Body as Battlefield: Genocide, and the Family in Goretti Kyomuhendo's *Secrets No More*

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Summary

In Goretti Kyomuhendo's *Secrets No More*, the faces of the individual characters often come through vividly, and the events and situations can be precisely located in time and place in the Rwandan genocide as corroborated by the historical evidence. However, despite its accessibility and the relationship between the real and the fictive, there is little or no reference to *Secrets No More* in the major studies about the fictional narratives on the Rwandan genocide. In most of the narratives on the genocide, the historicity of the carnage is explored by means of the stark images of human bestiality and the debility of the victims. Kyomuhendo specifically deals with the same experience and issues, but through the different vignettes that make up the narrative. She makes eloquent the devastating blow that the genocide wreaked on the family as a unit and, by extension, the relationship between the woman's body and the nation in moments of crisis. The narrative captures the gory images of total and unmitigated disaster, tinged with anger and disappointment over the violent destruction of lives and property, and the human folly in attempting to completely wipe out a group of people who were just as human as their murderers were. Although the subject of this article is one of violence, I examine the situational violence inflicted upon a specific group of people during moments of crisis (specifically the Rwandan genocide) in order to articulate how the battlefield has been extended beyond the physical space of engagement to the bodies and psyche of vulnerable groups. This in turn will demonstrate how the relationship between gender and national identity is reconstructed during ethnic clashes.

Opsomming

In Goretti Kyomuhendo se *Secrets No More* kom die gesigte van die individuele karakters dikwels skerp na vore, en gebeure en situasies kan presies in tyd en plek gelokaliseer word met betrekking tot die Rwandese menseslagting soos bevestig deur die historiese bewyse. Ten spyte van die toeganklikheid van die teks en die verband tussen die werklikheid en fiksie, is daar egter min of geen verwysing na *Secrets No More* in die vernaamste studies van die fiktiewe narratiewe oor die Rwandese menseslagting nie. In die meeste narratiewe oor die menseslagting word die historisiteit van die slagting verken aan die hand van die strak beelde van menslike verdierliking en die kragteloosheid van die slagoffers. Kyomuhendo behandel dieselfde ervaring en kwessies, maar aan die hand van die verskillende

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karaktersketse waaruit die narratief bestaan. Sy gee uitdrukking aan die ver-woestende gevolge wat die menseslagting vir die gesin as 'n eenheid en, ter uitbreiding, die verwantskap tussen die vroulike liggaam en die nasie in krisis-oomblikke ingehou het. Die narratief bring die grusame beelde van totale en onversagte rampspoed na vore wat gekleur is met woede en teleurstelling oor die gewelddadige verwoesting van lewens en eiendom en oor die menslike gekheid van diegene wat poog om 'n groep mense totaal uit te wis wat net so menslik was as hulle moordenaars. Alhoewel hierdie artikel oor geweld handel, ondersoek ek die situasionele geweld wat 'n spesifieke groep mense tydens krisisoomblikke (spesifiek die Rwandese menseslagting) moes verduur. Ek doen dit ten einde te verduidelik hoe die slagveld verder as die fisiese gevegsruimte uitgebrei is na die liggame en psige van kwesbare groepe. Dit sal op sy beurt aantoon hoe die verband tussen gender en nasionale identiteit tydens etniese konflik gerekonstrueer word.

> When people ask, my good listeners, "Why do you hate all the Tutsi?" I say it is the history. The Tutsi were collaborators for the Belgian Colonialist. They stole our Hutu land. They wiped us. Now they have come back. These Tutsi rebels. They are cockroaches. They are murderers. Rwanda is a Hutu land. We are the majority. They are the minority of traitors and invaders. We will squash the infestation. We will wipe out the RPF rebels. This is RTLM. Hutu Power Radio. Watch your neighbours.
>
> (*Hotel Rwanda*)

Introduction: Mankind, Violence and the Notion of Modernity

The postcolonial African terrain, like other continents across the world, continues to experience crises with ethnic, sociopolitical and economic temper. Most of the civil strife that continues to plague the continent spawns from the failure of Africa's emergent leadership to sustain the euphoria and hope of self-rule engendered in the 1960s. The bureaucratic failures and the visionless leadership which characterise the politics of governance in postcolonial Africa have provoked numerous crises, with some almost unending. However, some of the most catastrophic violence in the continent today is characterised by ethnic contestations and dissatisfactions with how some groups continue to hold on to power, while others are confined to marginal spaces where they negotiate the question of identity as mere observers. Indeed, ethnic difference and intolerance have become a socio-cultural ancillary invoked during political struggles for power. Con-sequently, the colonial policy that undermined the geocultural borders of different ethnic groups specifically for colonial administrative convenience has become a subject of continuous violent contestations in postcolonial African nations. This is so because the departure of the colonialists from

Africa's political landscape has created suspicion among these once distinct groups that have been brought together as geopolitical entities under one roof as sovereign states.

