Re-Writing the Historical Past: Literary Representations of the Rwandan Genocide

Semedo Gonçalves, Márcia

Leiden University
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Written By

Márcia Semedo Gonçalves

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Supervisor: Annachiara Raia

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Introduction

The 19th century constituted the age of historiography. By definition, historiography denotes the analysis of analysis of methods, approaches and techniques used by historians to develop historical knowledge. During this period, history emerged as a scientific, academic discipline and as such, the historian's representation of the historical past was assumed to be scientific and empiricist. The methodology used by the historian, which will be referred to as 'traditional' in this thesis, was considered to produce a truthful representation of past events. The second half of the 20th century, however, saw a turn in the process of historical writing with the emergence of the postmodern school. Critical thinkers such as Linda Hutcheon, Hayden White and Michel De Certeau started questioning the role of historiography in its production of historical knowledge. The previous established ideals of traditional historical writing were problematized, and without diminishing the value of traditional historical accounts, various scholars started considering the latter as literary artefact.

Contrary to the traditional understanding of historiography in the 19th century, adherents of postmodern thought questioned the historians' supposed objective relation to the historical past and the empirical world. In so doing, they considered the historian to be a self-conscious author like a fiction writer. Their texts were interpreted as tools to reach the truth about a past event rather than an accurate representation of the historical past. Thus, there was no longer a strict boundary between factual and fictive details, as history was treated as a literary artefact and no longer as a scientific work.

In 1988 the Canadian literary theorist, Linda Hutcheon, coined the term historiographic metafiction. Novels of this kind are characterised by two interdisciplinary domains, fiction and history. In other words, historiographic metafiction denotes works of fiction that combine methods of metafiction and historical knowledge. These works are heavily influenced by different artistic, historical, and literary texts, which all emphasise the text's intertextuality.

Furthermore, the intertextuality of the historiographic metafictional novels demonstrates the extent works of both literature and historiography are dependent on discourse.

Hereof, this thesis will focus on three historiographic novels: Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi: le livre des ossements* (2000) [Murambi: The Book of Bones], Véronique Tadjo's *L'ombre d'Imana: voyages jusqu'au bout du Rwanda* (2000) [The Shadow of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda] and Jean-Philippe Stassen's *Déogratias* (2000). The aim of this thesis is to analyse the authors' depiction of the Rwandan genocide in the novels and its representation. The hypothesis that this study makes is that historiographic metafiction can be used to re-write the historical past. The analysis of this thesis will, therefore, primarily focus on the techniques the authors used to narrate the Rwandan genocide. The research questions this thesis aims to answer is: why use historiographic metafiction as a medium to re-write the historical past? What can historiographic metafiction say or do that a traditional historical account cannot, and to what extend? This thesis will make use of Linda Hutcheon's postmodern theory (1988), in which she questions the traditional paradigm of historical writing.

The first chapter of this thesis will focus on the academic discussion revolving around historical and graphic novels, which will later be crucial for the analysis of the novels. Chapter 2 will elaborate on the theoretical background of historiography and its connection to literature. The focus here lies on the concept of historiographic metafiction by considering the works of Hayden White, Michel De Certeau and Linda Hutcheon. Hutcheon's theory (1988) is the most crucial to this thesis. It addresses many issues regarding narrative structure and elaborates on the techniques historiographic metafiction makes use of to question the traditional understanding of historical writing. Chapter 3 will examine the representation of history in Diop's novel *Murambi* (2000) by first focusing on the context of the novel's creation before proceeding to the techniques employed by the author. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of Cornelius, the protagonist, and his relation to historiography. Chapter 4 will take a

similar approach with Tadjo's novel by first contextualising the novel. The discussion will then continue with how *L'ombre d'Imana* (2000) constitutes an example of a historiographic metafiction. Chapter 5 comprises an analysis of the third novel used in this study, *Déogratias* (2000). The chapter will first focus on the methods Stassen uses to question traditional historiography. The chapter will end with an analysis of the iconography incorporated in the novel and how they problematize conventional notions of historical accounts. Chapter 6 continues with a comparative analysis of the previously analysed novels. It will assess, in general terms, the representation of history in the novels and conclude on the functions of the techniques used in the novels. Finally, chapter 7 will present a summary of the analysis conducted in this thesis.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

In order to be able to understand certain aspects of the novels chosen for this thesis, namely *Murambi: Le livre des ossements* ('*Murambi: The Book of Bones*') (2000), *L'ombre d'Imana* ('*The Shadow of Imana'*) (2000) and *Déogratia*s (2000), one needs to understand the purpose for which the novels were created. Novels on such a severe topic as genocide exceed their aesthetic boundaries as fiction to allow room for an accurate representation of the event. For the upcoming literature review, attention is given to several texts that fit into this thesis research scope of literature as a means to re-write the historical past. The following section will be concerned with pinning down specific characteristics of such novels, as well as specific modes of writing about genocide and the interlink between graphic novels and animal imagery as a key element to represent the inhumanity of the Rwandan genocide.

Before further explaining the concept of collective memory in Chapter 3, a brief consideration of Brehm & Fox (2017) examination of the role of (collective) memory in the case of the Rwandan genocide is of particular interest. Their research is based on prominent figures in the field of memory studies, such as Maurice Halbwachs (1992), which will be further analysed in the methodology. The authors discuss the importance of individuals as carriers of collective memory and discuss why attention should be given to the dialectical relationship between history, commemoration, and belief. In so doing, they take the case of Rwanda and explain how collective amnesia has prevented them from gaining any sense of closure. They argue that '[…] collective amnesia is a form of collective memory that provides

a collective mechanism'.[1] In choosing to forget about the past by letting life in Rwanda resume as if the 100 days of massacre never occurred, the collective decides the coping mechanism of amnesia. The approach used by Brehm & Fox (2017) to consider collective amnesia as a form of collective memory indicates that the aftermath of the genocide is still very much present besides the governments' intent to let life resume. This reading of collective memory in the case of the Rwandan genocide will act as a guiding step into looking at literature as a medium to remember and write about the past.

