

Special Issue

## Representations and Rhetoric of Genocide in African Popular Cultures

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One of the several pathologies of colonialism in Africa is to have created and bequeathed to African political nationalist discourses, forms of neurosis that manifest in anti-pluralistic ideological tendencies. These tendencies reveal and play themselves out in post-independence Africa in the form of ethnicity, tribalism, sexism and the other malignant patriotic discourses that fear some alternative views which parochial nationalism cannot understand, explain or wish to exist side by side with. This narrowing of the democratic spaces in post-independence African states has produced extremely fundamentalist ideas which encourage resolving social conflicts through violence. This, in turn, has entrenched genocide in the continent as the new normal. There are very few countries in Africa that have not suffered from genocidal wars – whether colonially induced or orchestrated on the masses by many of Africa’s post-independence leaders. Despite the existence of genocide as an existential threat to African countries, there has been little scholarly research on the subject. What research on genocide exists in Africa is fragmentary, and mostly written by scholars from the former colonial metropolises. In addition, how to write or speak about a sensitive issue such as genocide has continued to exercise the many of scholars. Africa’s popular cultures are diverse and are performed on different cultural and political sites. Some of these cultural sites, where genocide is reflected on, include the forms of the novel, film, children’s cartoons, historiography, conventional history, autobiography and popular songs. In addition, the ideologies that drive genocidal mentalities range from ethnicity, political and cultural populism, extremist and fundamentalist ideas borne of the regressive tendencies in African nationalisms.

This special issue on the rhetoric of genocide in Africa implies that the cultural flows of the narratives of genocide are trans-, multi-, inter- and intra-disciplinary in nature. This means that each of these disciplines have their own specialised vocabularies of giving form to genocide narratives. How a crisis is named might provide some clues as to how the problems arising from this crisis might be resolved. As Judith Butler (2010) puts it, how extreme

forms of violence such as genocide are framed, makes it possible to recognise which lives are grievable and which lives can exist as bare life and therefore, un-grievable. The articles contained in this special issue deliberately experiment with different cultural forms in order to render visible, the ideologies underlying genocide narratives.

In this issue, for instance, Chakawa's contribution uses sources from conventional history in order to make sense of the Gukurahundi genocide that occurred in Zimbabwe in the 1980s. Rwafa's article focalises on the ways in which victims of Rwanda genocide were first annihilated by being marginalised in the official media spaces. He ably argues that the minoritisation of an ethnic group is part of genocide rhetoric narratives used to justify destroying human lives in whole or in part. Memory places an important role in the construction of genocide narratives. Ndlovu's article debates graves as constituting sites of antagonistic memories. He clearly argues that Mugabe constructed the National Heroes Acre as a place of remembrance of the selected elite people who are described as the gallant soldiers of Zimbabwe, while at the same time undermining Ndebele memories of their loved ones by persecuting those ordinary survivors who wished to commemorate and called for reburials of the Gukurahundi victims. Sibanda's article is creative and offers new insights on the instrumentality of language in violent contexts. The article argues that language is the first port of call in naming those who must live and those destined to die. In other words, language is used to discriminate and name other people as the outgroup so that once named so, physical annihilation of social groups becomes possible and justified in the eyes of the killers. Gadzikwa's article discusses the 'negative' impact of the discovery of oil in South Sudan. He argues that instead of all the ethnic groups in the new country striving to benefit from the oil riches, the elites from South Sudan who previously fought the elites of North Sudan to realise self-governing and optimum use of resources have, in Mamdani's words, become killers. Oil has been transformed into a curse where, in other countries, oil is a boon and promotes rapid economic development. Khan's article uses the cultural template of the film to explore how the verbal and the visual narratives constructed after the Rwandan genocide are being used to revise and subvert unitary and officially-sanctioned definitions of who was a criminal in the violence that engulfed Rwanda in 1994. Mpofo's article delves into the philosophical underminings of how genocide rhetoric becomes possible. He argues convincingly that truth and knowledge about genocide are the main casualties in some forms of genocide rhetorical narratives. Muganiwa's article explores the gendered dimensions of the effects of genocide and she aptly conclude that in Vera's novel, *The Stone Virgins*, women and children suffered the most and that without a proactive ideological strategy in place, the possibility of another round of genocide cannot be ruled out in Zimbabwe. Seda returns to the problematique that emerges from writing genocide because every act of

## INTRODUCTION

writing or speaking about genocide introduces the author's subjectivities. The article participates vigorously in contemporary debates on representing genocide by showing the difficulties of writing about genocide without stylising the narratives. Shai and Nyawasha's article reveal that the Darfur genocide has been misrepresented. Firstly, some critics suggested that the proportion of the violence did not constitute genocide. Other critics were quick to label the Darfur violence as genocide to create a pathway to be involved in the Great Lake region's politics of oil and access to numerous raw materials that are in abundance. However, the two authors argue that in post genocide Darfur, there is myth that women's voices are visible, when in fact women's subjectivities are marginalised in male-authorised discourses on the genocide.

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