My argument above is not to insist that violence is a European-imported phenomenon for the African person if one considers the intertribal feuds which presented African communities, warlords and warrior-kings the opportunity for territorial expansionism during the precolonial era. Apparently, the construction of binaries or differences which bifurcates individuals and nations into strong/weak, developed/developing nations, rich/poor, man/woman is predicated on power. Power is therefore a normative term which is mostly associated with the dialectics of victory and defeat. The victor on most occasions deploys strategies predicated on brute force which may in turn inflict pain and engender unalterable scars on the psyche and bodies of the vanquished. From the foregoing, violence has become a universal phenomenon which defines human relations in the advent of contestations which eventually make room for the breakdown of civil order and justice. Crisis has therefore become an identity marker for the modern man and a cardinal subject in the social discourse of international politics.

The twentieth century remains the most turbulent in the history of humanity. Thus its history is arguably defined by two global conflicts, the First and the Second World Wars. Each of these conflicts began with a single shot. Just two bullets, less than thirty-one years apart gave birth to the modern world. Besides the two World Wars, humanity continues to be confronted with ethnic, national and international conflicts with unimaginable consequences on the human psyche. However, these pockets of crises are sometimes appraised as provincial, but their impacts are not only global, but far-reaching.

The world systematically averted a possible global crisis in the second half of the twentieth century. This was celebrated as the possible end of a crisis with monstrous global proportions which characteristically defined the political and economic relations of the developed nations or the so-called super powers. However, many decades after the end of the Cold War, the world still remains a tinderbox; any nation could end up becoming the flashpoint. The events in Bosnia, Chechnya, Rwanda, Darfur, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Kosovo and the Arab-Spring have vividly demonstrated that the end of the Cold War has not eliminated conflict completely.

The wars that have occurred since the end of the Cold War have a different temper when compared with previous wars. The subjects of most of the crises then usually captured issues bordering on the struggle to sustain or expand territories, economic issues and control of natural resources. However, the focal point of the new wars has shifted to internal rifts contoured by issues like identity politics and the question of ethnicity. Additionally, one of the most horrible impacts of the post-Cold War crises in Africa is the proliferation of firearms, especially the Kalashnikov popularly

called the AK-47. This assault rifle has strategically redefined the face of crises in Africa. The number of volunteers sustaining insurgencies in Africa continues to soar with the passage of time. Veterans are no longer just retired seasoned soldiers, but children also now comfortably assume the label. Indeed, the image of a child in combat bearing a Kalashnikov bigger than himself/herself articulates a new brand of violence within the African continent. Indeed, the child soldier is therefore not a nascent phenomenon in the history of crises worldwide, neither is it unique to the African people, but it amplifies the failure of man to protect his future which is signified in the identity of the child.

Although the subject of this article borders on violence, I examine a situational kind of violence inflicted upon specific groups during moments of crisis, specifically the Rwandan genocide, in order to foreground how the latitude of the battlefield has extended beyond the physical space of engagement to the bodies and psyches of vulnerable groups. This in turn will demonstrate how the relationship between gender and national identity is reconstructed during ethnic clashes.

Literature, Ethnicity, the Postcolony and the Legacy of Colonialism

Fifty years after most African countries celebrated independence, the chaotic geographical space, labelled Africa, continues to wobble in crises of varied dimensions, leaving the continent in a parlous state with a people mired in a socio-economic morass engendered by crises which stem from the problem of leadership. Although Africa continues to be labelled a violent continent, violence is not characteristically an African trait, as the phenomenon is universal. Some of the most violent tremors that continue to rock the plinth of the African landscape are generally externally influenced, especially those constructed from Western myths to explicate ethnic difference or distinction among Africans. Invariably, the attainment of independence appears to have ushered in new kinds of struggles which have continued to foreground how the African peoples renegotiate and (re)construct private, ethnic and national identities. Post-independence struggles for cultural, political and economic reconstruction in Africa are mainly negotiated through the politics of ethnicity. Consequently, the determining factor for attaining political power is predicated on difference – a kind of difference founded on the superiority of some ethnic groups over others because of their numerical strength, privileges acquired through proximity to colonial infrastructures, resources or facilities during the colonial era and the degree of involvement during the anti-colonial struggles. The latter is most resonant in the new South African political or democratic arrangements, while the other forms could be easily identifiable in other parts of the African

continent. Consequently, the dubious ethnic scheming geared towards exclusionism, which in turn contracts the identity of particular group(s) within what Anderson designates as "imagined communities" (1991: 6) has continued to provoke political crises and ethnic clashes of varied dimensions which sometimes end up as ethnic cleansing or genocidal attempts at vulnerable groups.

