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ALTERNATIVE PATTERNS OF LITERARY PROGRESS: WRITING ABOUT RWANDA IN THE WAKE OF TRAUMA

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Abstract: This article discusses three books about the 1994 genocide against Rwandan Tutsis, all of which belong to the “Writing as a Duty to Memory” project: two novels by Boubacar Boris Diop and Abdourahman Waberi respectively, and a travel journal by Véronique Tadjo. It looks at the performance of a new sense of community after a traumatic event which invalidated traditional notions of ethnicity, national unity and historical continuity, contrasting the social and ethical function assigned to storytelling in the wake of genocide with the description of politically engaged, marginal literatures in the work of Pascale Casanova, as well as Franco Moretti’s distinction between premodern and modern literature. More precisely, the Rwandan case presents an alternative to the teleological patterns of literary evolution drawn by some World Literature scholars, as this moment in literary history was shaped by collective trauma and ethical imperatives rather than Rwanda’s peripheral status in the literary world-system or its so-called “delay” in terms of written culture.

Keywords: Rwanda, genocide, community, collective trauma, literary evolution.

In 1994, Rwandan society was torn apart by one of the most gruesome genocides of the twentieth century: in only 100 days, Hutu extremist militias killed up to one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus, driven by an ideology of ethnic cleansing and abetted by international indifference. After the massacres, Africa fell silent. While European and American journalists and historians rushed to explain the events in articles and books,

literature took a while to record and digest the horrors of the genocide, so that the first published francophone Rwandan novel, *Le chapelet et la machette: sur les traces du génocide rwandais* by survivor Camille Karangwa, appeared only in 2003. The initial literary response, therefore, came from outside Rwanda when Nocky Djedanouma initiated “Rwanda: Writing as a Duty to Memory,” a collective project involving ten African writers from different countries. In 1998, they were invited to visit Kigali for two months and to produce literary texts that would challenge the distortion of historical truth by Western narratives (Hitchcott, Global 152). Neither of the Rwandans involved chose fiction or travel writing, opting for testimonials instead, but several novels were written by the others. My examples in this article will be taken from three of these books: Boubacar Boris Diop’s *Murambi, the Book of Bones*, Abdourahman Waberi’s *Harvest of Skulls* and Véronique Tadjo’s travel journal, *The Shadow of Imana*.

The starting point of my analysis has to do with the very particular and conflicted role assigned to fiction and travel writing in post-genocide literature, when writing had a manifestly social and ethical function, as well as a certain urgency to its pursuits. This extraliterary, morally determined contribution to the life of a very fragile national community is relevant not only as a peculiar historical case, but also when confronted with the patterns of global literary evolution famously employed in certain World Literature accounts like Pascale Casanova’s *The World Republic of Letters* or Moretti’s theory of forms. Worldlit theorists often look at literature as moving from the nation to the world, with different degrees of distortion in translation and various levels of assimilation by the pre-existent canon. As national cultures stabilise and become more refined, they enter the international competition and accede to increasing levels of universality (Casanova 156, 177): the path is largely linear and often silently associated with qualitative progress, so that, although Casanova explicitly calls universality “one of the most diabolical inventions of the centre” (Casanova 154), the evolutionary dynamic leading there appears as unavoidable for any writer aspiring to international recognition. Of course, such totalising claims can only be based on distance and generalisation, as they attempt to map centuries of literature from all around the world, and the existence of exceptions to these models of circulation and competition – like the Rwandan one – is to be expected. Even the harshest critics of such bird’s-eye perspectives have argued that it is not the blind spots of global narratives which should

come under fire, since they are unavoidable, but the presentation of a particular pattern as the sole valid description (Prendergast 121). Therefore, my analysis of turn-of-the-century prose about Rwanda is not meant to be yet another counterexample to Casanova or Moretti's theories. What I *do* intend to discuss and question, however, is the teleological nature of these broad representations of literary evolution, using the Rwandan case as an alternative, a possible way out of the authoritative perspective on marginality in contemporary World Literature.