To write about the past while using fiction as a medium is certainly not a simple task, but it makes room for certain aspects of the lived experience that traditional historical texts cannot. In his seminal work *Narrating Itsembabwoko* (2016)**,** the Canadian based scholar and professor Josias Semujanga extensively examines novels that focus on the Rwandan Genocide. He starts off his analysis by exploring the narratives of genocide and emotion and their impact on the reader. He argues that language alone cannot correctly describe the unspeakable nature of the Rwandan genocide. Therefore, the writer must use '[…] aesthetics and rhetorical tools as an antidote to a realistic illusion of an event like genocide, by using the artifice of narration or rhetoric' the writer can more thoroughly communicate the emotions and horrors of the genocide to the reader.[2] This thesis will use Semujanga's reading and analysis of Diop and Tadjo's novels, which also constitute two of the three novels chosen for the study of this thesis. Semujanga highlights the different narrative styles and plot structures that the authors use to narrate the Rwandan genocide, as well as the differences in their effectiveness to convey emotion to the reader. While this thesis' primary focus is to highlight how the Rwandan genocide as a historical event is narrated in the novels, Semujanga's book shows that through

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[1] Hollie N. Brehm, Nicole Fox, "Narrating Genocide: Time, Memory, and Blame," *Social Forum* Vol. 32, no. 1 (2017): 5.

[2] Josias Semujanga, *Narrating Itsembabwoko: When Literature becomes Testimony of Genocide* (Switzerland: Peter Lang publishing, 2016) Kindle edition, 15.

their work writers make use of language to represent the genocide so that the reader is invited to critically think about narratives on genocide.

Genocide is a severe topic to write about, let alone to render fictional. In this regard, the article by scholar Michelle Balaev on *Trends in Literary Trauma Theory (2008)* is conducive to understand how trauma is represented in literature. Balaev discusses vital approaches used by authors to portray trauma in their novels and how they function. He argues that the traumatised protagonist has the purpose of expressing his unique personal experience as much as the collective traumatic experience. In other words, the protagonist's trauma connects to more significant social and historical trauma experienced by his group. He is portrayed as an "every person" figure as the trauma novel intends to provide an overall picture of the traumatic event. The tension between the individual, and the collective is rendered obsolete and in '[…] this way, trauma is both a personal and cultural experience'.[3] Balaev highlights that the point where the personal and the cultural connect is the physical place of suffering, and the author derives the meaning of the event through the remembrance of that loss. It is how we remember past events that create the meaning and ideologies of the historical past.

In their article *Illustrating Genocidaires, Orphans and Child Soldiers in Central Africa (2012)*, Bumatay & Warman further analyse the various ways to present the Rwandan genocide in graphic novels. In hand of *Déogratias* (2000), the exact graphic novel included in this analysis, they explain the implication of using images and minimal paratextual material to portray the main character. They found out that this lack of text is a deliberate choice by the author, Jean-Philippe Stassen, to create self-identification between the reader and the main character. Thus, the reader is invited to reflect on what he would have done in the case of Déogratias while simultaneously also working through the traumatic event with Déogratias,

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[3] Michelle Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory," *Mosaic* Vol.41, no. 2 (2008): 18.

who constantly has a series of flashbacks that disrupt his present moment. The authors show that images are used to render the traumatic event more palpable to the reader. They allow the reader to move from the present to the past, demonstrating thus the blurred line between the historical past and the present. This approach of portraying history in graphic images allows the reader to experience the past and bear witness to it simultaneously.

For a passement of novels as an appropriate medium to write about the Rwandan genocide, two texts that analyse novels on genocide will be of usage. Firstly, the Dutch scholar Olivier Nyirubugara critical book *Novels of Genocide: Remembering and Forgetting the Ethnic Other in Rwanda (*2017*)*, where he analyses different novels written on the Rwandan Genocide. Nyirubugara highlights in his findings that there are three types of novels on the Rwandan Genocide. Each type advocates a certain ideology about the genocide. Some novels share the idea of war that made Hutu victims or war to prevent a genocide against the Hutu[4]. Lastly, there is also the type of novels that support the idea of war that victimised the Hutu whilst a genocide against Tutsi was simultaneously taking place. Nyirubgara notes that novels issued from the Fest 'Africa project have a similar narrative style as Tutsi-authored novels, highlighting thus a specific narrative or ideology behind these novels. Hence, the author points out that the text produced by the Fest 'Africa authors are, if not all, informed by the dominant historical discourse on the Rwandan Genocide. In other words, these novels are more likely to offer a narrative that is in line with the official narrative, hence the collective memory of the genocide. In narrating the story in this manner, the authors portray the genocide per traditional historiographic approach. Nyirubugara's text supports the argument that this thesis is trying to make, namely that these novels are informed as much by textual references of the past as traditional historical texts, and therefore exceed their fictional character. This argument will be

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[4] Olivier Nyirubgara, Novels of Genocide: Remembering and Forgetting the Ethnic Other in Rwanda, (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2017): 5.

given more attention in Chapter 3, when discussing the similarities and differences of historical novels and traditional historical texts.

