the spatial rubric of geography and climate. For Cuvier, “the impenetrable forests of America” were “still inhabited by the savage hunter or fisherman,” while the “immense sandy or salt plains of Central Asia and Africa” were inhabited by “half-civilized hordes [who] assemble at the call of every enthusiastic chief, and overrun the cultivated countries that surround them . . .” (48-49). While Paul Gilroy is correct to argue that the “raciologists of Europe’s imperial period worked to give Hegel’s famous speculations a blunt facticity” (*Postcolonial* 32), Cuvier had been ahead of the curve, physically demonstrating his theories of development on the body of Sara Baartman, the “Hottentot Venus,” a KhoiKhoi woman dissected by Cuvier in 1815 and so that her labia and skull could be used as proof of African inferiority, primarily through comparison of her “primitive” skull with an Ancient Egyptian mummy’s, well before publication of Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*. But this complication of Gilroy’s chronology is only important as an addendum, a qualifier stating that the developmentalist theories Cuvier verified with Baartman’s dissected body was neither the invention of one thinker nor the property of one scientific paradigm, philosophical community, or literary tradition: the spatialization of morality and evolutionary time held transdisciplinary and transnational influence in the European world and continues to

hold influence in contemporary conceptions of modernity and their newest global divisionisms: North/South, developed/developing.

Attending to the colonial logics of race and modernity that continue to impact how postcolonial violence is understood, observed, and dealt with constitutes an important task for critical narrations of postcolonial political crisis, as reductive accounts of such crises often aid and abet opportunistic and exploitative intervention strategies.

Narratives of primitivism and savagery should also be confronted given their complicity in dichotomizing populations, often in a reversal of colonial race hierarchies. If allowed to persist unchallenged such Manicheanism can prevent reconciliation and promote reprisal and retribution. Those narrations of postcolonial political crisis that strive for a critical and reflexive perspective are often concerned with confronting Eurocentric modernity and its narratives of primitivism, tribalism, and savagery while abstaining from the appropriation of the voices or bodies of victims for politically instrumentalist, partisan agendas. Such appropriation emerges vividly in the image of Theresa Mukandori's doubly victimized body, first by the genocidaries who raped, murdered, and mutilated her and second by the national government who displayed her corpse, despite her family's wishes, as part of a commemorative strategy that furthers an authoritarian, partisan agenda. These insights are made all the more urgent by the fact that these narrations of the past direct our understanding of the present, as the twenty-first century crises that continue to vex Rwanda and Haiti, as well as their neighbors, were catalyzed, in varying degree, by these misunderstood, misappropriated, and misrepresented crises of the twentieth century.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jonathan D. Glover completed his doctorate in English at the University of Florida in May 2011 with support in his final semester from a College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Dissertation Fellowship. He is currently working on two book monographs derived from this dissertation. The first concerns the discursive implications and material consequences of recent political and natural disaster in Haiti, while the second links ongoing strife in Rwanda to economic imperialism in the Democratic Republic of Congo.