Literature as a cultural product derives its raw materials from the society that produces it. If violence is a human phenomenon, it invariably becomes a profound subject for artistic creation. Some of the finest art forms worldwide derive their subjects from violence. Thus Eustace Palmer (2008: 6) asserts that "[m]ost wars in history eventually give rise to a fertile body of literature". Consequently, one will notice that most of the cultural forms that emanated from the dawn of the twentieth century were characterised by the prevailing sociopolitical temper of the time, specifically the wars which re-emphasised human bestiality and its ingeniousness for destruction. Considering this chameleonic relationship between the artist and his/her imaginative composition, one may begin to wonder about questions border-ing on the relevance of recreating the subject of violence. Thus, one may ask: what function does a recreated violence in art form offer a memory that has been scarred by such crisis? How does one measure the force of iconoclastic acts of violence against images that represent particular people or belief systems? Does the spectacle of violence provide a catharsis that enables the audience, collectively, to accept the unacceptable, even to welcome it? Although the subject of my article is not geared towards addressing these fundamental questions that border on the relationship between the artist and the recreation of the subject of violence, I shall organise my argument around them.

Palmer enumerates some of the reasons why the artist recreates subjects of violence and how the real narrative of violence recasts itself in art:

> Some writers may merely wish to capitalize on the popular enthusiasm for the excitement, suspense, and mystery the wars inevitably involve; others may wish to probe the cause of war and its impact on the lives of ordinary people; soldiers and other active participants may wish to record the trauma of living through a war.
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> (Palmer 2008: 6)

Violence therefore serves as an artistic intensifier for the writer in order to probe human inherent brutality and mankind's inanity for destruction and to re-emphasise the importance of human progress after bouts of destructive schemes geared towards truncating human progress and civilisation and ultimately the import of reconciliation in the face of life-threatening circumstances. Goretti Kyomuhendo, a Ugandan writer, uses her novel *Secrets No More* ([1991]2001) to explore the senseless brutality perpetrated by the Hutus to exterminate a group that was only their neighbour just

before the wake of what is today known in Africa's geopolitical history as the Rwandan genocide – one of the most barbarous acts of savagery enacted in Africa on the one hand – and to re-emphasise the will to survive a traumatic experience so devastating on the psyche of its survivors on the other. This genocide has become an indelible postcolonial geopolitical marker for ethnic bigotry or as Mahmood Mamdani (2001: xi) puts it, "a metaphor for post-colonial violence" in the African continent. Although Kyomuhendo is without doubt an outsider witness, since she did not experience the violence first-hand (Applegate 2012: 78), *Secrets No More* unequivocally explores in great depth the disastrous social consequences of the genocide. Particularly stunning is the presentation of the debility of the Tutsi victims and moderate Hutus, and the impact of the senseless brutality on the fortunes and condition of the most vital unit of the society, the family.

The family as a unit pragmatically functions as the custodian of tradition and memory. Irene Visser (2005: 5; my italics) asserts that one of the primary functions the family fulfils is the "*transmission and mediation* of memories, mores and myths of the preceding generations and the continuity". Besides being the locus of tradition where the core values of the preceding generations and the ancestors are transmitted and lived with emphasis on how continuity and growth are sustained within this minutiae human category, the family is a powerful reflector and indicator of social change. Anne McClintock (1993: 63) observes that "[t]he family trope is important in at least two ways. First, the family offers a 'natural' figure for sanctioning social hierarchy within a putative organic unity of interests. Second, it offers a 'natural' trope for figuring historical time". The family invariably becomes the base for national progression. The idea or the portrait of the nation(s) is usually conjured through the iconography of the locus of the familial. The family therefore is regarded as the base from which the nation grows. It is like the mother plant with numerous branches, and the seeds from this plant generate other plants. Thus people regard their nation as motherland or fatherland. The idea of the mother and father expresses the basic component of the family that guarantees life and continuity of existence.