Continuing the discussion on graphic novels, in their recent work *Culture of War in Graphic Novels* (2018*)*, Prorokova and Tal examine the graphic novel as a medium to engage with war and collective trauma from the perspective of various less acknowledge conflicts. The authors look at a collection of graphic novels about less familiar conflicts, such as the Rwandan genocide (1994). In Chapter 10, Prorokova introduces the concept of the haunting power that every war possesses and how it is imposed on survivors. According to Prorokova, the memory of war will always live in the memory of the survivors and their children, thus haunting them infinitely. The exposure of war, which is a stressful event, affects both the mental and the physical of the one experiencing the war 'exposure to stressful conditions inevitably changes one psychologically, as war continues to live in one's memory'.[5] Prorokova suggests that through their surrealist character, graphic novels (along with other cultural artefacts) allow for a connection between the past and the present by representing memories of war and history. This argument is in line with this thesis aims, as it explains why cultural artefacts such as (graphic) novels are an accurate medium to represent a severe event such as war or genocide. The intersection of a traumatic historical narrative within a fictional work makes (graphic) novels 'a symbolic memorial that preserves the history and trauma of the Rwandan genocide'.[6] Surrealism becomes ideal for representing war stories, because war itself is a surreal event.

To date, analysis of animal depiction in graphic novels has primarily focused on Art Spiegelman's ground-breaking novel *Maus* (1991). In her article Deborah Mayersen (2018) examines the role of non-anthropomorphised animals in graphic novels. Mayersen argues that authors who decide to move beyond the scope of humanism and anthropocentrism choose to

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[5] Tatiana Prorokova, "The Haunting Power of War: Remembering the Rwandan Genocide in 99 Days" in *Culture of War*, ed. Tatiana Prorokova, and Nimrod Tal (London: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 190.
[6] Ibid., 190.

do so because of 'an ethical refusal of binary thinking … that embrace the 'other', or an animal, as symbolic of the human condition, can be interpreted as a collective, instinctive response to the abhorrence of genocide.[7] The concept of humanity is lost during the genocide, and perhaps therefore, only an animalistic depiction of the happening can accurately represent such an event. Mayersen convincingly argues that in novels such as Deogratias, the animal is symbolic of the Human Condition. As such, the animal imagery can inform the reader about the character's condition, in Deogratias case, his inability to function in the human world. Nonetheless, Munslow Ong's article *"I am only a dog!": The Rwandan genocide, dehumanization, and the graphic novel* (2016) show that animal imagery can also be used to justify inhuman actions during the genocide. In so doing, Munslow Ong asserts that trauma provides a possibility to consider cross-species ethical engagement. In other words, animal imagery in graphic novels is an attempt to reconcile with society and to inspire a transformation of human relationship. All in all, both scholars support graphic novels as an appropriate way to represent the unspeakable and animal imagery in this context allows to render the inhuman acts of violence real.

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[7] Deborah Mayersen, "Cockroaches, Cows and 'Canines of Hebrew Faith': Exploring Animal Imagery in Graphic Novels about Genocide," *Genocide Studies*, Vol. 12 (2018): 167.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

3.1 Theories on Historiography

The following section is devoted to the representation of the past in fictional works. It will look at both traditional historical fiction and postmodern metafiction as a new historical understanding in literature. The concept of postmodern historical fiction by Linda Hutcheon is the central concept that this thesis will borrow from to analyse the novels included in this study. Nonetheless, before elaborating on the concept of postmodern historiography, it is necessary to understand the realm of traditional historical fiction. Therefore, this section will also look at the concepts of two prominent figures in the field, Hayden White and Michel De Certeau.

3.1.1. Hayden White's 'Metahistory'

Conducting research on historical fiction without considering the earlier works of Hayden White is impossible. The work of American historian Hayden White on historical writing, most noticeably his seminal work *Metahistory* (1973) and *Tropics of Discourse* (1978), considerably investigates the complex relationship between history and literary forms such as fiction. Grounded in the philosophy of Marx and Nietzsche, White similarly considers in *Metahistory* (1973) the same literary devices employed by writers of fiction mark historical texts, which include emplotement, explanation by argument, and ideological implication. In so doing, White questions the scientific nature of history and provides a new perspective on historical knowledge. He states that historical knowledge is ''[…] a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes

on the interest of explaining what they were by representing them'. [8] In other words, similar to fiction, the writing of history relies on a narrative structure to derive meaning; like authors, historians begin their writing process by creating a chronological order of the historical events. Through the narrative structure, they create a coherent story that relies on a plot that expresses the ideology and meaning of the text.

Additionally, White opens up a new dimension of the issue by arguing that language is not obsolete and neutral but instead is indicative of the argument and ideology of the text. In *Metahistory* (1973), White breaks up with the principle of realism in history. Until then historical texts were considered to derive authority over other modes of representing history because they were considered to have the most 'realistic' world view.

While *Metahistory* (1973) provides an in-depth analysis of the larger context of historiographic writing, in *Tropics of Discourse* (1978), White examines how narrative forms structure our human experience. The most critical aspect of White's argument in *Discourse* (1978) is the argument that while there is a distinction between fact and fiction, the line that separates the two is blurred, suggesting that historians cannot write about a factual event without implementing fictional elements.

What made White's theory so revolutionary was his interpretation of history, or historiography, as a narrative form. White regards historiography as a part of literature, as Jörn Rüsen formulates:

These dimensions [of giving the past the meaning of history] are formed by literary patterns, modes of argumentation, and political implications. They are synthesized by

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[8] Hayden White, Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteen-Century Europe (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1973), accessed on June 30, 2021, https://www-fulcrum-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/concern/monographs/pr76f371k.

founding them on rhetorical tropes. They give the events of the past a meaning for the present (and its future perspective). So rhetorical tropes decide about how the past can be understood as history. [9]

White considers the writing of history as an essential factor that is close to narrative theory in literary studies and linguistics. Historical texts are a form of discourse that renders historical writing as equally crucial as history itself. The strength point of his argument is that we cannot understand history without understanding the practice of presenting historical knowledge in the form of a narrated story.