More exactly, I would like to begin by focusing on the unspoken assumptions made by Casanova and Moretti in their most famous works, regarding the mutations or, rather, the progress of literature throughout history. The main dialectic drawn by Casanova in *The World Republic of Letters* involves national literatures representing or legitimising a collective identity with a view to securing political rights in the long run (Casanova 34-35). At first, literature is committed to a social or political goal, it is dependent on extrinsic motivations and fully engaged in a sense of commonality. In Casanova's work, this applies to both premodern nation-building and postcolonial literatures, all of which are situated in the periphery specifically because they are still fighting for symbolic and cultural capital and have not yet achieved synchronicity with the so-called Greenwich Meridian of Literature (Casanova 92). In order to get there (and the teleology is already apparent in this pragmatic approach), authors often turn against the aesthetic conventions of their national literatures, resort to experimentalism, and are eventually included in the pantheon of the book market due to their formal innovations (Casanova 37). In short, the end-goal of the literary field (which encompasses the whole world, geographically and temporally) is autonomy, pure literariness, based on the universality of literary experimentalism and fostered by the institutions of the world republic. For instance, Casanova inspects the criteria of the Nobel Committee in their evaluation of literature all throughout the twentieth century: political neutrality, the dissolution of strong national specificity in favour of an internationally palatable aesthetic, unanimity (the economic equivalent of universality) – all of these structured the debate around the most prestigious literary prize in the last century (Casanova 149-150). Even the 2000 award won by Gao Xingjian is interpreted by Casanova as the consecration of “the incarnation of what earlier [she] called an international writer,” capable of recreating “his own tradition using nontraditional

forms” (Casanova 152). This apparently open and tolerant attitude towards different cultures and traditions, which also makes the essence of multiculturalism, is nonetheless misleading. As Aamir Mufti has pointed out, orientalism has often amalgamated cultural difference into a “plane of equivalence and evaluation” (Mufti 488), all the while respecting the logic and the power dynamics of imperialism.

The impact of this system can still be perceived in Gao Xingjian’s case and even in Casanova’s verdict, since the author’s success is still measured by his ability to curate cultural specificity to a Western audience. In other words, despite her acknowledgement of systemic inequality in the literary world, Casanova describes the competitive system determined by economic success and traditional mechanisms of validation (general popularity and institutional prestige) as the immutable evolutionary path of literature ever since modernity and especially since the advent of globalisation. Ironically, although literature appears to mature from political and national dependency to depoliticisation and although Casanova celebrates this perceived aesthetic freedom, literature also seems organically bound to capitalist forms of expansion and evaluation, so that the very concepts of freedom and autonomy used in *The World Republic* are problematic, being equated with one’s efficient submission to the neoliberal order. It could be argued that this is an overly simplified version of Casanova’s theory and we must contend that the qualitative evolution of literature from marginality and specificity to aesthetic self-sufficiency is never articulated as such in *TWRL*. However, Casanova’s analyses are universally dominated by this one dynamic, which equates politically engaged literature and local specificity with an early stage of literary development, typical of new nations or recently emancipated communities. As Christopher Prendergast famously wrote, the writers who manage to escape these temporal enclaves and to be integrated into the Meridian are treated as – and I quote – “heroes” in Casanova’s work, who:

in besieging the citadels of the literary imperium (...) succeed in conquering not only for themselves but for the institution of literature a certain «freedom» and «autonomy»; literature not only becomes fully international, it also becomes «literature», a practice finally freed from its subjection to national imperatives (Prendergast 108).

Similarly, Christopher Thorne has noticed that Casanova's preference for formal innovation and literary de-localisation automatically relegates all other types of writing to an inferior position in the hierarchy: "realist fiction thus becomes the symptom in literature of a region's more general backwardness (...) it turns out that all [Casanova] really cares about is the liberation of literature" (Thorne 62).