The collapse of the family may constitute an eternal threat to the stability of a nation, while mortal injuries inflicted on the woman and the child, two important constituents of the family unit that guarantee historical progress of a group and nation may amount to an endangerment to the continuity of such a nation. Most of the criticisms on how the Rwandan genocide continues to recast itself into cultural art forms border more on their strength as testimonials or the relevance of documentary realism to the texts, while others consider how such texts can possibly provoke reconciliation for individuals who may have suffered trauma from the carnage. However, attention is hardly paid to the impact of the genocide on the family, especially as a summation of the numerous homicides that make the genocide. This article

has already noted in the introductory part attempts to engage in a conversation on how narratives on genocide extend beyond victimhood to enunciate how the representation of the genocide and its profoundly disabling ramifications in *Secrets No More* impacts on the family, especially its vulnerable constituents, women and children. To achieve my aim in this article, I shall deploy a popular Urhobo[1] proverb, "the worm in the nut", or "the rat in the house", to conceptualise how the family, the foundation of every society, is comprised and implicated in *Secrets No More*. Invoking Nira Yuval-Davis's theories of gender and national identity and the construction of women as "bearers of the conflict" (1997: 26), I argue that previous attention to female victims of war in African narratives, hardly addressed rape from a gender point of view; it is usually treated as an extension of war-related incidents of abuse. This is not so, specifically because gender violence during wars or conflicts is seen as inherent under such circumstances, but it points to global shortsightedness to come to terms with a basic human idiosyncrasy. My focus on the family and sexual violence in *Secrets No More* in the exploration of how women and children, constituents of the family that need protection in moments of crisis, become targets of military assault is geared towards insisting that rape and violence against children are an ethno-military strategy for a kind of premeditated attempt at the decimation of the enemy, nation or group. Furthermore, concentrating on rape is interesting because of the fact that its impact spans beyond the physical and psychological torture of the victim; it is an attack on the identity of the ethnic group in question, and by extension the entire community.

A major starting point for most studies on the Rwandan genocide is usually to connect the root cause of the carnage to the dialectic of ancestral shadows-cum-Eurocentric myth and the ideology of antagonism. Elizabeth Applegate (2012: 80) gives a brief but incisive description of this dialectic:

> According to widely disseminated stereotypes being deconstructed today, Tutsi were taller, more physically graceful, and had more refined features than the stocky, wide-nosed Hutu. With these physical differences came personality characteristics: While Tutsi were considered intellectually superior, innately capable of governing yet also of treachery, Hutu were seen as simpleminded, obedient, and easily dominated. The designations of "Hutu" and "Tutsi" existed long before colonization and largely referred to differences in social role (Hutu were farmers and Tutsi shepherds). Stereotypes about the two groups were created by the Hamitic myth, developed by the British explorer John Hanning Speke in the nineteenth century and adopted by German and Belgian colonists.
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> (Applegate 2012: 80)

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1. The Urhobo is one of the ethnic minority groups that make up what is today called the Niger Delta or the broad-label South-South geopolitical zone of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Apparently, the contest for superiority and the possession of political agency to run the state becomes a recurring feature in the ethno-political relations between the Hutu and the Tutsi, and the cardinal defining indices to justify how one group's identity is privileged and the other's confined to marginality. This in turn makes this unsubstantiated mythical design a ready tool invoked to legitimise how the binary of children of the soil and the foreigner or alien is constructed. Identity has become paramount in modern conflicts worldwide because of the ethnic content or agenda pursued by the facilitators. Identity basically gives expression to a "people's source of meaning and experience" (Castells 2004: 7). Identities go deep psychologically, and involve a process of self-construction and how the self, personality and subjectivity are negotiated and achieved. Castells defines identity as the organisation of meaning. Meaning in this context points to "the symbolic identification by a social actor of the purpose of her/his action" (p. 7). Castells's definition of the term makes lucid how identity and its contextual purposefulness were constructed, negotiated, at that historical moment in Rwanda. It is important to bring to bear factors that could have motivated the social reorientation of a group and how they deployed their new consciousness to inflict pain on their Tutsi neighbours. Once again I shall rely on Castells's description of how the complex process of identity construction is negotiated within a group in order to achieve a specific ethnic purpose:

> The construction of identities uses building material from history, from geography, from biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and religious revelations. But individuals, social groups, and societies process all these materials, and rearrange their meaning, according to social determinants and cultural projects that are rooted in their social structure.
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> (Castells 2004: 7)

The politics of identity (re)construction within ethno-national space is sometimes a strategic scheme employed by the elitist class to manipulate the masses. Castells opines that "who constructs collective identity, and for what, largely determines the symbolic content of this identity, and its meaning for those identifying with it or placing themselves outside of it" (2004: 7). As noted earlier, the formulation and construction of identity are without doubt a complex process.

