

## Introduction

# Violence and Genocide in African Literature and Film

### **Maurice Taonezvi Vambe & Urther Rwafa**

Studies on violence and genocide in Africa have for many years relied on the disciplines of history, sociology, and individual testimonies to make sense of the crimes against humanity. The main justification for using anthropological and sociological accounts to explain violence and genocide in Africa has been encouraged by an empiricist research culture that relied on quantitative methods to measure the impact of violence and genocide in Africa. The main aim in these sorts of research had been to over-awe the world with the image of Africa as the heart of darkness. These approaches are forcefully recreated in the worked by critics like Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal (1999) for whom it is disorder that makes Africa work. Furthermore the reliance on the evidence provided in statistics gathered from the victims who of violence and genocide unfortunately was manipulated by some critics to create the wrong perception which that only the people in Africa affected directly by violence and genocide could write insightfully and authoritatively on the subject. These views have now been challenged in a new scholarship by young African intellectuals. These African intellectuals as are represented in this issue argue in different ways that the structural, systemic and symbolical forms of violence introduced by colonialism, found a new life and was and then intensified by some postcolonial leaders whose politics undermined the potential of Africa to grow out of the stereotype constituted in the view that the continent is a place where anything and everything negative that can happen in the world is manifested. The power of the voices of victims of genocide has also provided compelling evidence of, and provided a robust moral argument to convince the world to act whenever the spectre of genocidal wars rears its head. But the actions of the world's powerful governments have been selective. Where their interests lay, they would act or not act depending on the global coalition forces' immediate interests. There is however in Africa, a refreshing look by young African intellectuals that refuse to minimize the complicity of Africans in their own historical misfortunes.

This issue “Violence and Genocide in African Literature and film” tackles the above described themes of violence, genocide, and African complicity. The authors represented in this issue are drawn from different parts of Africa and the divergent nature of their views on the roots and routes of violence and genocide provide stimulating reading. For example, the authors in the issue sometimes distinguish and on other times deliberately collapse the conceptual boundaries between violence, civil war and genocide in ways that seek to provoke readers to further interrogate the forces that shape and frame the discourses on violence and genocide in Africa.

Nyasha Mboti’s “*Violence in Postcolonial African Film*” explores the site of Sissako’s film, *Bamako* to argue that violence is often invisible to the naked eye, and is easily missed if one is looking for the stereotypes of violence such as rape, killings and beatings. The article further argues that the way we read representations of violence needs to be constantly subjected to rigorous contextualising and historicising, and that analytical frameworks should allow for more questions as opposed to certainties. Maurice Vambe uses Agamben’s ideas of the “state of exception” (2008), and the “paradox of sovereignty” to demonstrate that within the narrative topoi of the films, *Black Hawk Down* and *Blood Diamonds*, produced and directed by white people from the west, the African child-soldiers are symbolically constituted as enemy, the other, and one existing on the margin of “bare life” (Agamben 1998) and whose value is not worth mourning for – simply, “ungrievable” (Butler 2010).

In “A Linguistic Reading of the Metaphor of Genocide in *Hotel Rwanda*”, Macaulay Mowarin deploys tools within Systemic Functional Grammar to show how the director of *Hotel Rwanda* manipulates the resources of language at the levels of syntax and lexis to highlight the distortions created in Rwanda by the genocide. Tendayi Sithole’s article explores Ngugi Wa Thiongo’s epic novel, *Wizard of the Crow* and reveals how the notion of metaphor is imaginatively stretched to limits in order to engage the liminal space of the real and unreal as something interchangeable and also entangled in the performativity of power within the African postcolony.

Urther Rwafa’s “Playing the Politics of Erasure: (Post)Colonial Film Images and Cultural Genocide in Zimbabwe” explores the film, *Strike back Zimbabwe*. The author shows how the phenomenon of cultural genocide is underplayed in genocide studies and that this unscholarly practice is in fact a form of “epistemicide” because in reality this aspect of intangible violence provides the grammar of human conduct and conditions that prepare ground for physical elimination of targeted groups of people.

In “Rethinking Marikana: Warm and Cold Lenses in Plea for Humanity”, Lesibana Rafapa focuses his critical searchlight on South Africa, the “last” African colony and explores how the neurosis of apartheid is reproduced in the historic Marikana tragedy of 16 August 2012. In this article, the illusory

## INTRODUCTION

“rainbow nation” does not provide sanctuary to the economically besieged gravid mass of black South Africans.

Ogaga Okuyade takes on the novel, *Secrets No More* by the Ugandan author, Goretti Kyomuhendo. Ogaga then reveals how genocide is wrestled from some physical war fought in some battlefields as it extends its tentacles to embroil and consume family and gender. The author argues that in the novel, just as in film, a situational kind of violence is inflicted upon a specific group during moments of crisis, revealing how the battlefield has extended beyond the physical space of engagement to the bodies and psyche of vulnerable groups.

## References

Agamben, Giorgio

1998 *HOMO SACER: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, translated by Heller-Roazen, Daniel. Stanford: Stanford University.

2008 *State of Exception*, translated by Kevin Attell. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago.

Butler, Judith

2010 *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* London, Verso.

Chabal, P. Daloz, & Jean-Pascal

1999 *Africa Works: The political instrumentalization of disorder*. Oxford, James Curry.

Scott, R. Dir.

2001 *Black Hawk Down*.

Zwick, Dir.

2007 *Blood Diamonds*.

**Maurice Taonezvi Vambe**

University of South Africa  
vambemt@unisa.ac.za

**Urther Rwafa**

Midlands State University, Zimbabwe  
rwafau@msu.ac.zw