3.1.2 Michel De Certeau's 'The Writing of History'

The work of French Jesuit scholar Michel de Certeau follows the ideology that history should try to represent as much as possible the réel, a Lacanian term used by the scholar '[…] to signify the sensed reality that cannot be rendered in words and is always inescapably perceived through the prisms of cultural codes'. [10] The sensed reality is what he describes in *The Writing of History* (1988) as the problem of the 'other'. The 'other' is the concrete past that cannot be recovered and which the historian tries to make accessible in the present through his writing. In so doing, the historian is '[…] in the difficult position of breaking the gap between the past and the present with writing'. [11] In this sense, De Certeau's theory is similar to that of White because both consider the writing of history to share affinities with the writing of fiction. Thus, the writing of history becomes impossible, and historiography attempts to write reality as accurately as possible. As explains Tom Conley, 'both the historian and fiction writer must

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[9] Jörn Rüsen, "A Turning Point in Theory of History: The Place of Hayden White in the History of Metahistory," *History and Theory* 59, no. 1 (2020): 95.

[10] John B. Roney, "The Writing of History by Michel de Certeau and Tom Conley,", *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, Vol.3, no.2 (1991): 453.

[11] Ibid., 267.

fabricate a story in order to reconstruct a discourse conforming to present scientific structures, thus creating a new and completed story'. [12]According to De Certeau, what the historian produces is fiction about the past, which functions as an explanation for the present. In *The Writing of History* (1988), his postmodernism work De Certeau further explains that the production of historians should not be taken at face value but instead should be regarded as fiction describing actual events. In so doing, De Certeau redefines the practice of historiography and the general conception of history and moves away from a clear separation in history of the past and the present. The argument that the practice of historical writing and fiction are both used to report and represent history, will be used to argue that the novels included in this study achieve their metaphysical character by problematizing conventional notions of historical writing.

3.1. 3 Hutcheon's Theory on Postmodernism and Historiographic Metafiction

There is a clear distinction between the traditional historical novel and the postmodern. Traditional historical novels focus on representing past events as accurately as possible, whereas postmodern historical novels focuses on the methods used to write about the past. Historiographic metafiction aims to situate itself within historical discourse without rejecting its function as fiction. In her cbook *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory and Fiction* (1988), the Canadian critical theorist, Linda Hutcheon, classifies historiographic novels as postmodernist fiction. Their crucial element is to incorporate the (inter-)texts of history for a critical reworking of the textual past. The reference to a 'textual' past is crucial because Hutcheon states that all we know of the past is what is written in texts. 'After all, we can only "know" (as opposed to "experience") the world through our narratives (past and present) of

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[12] Roney, "The Writing of History by Michel de Certeau and Tom Conley," 277.

it'.[13] In this regard, the nature of history as being anything other than textual evidence is questioned and rethought as a a human construct. In other words, Hutcheon analyzes postmodern novels in their representation of history. To show this Hutcheon Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* (1973) as an example:

> What a novel like Rudy Wiebe's The Temptations of Big Bear suggests, by its very form as well as its content, is that what language refers to – any language – is a textualized and contextualized referent: the Big Bear we come to know is not really the Big Bear of actuality (for how can we know that today?) but the Big Bear of history texts, newspaper accounts, letters, official and unofficial reports, but also of imagination and legend.[14]

In historiographic metafiction reference is made to textual products of the past instead of the observable and physical reality. Hutcheon's postmodern perception of history is that everything is text and, therefore, a human product. The practice of history becomes thus a form of narrative based on documents of the past instead of a fixed representation of the past. In so doing, the nature of the archive becomes 'the textualized remains of history' further elaborates Hutcheon (1988). Therein lies the connectivity of history with fiction, 'the past really did exist, but we can only "know" that past today through its texts'[15]. Both history and historical fiction are looked at as forms of discourse used to form meaning of past events into present historical facts. The reworking of historical knowledge suggests that the meaning of the past is not in the event but in the systems used to make the most past events into present historical facts.

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[13] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 7.
[14] Ibid., 144.
[15] Ibid., 9.

Thus, historiographic metafictions are novels that question and make use of the parallels between writing fiction and historiography to demonstrate that both do not merely represent reality but instead are used to (re)shape past events for ideological purposes. Without diminishing the value of historical sources, Hutcheon explains that historiographic metafiction constitutes an opportunity to redefine our meaning of value and to somewhat detach it from conventional forms of both history and fiction by acknowledging their (inter-)textuality. Similarly, in *Metahistory* (1973), White questions the supposed scientific nature of history and provides a new perspective to look at historical knowledge as '[…] a verbal structure in form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes on the interest of explaining what they were by representing them.'[16] According to White, the process of history-writing is ruled by similar semiotics used in various literary forms of writing. Historians like authors begin their work process by creating a chronological order of the historical event, which is then organized into a coherent story with a plot that can express an ideology. Hutcheon further elaborates on the definition of historiographic novels by explaining that they are '[…] those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages'.[17] In other words, these novels self-consciously incorporate both fictive elements and historical facts at the same time. By refusing the notion that only history has a claim to truth, historiography and fiction become two modes of writing that derive their value from verisimilitude. '[…] the historian could speak only of what has happened, of the particulars of the past; the poet, on the other hand, spoke of what could or might happen and so could deal more with universals'.[18] The problematizing of traditional historiography is achieved through what Hutcheon labels as metafiction. Or, to put it differently, historiographic metafiction refers to novels, which self-

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[16] White, *Metahistory*, intro. 2.

[17] Hutcheon, *A Poetics*, 5.