  From Castells's proposition on the process of identity construction, it becomes glaring that the Rwandan political elites strategically inserted their private agenda into the national discourse through the deployment of already prevalent identities (both the indigenous myth of creation and the Eurocentric myth of ethnic superiority) as instruments for social-cum-ethnic mobilisation. This strategic reorganisation of identity was a success because these identities had already established semantic nuances in the psyche of

the people or heavily entrenched the sociocultural framework of the groups. Invariably, the elitist class from time to time uses the politics of identity to manipulate the masses depending on the context and whatever is to be derived from such schemes usually geared towards protecting and sustaining their place in the vanguard of such societies. However, the masses are galvanised through these schemes because they are deeply rooted in the sociopolitical relations of the groups that make up the nation. The success of the elitist class in the manipulation of the masses depends on how deeply entrenched these identities are in the cultural base of the society and their internalisation by the social actors. From the foregoing, it becomes glaring that identity can only be reconstructed around existing basic institutions in the collective memory, such as family, community, the rural past, religion or the nation.

Interestingly therefore, when the Rwandan government under the leadership of President Juvenal Habyarimana became depraved, with the masses displaying their discontent and disenchantment through different forms of protest, the Eurocentric myth of the origin of Rwanda was reconstructed to justify its loss of focus, unpopularity and the bureaucratic inefficiency with which it conducted state affairs. The invocation of this myth afforded the regime the opportunity of placing its failures at the doorstep of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, and by extension the Tutsis. Through this scheme, the Tutsis were not only othered, they were equally demonised. Through this well-tailored propaganda, the provincial Hutu majority held their Tutsi neighbours responsible for the possible failure of the regime, especially because of the ethnic symmetry to the growing insurgency associated with the Rwandan Patriotic Front believed to be championing the cause of a possible Tutsi-led government as the solution to the Rwandan socio-economic crisis. Moise Jean sums up the economic crisis of the period thus:

> The economic crisis of the 1980's, resource depletion, dependency on foreign aid, and the pressure to build a democracy in Rwanda put a strain on the government of Habyarimana. The government turned to military mobilization against the RPF as a way to maintain power instead of sitting down for diplomacy. This gave them an excuse to eliminate opposition to their regime both in the RPF and in other Hutu groups in Rwanda.
>
> (Jean 2012)

This ideology of hatred and the Eurocentric myth of the origins of the three ethnic groups in Rwanda aptly created room for the othering of the Tutsi, and the reconfiguration of their identity as foreign invaders. Thus the myth became the mobilising principle for the onslaught on the Tutsi. What eventually became the Hutu Ten Commandments – a document that under-pins the propagandistic scheme which accelerated the process of the violent tensions which lasted for approximately three months – further amplified the hermeneutics of ethnic difference.

Negotiating Difference: Genocide, the War within and the Rat/Worm Metaphor in *Secrets No More*

Not only do most of the narratives on the genocide vary generally in style and their exploration of the brutal destruction of human lives and properties; they are also characterised by the urgency to relay information about what happened in Rwanda. Thus besides being an artistic recreation of the crises, they equally carry the badge of journalistic reportage. *Secrets No More* possesses these attributes, but its tremendous density of texture, the rhetorical devices the author deploys to narrativise the genocide, using the family as the tripod for its exploration is profound. Through these devices, Kyomuhendo articulates how the genocide was well thought out and the brutal efficiency with which it was executed and the importance of focusing on the family as the base for reconciliatory dynamics. Considering how Kyomuhendo deploys her rhetorical devices, *Secrets No More* does not pretend to be a factual account of the genocide. But the author blurs the line between history and fiction as she artistically reconfigures the relationship between the individual and the nation. Interestingly therefore, the narrative arguably pendulates between the family and the nation. Kyomuhendo addresses serious postcolonial concerns like ethnic intolerance, the collapse of bureaucratic apparatus for governance, externally induced conflict in Rwanda and genocide fictively through the Bizimana family. Invariably the politics of the family structurally parallels that of the nation.