When it comes to Moretti's work, at least *Signs Taken for Wonders* and *Modern Epic*, a similar teleology structures the variation of form, albeit in a much more subtle manner. It would be very difficult to accuse Moretti of essentialism or a preference for aesthetic autonomy, since his concept of the literary field embodies precisely the political unconscious and the wider inequalities of the world-system. But in spite of this, his critics remain sceptical about the temporal divide between a premodern age of literature (a time of tragic dissent and protest against a given social order) and modern times, when literature supposedly fosters compromise and adjustment between opposing values, since no axiology can dominate the other anymore (Moretti, *Signs* 28). Even one of Moretti's most famous and astute observations – that modern literature works in favour of social cohesion, managing the "symbolic overload" caused by historical change and using literary form to handle the impact of social tension (Moretti, *Modern* 6) – can be taken with a grain of salt, depending on one's understanding of oppression, dissent and compromise. For example, postcolonial theorists like Aamir Mufti or Lorna Burns have been known to question this articulation of consent, arguing that the endless modern dialectic where no value can triumph or be verified is based on silent oppression and omission or, in Burns's words, "a rhetoric of innocence that convinces us that the subaltern cannot speak" (Burns 68). The very purpose of postcolonial studies is invalidated if criticism can only occur against a backdrop of "organic order, of an assumed totality in Hegelian terms" (Burns 68). This is why Mufti argues for the inspection of World Literature as a concept, namely the global power relations it enforces and obscures when thought of as an organisational pattern (Moretti) or a reading method (Damrosch, Sarah Lawall) (Mufti 465), but also claims that distant reading alone cannot offer the proper critical lens for this project (Mufti 493): some World Literature scholars describe the systemic evolution, integration, and competition of regional literatures as a given, an unchangeable pattern, based on

negotiation and compromise but perennial in its core mechanisms. Finally, if resistance, conflict and radical opposition are the prerogatives of premodern literature, then manifestly anticolonial writing is automatically placed outside – or at least on the fringes of – dialectic modernity, continuing to generate tragic clashes between literature and social norms and validating an axiological system over another. This also implies that the evolution which took place between premodern times and contemporaneity is yet to happen in marginal cultures, placing them once again in a time lag against Greenwich.

All this being said, we can resume our conversation about Rwanda. I chose to focus on this case study due to the unprecedented imperative for storytelling that arose out of the 1994 genocide, as well as the intentional deployment of fiction in the service of historical truth, which makes “Writing as a Duty to Memory” a paradoxical pursuit. Rwanda was colonised at the end of the nineteenth century and remained a Belgian colony until 1962, when the independent republic was declared. Crucially, its decades as an occupied country were marked by ethnic division programmatically fostered by the colonists, whose pseudo-scientific anthropological and ethnographic studies posited that the Tutsis were actually ‘more white, more European’ than the Hutu majority (Hitchcott, *Global* 152). The Tutsis were generally used as colonial proxies and granted economic privileges and authority, thus leading to animosity and – virtually – a class conflict disguised as ethnic competition. For the colonists, this ensured a controllable national hierarchy, but the end of the imperial rule in Rwanda ultimately left behind a fractured social fabric, culminating in massacre by the end of the twentieth century. In other words, the 1994 genocide was a historical event surrounded by mythology and mythological interpretation. First, Western reactions to the genocide were characterised by ignorance, simplistic explanations and clichés, depicting the killing of thousands of Tutsis as a typically African tribal conflict, ethnic rivalry, or civil war (Diop, *Transforming Genocide* 4; Hitchcott, *Writing on Bones* 55): the huge imbalance of power between the aggressors and the victims, as well as the one-sided nature of violence (at least until the RPF intervened) were both completely ignored. Moreover, multiple African intellectuals – Diop included – have shown that the Western perspective on Africa, in which the whole continent is inherently chaotic and incompatible with democracy, has contributed to international passivity during what

was undoubtedly a humanitarian crisis (Diop, *Transforming Genocide* 4). It took several years for historians to start analysing the complex economic circumstances that led to the genocide, with Gérard Prunier demonstrating that “the crisis which turned the more or less benevolent authoritarian Habyarimana regime into a hardened and aggressive dictatorship was linked to the decline of the international price of raw materials and to the aid crisis around 1988” (Prunier 364).