[18] Ibid., 106.

consciously abuse the conventional process of historical writing through its metafictional character. Similar to White, Hutcheon claims that history and literature share a few similarities.

> Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity.[19]

By stating that history and literature are texts, she blurs the boundary that separates both. The blurring of history and fiction is done including real historical characters in the plot of the story. The implementation of a historical character questions the accuracy of historical evidence, as elaborates Hutcheon:

> In novels like *Foe* (1986), *Burning Water* (1964), or *Famous Last Words* (1981), certain known historical details are deliberately falsified in order to foreground the possible mnemonic failures of recorded history and the constant potential for both deliberate and inadvertent error.[20]

Historiographic metafiction is used to question the historical knowledge of the past. It allows the monopole of knowledge production that the West holds to disperse and thus allows the peripheries to gain value. Historiographic metafiction constitutes an opportunity to redefine our meaning of historical facts and to detach value from conventional forms of historiography.

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[19] Hutcheon, *A Poetics*, 93.
[20] Ibid., 114.

However, this does not mean that history ceases to claim truth about the past, but the emphasis is that the textual nature of historical texts is in reference points oft artistic or historical documents of the past.

Additionally, in historiographic metafictional novels, the past is revisited through an ironic dialogue. Parody constitutes mechanism of questioning conventional notions of traditional historiography. Hutcheon defines *parody* as '[…] repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity'.[21] In other words, writers of historiographic metafiction use techniques or subject matters of conventional historical writing and abuse them to create a parody of them. Lastly, as historiographic metafiction disposes of a self-reflexive character, the writer of such novels must be self-conscious too of his positionality in writing history and fiction. In traditional historical writing, the historian's authority is unquestioned as his accounts are considered to portray reality accurately. In historiographic metafiction, however, the writer is conscious of his text being a human construct and thus draws attention to his text as such. Hutcheon argues that this characteristic is vital as it asks the reader to approach any text, whether historical or fictional, critically, which can be done through opening the narrative to multivocality or discontinuity in the story. In so doing, the reader encounters the problem of subjectivity '[…] the frequent challenge to traditional notions of perspective'.[22] The subject (historian, narrator, or character) is no longer thought of as a coherent being, and the truth about the past can never be entirely known to the reader. In other words, in traditional historical writing, the historian is assumed to be reliable in his representation of the past. In contrast, in historiographic metafiction, the narrator is unreliable in his fragmented representation of the past.

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[21] Hutcheon, *A Poetics*, 26.
[22] Ibid., 11.

To conclude, Hutcheon's definition is the most relevant to the aims of this study, given the emphasis it places on history and fiction as modes of writing that create meaning of past events. The Rwandan Writer Expedition claims in its mission statement that the author's duty is to write as of duty to remember. Therefore the texts produced by Diop and Tadjo claim the need to represent what happened in Rwanda as accurately as possible despite using fiction as a mode of writing. The novels thus derive their value from their verisimilitude aspect and their use of reference. Furthermore, Hutcheon's theory of historiographic metafiction is relevant to this research because it shows how historical novels trace the causes and effects of past events. In other words, postmodern fiction closes the gap between the past and the present for the reader while re-writing the past in a new context.

3.3 Research Methods

This thesis seeks to combine the interdisciplinary field of history and literature by analyzing a historical event through a literary representation. The first experimentation of this was done during my internship at the Black Archives based in Amsterdam. Founded in 2016, the Black Archives, an independent organization, seeks to amplify the history and culture of African and Dutch-Caribbean communities. During my internship, I had the opportunity to explore their archives, and it was within this framework, that I noticed a literary gap in their collection. Most of the works available at the Black Archives were mainly traditional historical texts.

While the topic of Genocide is rather severe and limits aesthetic choices, this thesis aspires to look at fictional stories as a new poetics of learning and writing about the past. In order to be able to better analyse fiction as a medium to document the past, three novels on the Rwandan Genocide will be used for this study. Diop's *Murambi* (2001) and Tadjo's *L'ombre d'Imana* (2000), were two of nine books produced as result of the 1998 literary initiative

Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire ('Writing as a Duty to Memory')[23]. The project, also known as the Fest'Africa project, organised by a French-based festival of African literature and culture, invited 10 authors to Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda. The group composed of ten African writers from eight different countries were encouraged to reflect on the Rwandan Genocide and to produce written texts based on their experience there. Both Diop and Tadjo's novels read as fiction, which present an imagined version of the events of the 1994 genocide. *Murambi* (2000), *The Shadow of Imana* (2000) and *Déogratias* (2000) were chosen for this research because of their different narrating style despite both being produced by authors who had visited the same places and done the same field work in Rwanda. Without drawing any conclusions yet, each of the novels represent characteristics of both historical fiction and historiography metafiction, while also representing an individual act of commemoration. In his graphic novel *Déogratias* (2000) however, Belgian-born artist Jean-Phillipe Stassen refuses to adhere to a common depiction of the events that accrued in 1994. Although, the medium of graphic novels is scarcely used to portray the experience of genocide, the format leads to discussion of mainstream notions of historical representation. As has been established by the analysis of the concept of historical writing, traditional historical texts are privileged over fiction, let alone images. By embracing the format of fiction and graphic novels as a medium for historical writing, this thesis challenges notions of authenticity and historical