  The novel realises its structural coherence through the shift from story to report at irregular intervals. The narrative is relayed from the third-person perspective, telling the story of the Bizimana family, especially the events that led to the birth of their first child and at the same time recounting the build-up of tension in Rwanda as a result of ethnic contestations. Through this device, the reader easily notices that Mr. Bizimana and his wife are from different ethnic groups. Mr. Bizimana is a Hutu while his wife Mukundane is a Tutsi. From this dimension it becomes clear that both groups once coexisted peacefully and inter-ethnic marriages sustained the relationship between both groups despite ethnic difference: "Hutu men occasionally married Tutsi women, though the latter were called derogatory names like *Inyenzikazi* or *Maguruyasarwaya*" (*Secrets,* p. 1). The reader is then informed that Mukundane had grown up as an adopted child in a Hutu family from the age of nine "after her parents' massacre in the 1959 uprisings" (*Secrets,* p. 1). Through this narrative design the author recounts the immediate past history of Rwanda and the socio-cultural relations between the two major ethnic groups. From this perspective, one gets a glimpse of the ethnic tensions between both groups in the past and the present. Invariably, the family becomes the barometer with which to calibrate how the politics of development and national identity are negotiated among both groups.

Among the Urhobo of Nigeria, misfortunes in the family or the home are usually associated with internal factors or forces within the familial base. It is believed that whatever problem an externally induced crisis wreaks on the familial or the primordial base, somebody within must have given vital information to the enemy outside, which eventually facilitates the damage within. Thus a damaged nut does not get rotten from the outside, but from the insidious parasitic worm lodged inside the nut. This equally parallels the fact that when rats invade a home, it is the rat within that catalyses the process of the invasion. This is so because the rat outside has no possible knowledge of the abundance or absence of food in a particular home; it is the rat within that provides the vital information and invitation for the ones outside, about when and how to strike. The dialogic of this metaphor aptly captures the relationship between Chantal and the Bizimanas.

In one of the vignettes of *Secrets No More*, Kyomuhendo normatively relays how Chantal is brought into the familial affairs of the Bizimanas. Chantal's character appropriately matches that of the villain as Kyomuhendo uses her to not just enunciate the rhetoric of the enemy within or the worm in the nut, but to reiterate the fact that "[w]hat happened in Rwanda was not, as the Western media repeatedly suggested, a case of ethnic conflict; it was an organized attempt to eliminate an entire group of people" (Hitchcott 2009: 54). Linda Melvern further accentuates the position above on the preparedness of those who perpetrated the slaughter:

> Far from being a chaotic tribal war, what happened in Rwanda was deliberate, carefully planned and clinically carried out by an extremist group using army units and gendarmes to drive people systematically from their homes and assemble them at pre-arranged places of slaughter. A militia of the mainly unemployed, the Interahamwe, those who work together, and the impuzamugambi, those with a single purpose, were trained to kill 1,000 human beings every twenty minutes. Local administrators organized the disposal of bodies in garbage trucks. The slaughter continued unhindered for three months.
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> (Melvern 2000: 5)

Hitchcott and Melvern's assertions become very relevant if one considers the pains and troubles Chantal goes through just to have access to the Bizimanas. Kyomuhendo uses the Bizimana family as a narrative vent to demonstrate the magnitude and impact of the Rwandan genocide on the familial base, the smallest and most important unit of any society. Interestingly therefore, a summation of the numerous homicides is what makes up the genocide and this in turn eloquently enunciates the inconsequentiality of human evil and sadism.

The narrative begins with a flashback released through the prologue to specifically configure a genial ambience in the Bizimana family. The first child of the family has just arrived after a couple of years of waiting.

Bizimana, a Hutu and serving minister in a Hutu-led government and his wife Mukundane are overjoyed at the birth of their first child, Marina. Mukundane is grief-stricken before the birth of Marina; she hardly talks especially as she has once experienced a brutal ethnic clash which claimed the lives of all her siblings. Those left of her entire family now live in Uganda as refugees. To ensure that his wife is psychologically and emotionally stable, Bizimana employs Chantal to keep her company. Chantal is more of a spy than a companion – a lady who is consumed by the rage of ethnic intolerance and greed. She has refused to participate in a local community work, "*Umuganda*" (*Secrets*, p. 2) and the penalty for evading this communal exercise is imprisonment. Bizimana as a serving minister uses his powers to release her from security custody and introduces her to his home as a companion to his wife. This is where the conflict of the narrative is set. Shortly after the birth of the third child of the Bizimanas, the ethnic tension begins to mount – what is popularly designated in history today as the Rwandan genocide, where about a million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were murdered. Under the watchful eyes of Chantal, the worm in the nut or the rat within, the Bizimanas are given away as political saboteurs. Their apartment is invaded by bloodthirsty soldiers who gruesomely wipe out the entire family with the exception of Marina, the eldest of the children, who was not spotted by the ferocious-looking soldiers who have invaded her house under the guise of searching for firearms lodged in her father's apartment. Like the archetypal villain, Chantal disappears from the home on the night of the onslaught. Her absence from the home the night the soldiers strike is of no consequence because she has already provided the soldiers with the vital information for the raid.