Second, mythology and stereotypes were not only imposed on Rwanda by the Western world as a result of the genocide, but were already ingrained in the national imaginary at the time of the killings. Rwandan self-perception had been manipulated and twisted for more than a century leading up to the 1994 events, making any pre-colonial collective identity impossible to retrieve. Consequently, responding to the deep-rooted, divisive ethnographic narrative created by empire with a new wave of fiction was a necessary strategy. To quote Boubacar Boris Diop:

one is all the more entitled to write an imaginary account of the genocide since the recent history of Rwanda was largely the result of a conflict between truth and fiction. All these nightmarish delusions developed out of a certain colonial ethnology, which *fabricated* a non-African history in an African country and passed it off as science (Diop, *Transforming Genocide* 13, emphasis in the original text).

Indeed, many of the novels written about Rwanda at the turn of the century could be seen as documentary fiction, defined by Barbara Foley as “distinguished by its insistence that it contains some kind of specific verifiable link to the historical world (...) it requires the reader to accept certain textual elements – characters, incidents, or actual documents – as possessing referents in the world of the reader” (Foley 26). However, the three books I mentioned in the introduction have a very particular approach to historical truth and the representation of violence, which cannot be ascribed to a universal, delocalised need to remember and exorcise trauma, but has a lot to do with the geopolitical situation of Rwanda.

To begin with, Diop’s novel, *Murambi, the Book of Bones*, is an example of polyphonic storytelling, in which the tale of Cornelius Uvimana, a returnee to Rwanda long after the genocide, is interrupted by dozens of short first-person narratives

belonging to victims, survivors, RPF rebels, perpetrators, and even organisers of the mass killings. Cornelius, who is quite visibly Diop's alter-ego, intends to write a play about the genocide, but ends up discovering that his own Hutu father – whom he had presumed dead for many years – had in fact orchestrated the Murambi massacre, condemning his own Tutsi wife and their children to a gruesome death. The protagonist visits the memorial and has multiple conversations with various survivors, all of which provide numerous opportunities for graphic descriptions of torture and murder. And yet, Diop prefers to represent death and suffering obliquely: the only fragments containing truly detailed accounts of rape and physical pain belong to Gérard Nayinzira, a Murambi survivor, indicating Diop's intention to apply no censorship when it comes to actual witnesses of the massacre. But other than that, the author himself has spoken about the attempt to control the reactions of his non-Rwandan readers: “each time events seemed too cruel or unbelievable, I avoided talking about them” (Diop in *Di Genio*). This was meant to prevent the readers from seeing his writing as mere fiction because of their unfamiliarity with the story and their visceral disbelief; to discourage any voyeuristic tendencies and the appetite for violence fostered by our increased exposure to graphic imagery; to suggest that the emotional experience of the reader can never be equal to the lived experience of the survivors: all of these effects on the reader are achieved through very careful storytelling. To give but an example, the description of the bare bones exposed in the Murambi Memorial is subtle and poetic, representing the victims as living people instead of material remains: “but why did these rooms piled with corpses make him think of life rather than of death? (...) A forest of arms still murmuring with the cries of terror and despair” (Diop, *Murambi* 146).

By contrast, Véronique Tadjo's account of her touristic visits to other memorials in Rwanda is much more explicit, hanging onto every visual detail and structuring the descriptive passages in an almost ekphrastic manner (Tadjo 11-13). But even so, Tadjo's genre of choice allows her to take significant detours into her own confused reactions to the landscape and the people she meets, interweaving these impressions with childhood memories and metaliterary reflections on the appropriate depiction of evil. Violence seeps into various aspects of life, such as the contrast between natural beauty or the apparently unscathed Rwandan towns and the recent horrors plaguing everyone's thoughts. In its turn, Waberi's experimental novel offers alternative ways of narrating