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[23] The published texts are Boubacar Doris Diop (Senegal), Murambi: le livre des ossements (2001) [Murambi, the Bok of Bones (2006)]; Monique Ilboudou (Burkina Faso), Murekatete (2000); Tierno Monénembo (Guinea), L'A'iné des orphelins (2000) [The Oldest Orphan (2004)]; Koulsy Lamko (Chad), La Phalène des collins [The Moth of the Hills (2002)]; Vénuste Kayimahe (Rwanda), France-Rwanda: les collisses du genocide, Témoignage d'un rescapé [France-Rwanda: Behind the Scenes of Genocide. A Survivor's Testimony (2001)]; Jean-Marie V. Rurangwa (Rwanda), Rwanda: le genocide des Tutsi expliqué à un étranger [Rwanda: the Tutsi Genocide Explained to a Strager (2000)]; Véronique Tadjo (Côte d'Ivoire), L'Ombre d'Imana: voyages jusqu'au bout du Rwanda (2000) [The Shadow of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda (2002)]; Abdourahman A. Waberi (Djoubouti), Moisson de crânes [Skull Harvest] (2000); and Nocky Djedanoum (Chad), Nyamirambo! (2000). The text of Kenyan writer Meja Mwangi has not been published.

representations. The different novels were therefore chosen with the aim to establish several ways in which history can be narrated in novels.

The choice of sample for this study is twofold. First, the nine novels published as a result of the Fest'Africa project mark the birth of African literature about the Rwandan genocide. Before this initiative a small number of testimony novels had appeared, nonetheless literary depictions of the Rwandan genocide remain (to my knowledge) a theme that is less explored. Secondly, through choosing a small range of novels, with each having different modes of narration, the patterns identified can be analysed in greater detail without establishing a fixed mode of representation that can be used as representative of the genre.

As has been specified in the theoretical framework Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction and Halbwachs' concept of collective memory will be used together as a methodological tool necessary for this work. To achieve this, this thesis will make use of narrative inquiry, a term first used by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) ,which denotes a methodology used to describe the personal stories. Through the narrative approach real-life experiences are described through stories and by analyzing these texts meaning is derived from them. By using storytelling to communicate meaning to a wider audience, the narrative inquiry approach amplifies the voices of people that normally remain unheard. This criterion is relevant to the works analyzed in this thesis because although they are fictional and imagined, they concern themselves with what De Certeau (1992) defines as the real. Traditional historical sources are concerned with the truth, meaning everything that can be truthfully backed up with factual evidence. In contrast, the criteria of the real in historical fiction defines all that could have been possible. Additional to the mode of narrative inquiry, this thesis will make use of a close reading of the texts in question. As Graham (2000) has brought forward, no text is independent in its meaning. As a result, to find the meaning of a text, one must trace its

intertextuality. In other words, through the narratives of the characters, the authors have tried to show the multiplicity of the happenings that occurred in Rwanda in 1994.

To conclude on this chapter, the concept of historiography and collective memory will be combined to serve as a theoretical framework for this thesis. The question of why these two concepts combined constitute an accurate approach can be explained by the reason that we must deal with a historical past that has been narrated by voices that do not reflect the individuals whose story is being narrated. The central concern of this chapter was to explore the theories of White, De Certeau and Hutcheon on historiography on the one hand and Halbwachs theory on collective memory on the other hand, to create a conceptual framework adaptable for the study of this thesis. Concluding on the theory of historiography, each scholar emphasized the fact that we know the past only through text, as such if we consider historical writing as a form of discourse the lines that separate it from the writing of fiction become blurred. Fiction, which already tends to mirror our reality, can thus be a way of writing about the historical past. This research would have been incomplete if it did not consider primary function of narrating the past, which is memory. In the context of the Rwandan genocide, that historical past exceeds individual memory and becomes a collective remembrance fueled by the stories and experiences of individuals of the group. (Re)presenting the past through fiction thus also allows to commemorate the past. To generate an in-depth assessment of this medium of writing only a small sample was chosen for this research, two novels and one graphic novel. In so doing, different patterns of portraying the past through fiction can be analysed without generating a fixed representation mode, which speaks on the scope of research that can be continued beyond this thesis. Finally, the use of narrative inquiry and close reading as methodological approaches allow for an inquiry of the rhetorical features used to present the historical past.

Chapter 3: Murambi: The Rwandan Genocide Through Multiple Perspectives

In his novel *Murambi* (2001), Diop overtly incorporates different literary forms and styles, blends fiction with reality and employs an unconventional plot structure to create a historiographic metafictional novel about the Rwandan genocide. The present chapter will first look into the novel's context and creation before elaborating on the metafictional techniques used in the novel to question traditional historiography. Afterwards, this chapter will continue with an analysis of the role of the main character, Cornelius, and his relation to historiography.

3.1 About the Novel: Context and Creation

In order to understand certain aspects of the novel, the context in which the book was created needs to be considered. Paul Ricoeur's 's model of mimesis (1988) emphasises that (fictional) literature draws from the extra-literary context that surrounds it. As such, we should acknowledge the circumstances that shaped the creation of the novel.

Boubacar Boris Diop is a Senegalese journalist, screenwriter, and novelist. He has written articles and essays, scripts, short stories, plays and screen plays. He is the author of *Les Traces de la meute* (1990), *Négrophobie* (2005), *Kaveena* (2006) and *L'Afrique au-déla du mirror* (2006), amongst others. His novel *Murambi, Le Livre d'Ossements* [*Murambi, The Book of Bones*] was published in 2000 by Stock and translated into English by Fiona McLaughlin in 2006. As has been mentioned earlier, the novel is issued from the Fest'Africa project Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire [Rwanda: Writing as a Duty to Memory] which was organised in 1998, four years after the genocide. Diop, and the authors that participated in the project, stayed in Rwanda for two months '[…] to listen to the victims of the massacres of 1994 and to try,

through [their] books, to make [the victims'] suffering known to the world.'[24] In *Murambi*, Diop gives more importance to the information he gathered from his interlocutors and artistically recreated the aftermath of the genocide by placing the witness/survivor statement in Rwanda's historical context. Diop's novel tries to mitigate the tension created by the question of factual precision and the difficulty in presenting the genocide artistically:

> I must add that in spite of this concern for factual precision, Murambi, The Book of Bones remains a novel to the extent that it tells the tumult of a tragic history and through diverse, individual trajectories, one author's subjectivity. […] My commitment to accurately representing the experiences of my interlocutors did not waiver, but I relinquished the scientist's neutrality. It was no longer a question of coldly collecting the facts but listening to the stories of destroyed men and women and of giving them a voice.[25]

Therefore, one can therefore state that the author assumes the role of the storyteller rather than that of the traditional historian. Diop's commitment to lift up the voices of his interlocutors is evident through the various narratives that make up his novel. *Murambi* narrates the stories of the people involved in the genocide – victims, perpetrators, witnesses, and bystanders and the chapters are named after these people.