As already noted in the introductory part of the article, my intention is to demonstrate how Kyomuhendo articulates the impact of the genocide on the family and how the woman's body translates into a battlefield. One of the strategies deployed by the soldiers who invade the home of the Bizimanas to break the spirit of Bizimana and his wife is rape. Besides the taking of life, the most terrifying weapon used during the Rwandan genocide to destroy the family is rape. Kyomuhendo makes this point lucid by making rape scenes graphic. The narrator explicitly describes the scene of the rape of Mukundane, bequeathing it with a kind of narrative immediacy which unambiguously becomes a permanent mental filmic recurrence of the incident in the psychological make-up of the only survivor, Marina the protagonist:

> Marina felt a horrible nausea sweep over her. She wanted to rush to her mother and save her but her legs were cold and felt like logs of wood. She could not move them. As she watched, the Colonel struggled out of his trousers and stood there naked, his manhood obscenely pointing in front of him. In one swift movement, he was on top of Mukundane. She put up a feeble resistance but she might as well have reserved her energy. The two soldiers holding her down were too strong for her. Marina closed her eyes.

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> She willed herself to move but her legs let her down. She opened her mouth to scream but no sound came out. She heard the fabric of her mothers [sic] night gown ripping and her eyes involuntarily flew open.
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> She watched as the Colonel, with a vicious thrust of his body, entered her mother. Nausea rose to her throat like bile and she knew she was going to throw up any minute. Mukundane tried to push the Colonel away but only succeeded in igniting him the more. Like a possessed man, he began pounding at her. He slowed down briefly and looked in Bizimana's direction. "Once you tell us where those guns are, I will stop doing this to your wife," he said breathlessly. But Bizimana's eyes were swollen – shut against the horrible scene in front of him. With renewed energy, the Colonel resumed the pounding. Mukundane curled her fingers into claws and lashed out at him. Marina heard him curse under his breath but he did not slow down. Mukundane screamed out as the Colonel seemed to tear at her insides.
>
> (*Secrets*, p. 17)

Besides Marina witnessing the brutal assault on her mother during the genocide, Dee equally relays his experience of the carnage to his friends in Uganda:

> The bellies of pregnant women are slit and their husbands are made to eat the foetuses before they are bayoneted themselves. They say they don't want to make the same mistake their predecessors made in 1959 when they let the children go free. The same children have re-organised themselves and come to fight the government … the men pay the murderers money so they can kill their loved ones, wives and kids, decently. If you don't pay, your wife is slain right in front of you in the most ghastly manner. The murderers pierce her with a sharp object through the vagina until she dies. But if you pay, well, she is only gangraped first, then shot once through the head.
>
> (*Secrets*, p. 135)

I have profusely quoted the description of the rape scenes to elucidate the process of the brutal assault on the targeted groups, women and children, and how they are eventually eliminated with their husbands helplessly watching. Both excerpts above make one point glaring; the attack on the family during moments of crisis. These attacks are not just geared towards eliminating the enemy; they make eloquent an attempt to destroy the idea of the nation signified by the family through the elimination of its foundational constituents, women and children.

Dee's experience of the genocide which he unequivocally recounts in exile makes the threat on the family frightening. Even lifeless "foetuses" were not spared the soldiers' barbaric attack. Basically, rape is associated with male superiority over females as "it is the quintessential act by which a male demonstrates to a female that she is conquered" (Brownmiller 2005: 49). *Secrets No More* pushes the structural utility of rape to enunciate that the rape of Tutsi women by Hutu men is an eloquent statement of the insignificance of the Tutsis. Furthermore, the act of performing the rape with

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the husbands of the Tutsi women as witnesses is a signification of the fact that the Tutsis are not only minor but are mere objects within the Rwandan nation. Thus rape becomes not just a "weapon of war and suppression" (Armstrong 2009: 266); it is equally an instrument for derogation and the insistence on the unacceptability of the humanity of the violated and their total rejection as humans equal to the violators in recent ethnic conflicts like the one in Rwanda. The act of violent rape in the presence of the helpless husband makes the violated mere abject items or objects in the society. Colonel Renzaho's brutal rape of Mukundane with Bizimana, her husband, as witness is not just a strategy or a weapon for mere humiliation of the victims; it is an eloquent dramatisation of the ethnic ideological construct premised on the supremacy of the Hutus over other groups in Rwanda and above all, the subordination of the Tutsis. Mukundane is sexually assaulted and killed by the Hutu soldiers not specifically because she is a Tutsi. Women are associated with reproduction and the continuity of the family, the ethnic group and nation; hence the female body is symbolically connected to geographical territories and land. Mukundane's case is complicated considering the fact that she is in an ethnically mixed marriage.