violence by focusing on the outcomes of the genocide (people robbed of their future, paralysed in the past (Waberi 23)) and by imagining the speech of an Interahamwe leader calling the Hutus to “cleanse” Rwanda (Waberi 16-20): violence is not synchronous with the discourse, but it is remembered and announced, drawing the reader into the ambiguous temporality of trauma. Finally, none of this means that historical truth is being replaced by imagination in Diop, Waberi and Tadjó’s writing. Rather, these novels about the genocide are quite clearly aimed at a non-Rwandan audience and never hide their intention to inform and awaken the dormant, comfortable, self-righteous West, but also strive to present the reality of the genocide in a dignified manner. In her article on the “(un)believable truth about Rwanda”, Nicki Hitchcott quotes Achille Mbembe’s theory about the connection between truth and belief – “What is a true narrative if not the narrative believed true and so regarded by the person narrating it, hearing it, or accepting it?” (Mbembe 159) – and explains this dependency on the reader through the almost uncanny nature of the events of 1994:

during just 100 days, over one million Rwandan people were killed in ways so brutal that they are unfamiliar to most of us and could therefore be dismissed as implausible; or, if not implausible, then so excessive that they become difficult to represent and therefore difficult to believe (Hitchcott, (Un)Believable 201).

It is the distance between the Western perspective on Africa (shaped by popular films like *Hotel Rwanda*, touristic adverts, and newspaper articles) and the experience of the Rwandan people that makes the mediation of truth necessary, just like the encouragement of empathy through first-person narratives.

Needless to say, all these novels address the genocide directly, as well as the negationist narrative propagated by certain intellectuals, the silence of the international community, and the responsibility of imperial policies in driving people to radical social division. In many ways, Rwanda in the 1990s was one of the new nations described by Casanova in her analysis of literary nation-building, having a precarious economy, a divided society, and a traumatic past (often compared with the Holocaust) that required mourning, healing, and reconciliation. According to Nicki Hitchcott, Rwanda had produced little written fiction before the genocide, in spite of its rich tradition of oral

poetry and storytelling (Hitchcott, (Un)Believable 203) and given that the African novel became an established genre in the 1960s, it would be easy to read Diop, Tadjó and Waberi's books as national allegories, trying to capture Rwandan society and its political identity. According to the teleology of the World Literature evolutionary models discussed above, they would represent examples of submission to the local political cause, serving the interests of the nation. Even though all three authors (Tadjó, Diop and Waberi) come from other African states and are not technically Rwandan writers, they were among the first to produce something other than journalism or testimonials about the massacres of 1994. Moreover, it has been argued that the "Writing as a Duty to Memory" project manages to advocate for a "transnational commemoration that addresses a global consciousness" (Hitchcott, Global 159). But in spite of Diop, Tadjó and Waberi participating in the mission to reconsider Rwandan identity, their writing defies the competitive system of World Literature (as described by Casanova) and serves a double ethical principle born out of the specificity of the geohistorical situation: first, truth-telling, paradoxically associated with most attempts at fictionalisation (Hitchcott, (Un)Believable 200); second, reconciliation, the recovery of a shared humanity obliterated by the extreme violence of the genocide. The latter has also become a governmental ambition, with the National Commission for Unity and Reconciliation being founded in 1999, out of a desire to undo the evil of colonial prejudice and ethnic hatred.

However, while literary nation-building often strives to demonstrate the existence of a national soul, essence or political will, the authors working in the Fest' Africa project strived to find the balance between historical accuracy – "to call a monster by its name", in Diop's words (Diop, Murambi 179) – and a sense of community that can function even when notions like the nation or ethnicity have become problematic and unconvincing. Navigating this narrow passage is especially difficult since Western historians, politicians and journalists writing in 1994 and later on reacted to the genocide by eagerly reproducing all the well-known clichés about Africa in order to explain away the complexity of Rwanda's political situation, even proposing the theory of a double genocide (Diop, Conversation 4). Diop, Waberi and Tadjó had to uphold the integrity of collective memory – to show the reality of a one-sided attack on the Tutsis – while also searching for alternative forms of togetherness, necessary for survival and for

the possibility of a Rwandan future. Their solutions were remarkably inventive. *Murambi*, for instance, takes its readers from character to character, presenting the protagonists' psychologies and individualised voices before disclosing their ideological allegiance and complicating the relationship between personal histories and ethnic identity: the perpetrators are sometimes civilians, forced to take part in the killings in order to protect their families; the daily life of future victims is especially haunting for the reader, who knows more than the protagonists and can identify the danger looming over these characters – just like in Roland Barthes's well-known reflections on photography, in which the subject's death is simultaneously in the past and the future (Barthes 96), we are faced with Tutsi characters whose destruction is imminent.

At the same time, moral responsibility is constantly debated and negotiated by the characters, from Cornelius's sense of guilt at not having prevented his father from becoming a war criminal to his childhood friend, Jessica, whose undercover involvement with the RPF implied the abandonment of innocent strangers and friends, so as to protect the mission of the rebel forces. The reader is therefore forced to accept that moral righteousness during the genocide cannot be decided judging by nationality, ethnicity, or – sometimes – even a person's actions under duress and it is this journey from chapter to chapter that effectively binds the characters in a shared experience of trauma and loss, revealing what Catherine Kroll has termed “inescapable affiliations” between allies and enemies alike (Kroll 657). Waberi also combines various perspectives, alternating his own experience visiting Burundi or Rwandan prisons with descriptions of fictional characters and poetically written propaganda in favour of the genocide. The transition between these voices is generally seamless, making the reader glide in and out of confusion, in and out of sympathy. When explaining the current situation of neighbouring Burundi, for instance, Waberi points out that across the border, a similar genocide had been carried out by the Tutsi population against the Hutus back in 1972 (Waberi 45) and that Burundi in the 1990s was facing the same difficulties in trying to transcend collective trauma and rebuild society. Thus, without ever relativising the evil of genocide or the power imbalance in 1994 Rwanda, Waberi makes it clear that the interdependence between the people who have experienced genocide also implies a degree of permutability, since material circumstances and colonial discourse function regardless of geography or ethnicity.

In fact, these three books depict the downfall of the common national ideal and the construction of something new, a strictly contemporary sense of belonging to a community defined by collective trauma and the urgency of rebuilding the very *concept* of humanity. Suggestively, Tadjó ends her book by writing “We need to understand. Our humanity is in peril” (Tadjó 118). When nation *does* appear in these stories, it is always immediately subverted – a nation torn apart, plagued by fear and suspicion, a nation without an identity and so on. For example, one of Waberi’s longer chapters is a call to violence by a Hutu extremist, in which a fictional origin story is meant to encourage the fight: the images are strikingly similar to many European national legends – brave Hutu warriors being invaded by Ethiopian tribes in time immemorial (Waberi 16-17), a mystical connection to the land (“sons of the earth” (Waberi 18)), a natural paradise destroyed by the new-comers, a continuous appeal to the collective ‘we’ as opposed to ‘them’, and the desire to change the submission of the ancestors into modern rebellion (Waberi 17). Diop also suggests that Rwanda’s past has been irreversibly deformed by colonial discourse when one of his episodic characters, Faustin, is being relentlessly indoctrinated by his Hutu father’s so-called “numerous anecdotes” about the “Inyenzi” (literally the cockroaches) right before leading an attack on the Tutsis (Diop, Murambi 12-23). In a country where oral culture had been the norm for centuries and where the first fixed narrative of society and community was a foreign, hierarchical one, the genocide itself becomes the new point of reference, destabilising any conventional understanding of the nation. Unity between people – between the characters encountered or imagined by the authors – can no longer stem from a foundational tale of solidarity, homogeneity or sameness, because the past holds only division. Tadjó goes so far as to wonder about the collective unconscious of a people marked by unspeakable horror, asking: “who can say what makes up the memory of a whole nation? What images carpet its unconscious mind? Who can know what slaughter, hidden behind the centuries gone by, is even now sculpting the future of a nation?” (Tadjó 19). Therefore, unlike the cultural devices of Benedict Anderson’s imagined communities (the newspaper and the so-called “traditional novel”), which were supposed to legitimise the nation through the representation of homogenous space and time (Anderson 25), Diop, Waberi and Tadjó are concerned precisely with a lack of synchronicity, with miscommunication, and the fragmentation of history and geography: space is haunted

by the spectre of the perpetrators, but it is also inhabited by those who have taken part in the violence without being brought to justice – an “intimate genocide” (Blackie and Hitchcott 24) has made space ambivalent, hosting both acts of terror and, just months later, acts of domestic life carried out by the same individuals. And yet, this troubling fragmentation of one’s context is also the premise of solidarity and reconstruction, as the endless loop of suspicion, guilt, and retribution can only be broken by a creative, untainted form of unity.