From the foregoing, it becomes clear that the woman's body translates into a battlefield during inter-ethnic feuds. Women are hunted down like animals and eliminated to ensure the enemy population is not only depleted, but strategically punctuated. Mukundane's rape, the total annihilation of the family including innocent children is by no means fortuitous, but a strategy of war, which has conceptually broadened the definition of genocide. Rape becomes a violent instrument deployed to achieve a specific military-cum-ethnic agenda. Yuval-Davies (1997: 45) suggests that women are "constructed as the symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honour, both personally and collectively". Thus, one pragmatic strategy to destroy an enemy is to target its women. Shaming the woman's ethnic group by sexually violating her body reinforces the dominance of the opposing group as demonstrated by the Hutu soldiers. Thomas and Ralph (1999: 209) reconceptualise this strategy when they remark that "[s]oldiers rape to subjugate and inflict shame upon their victims, and, by extension, the victims' families and communities. Rape, wherever it occurs, is considered a profound offence against individual and community honour". Indeed, rape is therefore a potent tool for humiliating the enemy during conflicts and a powerful ethno-military weapon and strategy for breaking the psyche of the enemy. The Hutu soldiers rape and kill Mukundane not specifically because she is a woman, but because of her ethnicity. The elimination of the Bizimana family becomes an endangerment to the historical progress of the ethnic group they belong to, the family as base of any society and by extension the nation.

Conclusion

Secrets No More (Kyomuhendo [1991]2001) is contoured with violence of different kinds, but I focus on the variants inflicted on the family and the one performed on the body of the woman in order to demonstrate how the theatre of war continues to be extended beyond the borders of the battlefield to achieve ethnic-cum-national victory over perceived enemies. The narrative at the end celebrates the power of the family and its indestructibility, which signifies the beauty of human life regardless of the ethno-military strategy deployed to destroy it. The only survivor in this battle for the annihilation of a group, Marina, becomes traumatised as she is trapped in a temporary loop.

Violence serves as an artistic intensifier for the writer to probe human inherent brutality and mankind's inanity for destruction and to re-emphasise the importance of human progress after bouts of destructive schemes geared towards truncating human progress and civilisation and ultimately the import of reconciliation in the face of life-threatening circumstances.

This article therefore calls the attention of critics to the achievement of Kyomuhendo in her narrative on the Rwanda genocide and to place *Secrets No More* where it belongs – at the core of the discourses on the narrative of the genocide. The narrative intensely recreates a perfect image of the triumph of disorder during the genocide in Rwanda. Furthermore, *Secrets No More* brings to the fore a nation reduced to a morass of epistemological purposelessness and ethical disorientation by the terrorism of years of visionless military and democratic rulership; the bureaucratic inefficiency of the politics of governance and the futility of constructing ethnic identity from a speculative Eurocentric myth geared towards distinguishing two groups that are almost homogeneous in nearly every sphere of human endeavours. But above all, the most fascinating aspect of the narrative is the celebration of human resilience in the face of horror and sadism and the propensity for reconciliation, rehabilitation and relief after the moments of unmitigated rage. Not surprisingly, the narrative ends with the assurance that the family cannot be completely wiped out of existence; there is always room for continuity. Although Marina's psychic networking is scarred by her experiences as a child who witnesses the violent rape of her mother and the brutal efficiency with which her parents and siblings are killed, she eventually finds comfort in her new family – a kind of comfort which is characterised by the propensity for human continuity and progress in the face of suffering and hopelessness. The novel begins with attempts by individuals possessed by the rage of ethnic intolerance to eliminate an entire family and by extension an ethnic group because of the question of ethnicity. *Secrets No More* ends with an unequivocal statement which reiterates the fact that human existence is predicated on the family as base for mortal continuity and progress and that this unit of the society can neither be

contained nor completely destroyed but will eventually break through. Mr. Magezi, musing on the agency of the family, reinforces the certainty of the hope that there will always be a future for the human race: "I know, love. But I have Rosaria and you. What more could a man ask for?" This thinking bears the stamp of the expected fulfilment, harmony and the absorption into the familial base.

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