This new sense of community, built in an age of national disenchantment, is reflected in the transnational nature of “Writing as a Duty to Memory”. Not only are the novelists involved foreign visitors to Rwanda, but the central function assigned to their work from the very beginning – i.e., ethical reconstruction – is projected on a global scale. First, because the main character of each book (either Diop’s Cornelius Uvimana or Tadjó and Waberi’s alter ego narrators) are practically strangers to the genocide and their reckoning with the massacres is representative of the entire international community acknowledging its moral responsibility for the humanitarian crisis. Diop, Waberi and Tadjó all add a metaliterary dimension to their texts, wondering *how* best to represent the unspeakable, how graphically to describe memorial sites. They make their main narrators unreliable, insecure, and self-conscious, discussing the power of literature almost as much as they discuss the genocide. Ultimately, neither the concept of community, nor the proper form of commemoration can be decided with absolute authority, precisely because trauma dissolves any steady pattern of knowledge and judgment – in Cathy Caruth’s words, “trauma, as an experience, as a *missed* experience, causes you to ask, precisely, why it is that all the frameworks you have previously used, all the models, aren’t adequate to describe this experience” (Caruth 51). Therefore, community and commemoration need to be actively and intentionally performed in Diop, Waberi and Tadjó’s books, using the gaze of the reader as a partner in negotiation and reflection. They can no longer be used as instruments of national legitimisation, set in stone and folklore, but community endures as a future possibility, starting to materialise through fictional dialogues between victims, survivors, perpetrators, and international witnesses.

Finally, the literature written about Rwanda in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide is difficult to place in the evolution of World Literature. It cannot be explained

as a mere reaction to trauma, striving to commemorate the victims and to prevent anything similar from ever happening again. Although a remarkable number of citizens are currently involved in government projects and volunteering precisely to improve living conditions and to ensure that genocide will become unthinkable in the future – as discovered by Blackie and Hitchcott in their interviews with multiple survivors and members of Rwandan associations (Blackie and Hitchcott 32) – literature is a much more complex endeavour. For one thing, it addresses the moral disaster caused by the massacres, since the most close-knit social units (families, villages, neighbourhoods, churches) were torn apart by the extreme ideology propagated in the decades leading up to 1994. It also reckons with the residue of colonial policies, acknowledging that the genocide was not entirely the result of homegrown totalitarianism, but had to do primarily with external ideological violence being imposed on the people of Rwanda for almost a century. Moreover, the books written by Diop, Waberi and Tadjó after their visit to Rwanda were clearly meant to be read by a Western public, as well, which meant that historical truth needed to be framed in a palatable fashion – to be made visible, and, no matter how cynical it may sound, to be made relevant to a readership educated to believe in Africa's natural predisposition to violence and chaos. This is not the same as pandering to the aesthetic standards of the book market or the centre of the literary world; rather, it shows that global dialogue was urgently necessary for the sake of Rwanda's survival and the recovery of a shared humanity. Likewise, the Rwandan case is no traditional tale of nation-building, considering that most useful fictions and myths employed in the nineteenth-century formation of nations or even in postcolonial reconstruction crumble when confronted with the confusion and brutality of genocide. All in all, it becomes obvious that collective trauma of such magnitude can dislocate any pattern of literary evolution theorised by scholars and critics, submitting systemic principles like national competition to urgent ethical goals and devising new forms of community and large-scale solidarity, most of which do not fit comfortably with the criteria of the international book market or the general progress of peripheral literatures towards the autonomous centre.

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