Murambi is composed of a forward written by Eileen Julien[26], an introduction by the novel's translator Fiona Mc Laughlin and then proceeds with the various narratives of the

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[24] Bouris Boubacar, Murambi: The Book of Bones (USA: Indina University Press, 2006), 185.

[25] Diop, *Murambi*, 191.

[26] Eileen Julien is an African American scholar and professor of comparative literature at Indiana University. Her research primarily focuses on postcolonial theory with a focus on the connections between Africa, Europe, and the Americas. She is the author of *African Novels and the Question of Orality* (1992), *The Extroverted African Novel* (2006) and *Arguments and Further Conjectures on World Literature* (2006).

characters, which are all organised in four parts. Part one titled *Fear and Anger,* includes the reports of Michel Sermundo, Faustina Gasana and Jessica. The Return of Cornelius constitutes part two of the novel and primary focuses on Cornelius experience in Rwanda. Part three is titled *Genocide* and includes the narratives of Alyos Mdasingwa, Marina Kkusi, Jessica, Rosa Karemara, Doctor Joseph Karekezi and Colonel Étienne Perrin. Part four focuses on the massacre that happened at the Technical School in Murambi and the aftermath of the genocide. Lastly, the novel concludes with an afterword by Diop, I which he details his experience in Rwanda and why it was vital for him to write the book.

Diop's novel portrays the genocide from every perspective. Both Tutsi and Hutu individuals were given a voice, without representing them as different ethnic groups but as human beings who have their aspirations, fears, and commitments. Take, for example the case of Doctor Joseph Karekezi, Cornelius's father. Diop does not portray him as a hate-driven Hutu, who commits the massacre in the Polytechnic school out of mere hatred for Tutsi individuals. Instead, Diop humanises the character and shows that he participated in the genocide as much for himself and for the others. In so doing, Diop demonstrates how executioners saw the genocide as a good action for a good cause and that its inherently evil nature can be concealed under state absolutism.

> Of course I didn't like the scene. I'm neither a monster nor an idiot. But I would be lying if I were to say that it affected me very much. If you're a determined person, it's a question of knowing what you want. We are at war, period. The sadistic way that things happen is just a detail. The end justify the means. Nothing else counts.[27]

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[27] Diop, *Murambi*, 102.

The above passage demonstrates the totalitarian evil inherit in the genocide. For the executioners it was not necessarily a question of choosing between the good thing and the wrong thing to do but between choosing their own lives or the lives of Tutsis. *Murambi* can be read from different angles. It covers a wide range of issues, however, for the purpose of this study I have chosen to read and analyse the novel in terms of its depiction of the Rwandan genocide.

Murambi is mainly about Cornelius, the main character, who returns to Rwanda after many years of exile. Through his return, Cornelius seeks to understand the tragic events that have torn his country apart, all while having to confront his absence during the genocide and the disturbing truth about what happened to his family members while he was in exile. The author creates a dichotomy between witness and survivor, victims and perpetrators, and active and passive accomplices through several archetypal characters. As briefly mentioned earlier, the novel is structured in four parts; the first part addresses the very beginning of the genocide through the eyes of several characters, who narrate the feeling of tension rising in the country. The second part focuses on Cornelius' return to post-genocide Rwanda and the people he encounters. The last segment of the novel, part three and four are devoted to the genocide, and the historical investigation carried out by Cornelius.

3.2 Murambi As an Example of Historiographic Metafiction

In the following section, the novels metafictional nature will be analysed by focusing on the techniques employed by Diop to create a historiographic metafiction. *Murambi* employs various techniques and methods that are in agreement with Hutcheon's theory of historiographic metafiction (1988). The use of self-reflexive intertextuality, a self-conscious author and multiple perspectives allow Diop to question traditional historical writing. Most importantly, experimenting with these various techniques and methods allows the sharp

boundary between historical fact and fiction to be blurred. As such, the author compels the reader to think about the writing process of both history and fiction and to acknowledge that the same mimesis rules both.

The self-reflexive intertextual nature of the novel is demonstrated through other texts, such as the forward and afterword, which blurs the boundary between historical fact and fiction. According to Genette De Gerard (1997), para-texts influence the reader's experience by framing the content of the text and thus facilitating the reader's access to it. For example, in her forward Eileen Julien states:

What does a novel such as this bring to the awful violence of genocide that journalistic accounts and histories cannot? These forms of narrative are held to a well-known standard of truth. They are meant to establish and report facts, to offer an accurate and balanced, if not objective, representation of events.[28]

In contrasting the novel to journalistic accounts and histories, Julien influences the reader to think of the novel as an accurate representation of the violence that ensued in Rwanda. The text at hand ceases to be a fable for the reader and he/she is inclined to approach the text like a traditional historical account. The novel's fictional nature thus, constitute but a means of representation and is not indicative of the novel's truthful nature. The composition of the novel is indicative of its historical nature. In traditional fiction the author does not disrupt the main text to provide the reader with contextual information about the theme or plot. The forward written by Eileen Julien, for example, exists to justify the novel's significance. Julien states:

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[28] Eileen Julien, "Forward: An Urn for the Dead, an Hourglass for the Living", in *Murambi: The Book of Bones* (USA: Indiana University Press, 2006)

[Murambi] distils and gives voice to those who can no longer speak – recovering, as best we can, the full, complex lives concealed in the statistics of genocide and rendering their humanity. […] it is through the work of imagination and language that the novel reconstitutes those unique human beings, now lost to us, and allows them nonetheless to survive and to be heard. […] the novel opens a space of reckoning, calling on us readers, like Cornelius, to reflect and weigh the question of responsibility, to imagine a new future.[29]

It is made evident through Julien's forward that the text's function is to represent the genocide through the perspective of people that experienced the terrible event and in so doing the targeted audience are those unaffected by the genocide. The novel is intended for an audience, who normally would have learned about the genocide through traditional historical accounts. The forward is thus a metafictional strategy to enhance the novel's relation to historiographic metafiction as it foregrounds the text's intertextuality. The reader is made aware from the beginning that the text is based on the author's research and interview with his interlocutors, thus the novel does not constitute a mere product of the authors imagination. In contrast, Mc Laughlin's forward to the English translation shifts the focus Fest'Africa project by defining the African author or intellectual's role in the public sphere of political engagement. According to Mc Laughlin, *Murambi* constitutes what the French author Jean-Paul Sartre desribes as *littérature engagé* [literature of engagement], which denotes the idea of the artist's responsibility to society. By stating this in the forward, Mc Laughlin recognises the literary and political value of *Murambi*.

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[29] Eileen Julien, "Forward: An Urn for the Dead, an Hourglass for the Living", in *Murambi: The Book of Bones*, (USA: Indiana University Press, 2006)

Another text that foregrounds the intertextual nature of *Murambi* is Diop's afterword at the end of the novel. In his afterward, Diop gives detailed information about his journey to Rwanda and why he chooses fiction as a medium to write about the genocide. As a journalist and novelist, Diop is well skilled in both modes of writing. Nonetheless, the Rwandan genocide obliged him to think about how to approach the process of writing, he explains:

> The ambiguity of this unusual "commissioned text" is very quickly apprehended, because although your interlocutor wants to be fictionalized, he doesn't actually want you to transform him into anyone besides himself.[30]

Diop's role, therefore, differentiates himself from the historian-analyst in the construction of the event because he assumes the role of bearing witness to the victims' stories. The nature of self-reflexivity raises the question of appropriating and representing the past, all of which the forward and afterword try to justify. Consequently, they prove White's theory that any narrative – including the historian's – is driven by present concerns and are politically motivated. Therefore, postmodern novels are invariably subjective.

Furthermore, *Murambi* makes use of the mechanism of intertextuality by deploying characters that share similarities with actual historical figures. In part three of the novel, the reader is introduced to the French Colonel Étienne Perrin, whose narrative reminds the reader of Rwanda's colonial past. Colonel Perrin constitutes an important character because through him, the novel also shows '[…] how [the French] dubious ideas remain, informing those justifying financial and political support by France vis-à-vis the Hutu Power regime, which made the genocide possible'.[31] Diop uses this character to express critic towards the French

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[30] Diop, *Murambi*, 185.

[31] Josias Semujanga, *Narrating Itsembabwoko: When Literature becomes Testimony of Genocide* (Switzerland: Peter Lang publishing, 2016) Kindle edition, 106.

government's complicity during the genocide. In contrast to his compatriot at the Ministry of Defence, Colonel Perrin fully accepts his mission without questioning it. When his compatriot shows empathy to 'millions of shattered human lives', Colonel replies that one must have many regards 'to respect such a despicable continent'.[32] In so doing, the author consciously interferes with the narrative to exert criticism and portray a particular ideology. In this case, the narrative that the French aided in the genocide committed by their Hutu protégés.

Murambi employs multiple narrators and points of view to narrate the Rwandan genocide, which differentiates this novel from traditional historical fiction. Take, for example, part one of the novel Fear and Anger. This section includes the narratives of three people during the beginning phase of the genocide, but each narrative has its purpose. For example, the first narrative that of Michel Sermundo exists to create tension in the reader, so that s/he knows how the people must have felt on the evening the president's plane was shot down.

> The atmosphere was heavy inside the bus, and the passengers sat in silence. […] It was only when a group of nervous soldiers stopped our bus from passing in front of Radio Rwanda that I started to suspect that this was a day unlike any other. [33]

In the above passage, Michel Sermundo details how Hutu soldiers stopped the bus he usually takes to get home after work to inspect his identity card. Diop manages to re-create the same tension Tutsi minorities must have felt when they realised that president Juvénal Habyarimana's death had evoked the massacres that were about to consume Rwanda for the following 100 days. In traditional historical writing, the author usually incorporates an omniscient third-person narrative, whereas in Diop's novel, this narrative style is replaced by

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[32] Diop, Murambi, 125.
[33] Diop, Murambi, 5.

multivocality. In so doing, the narrative is constantly disrupted by introducing a new character with a different experience or attitude towards the genocide. This technique is used by Diop to problematize historical fact and fiction. By incorporating multiple perspectives, the reader does not reach a stable and reliable conclusion about what happened during those 100 days of killings. Semujanga further elaborates:

> In writing about several survivors' and executioners' testimonies, Diop qualifies himself as a reliable witness. He did his field experience as the anthropologist or the historian of distant lands. […] despite its character as an anonymous subjective case study [the novel] participates in the construction of collective memory about genocide.[34]

Semujanga considers Diop's novel to be a first-hand account of the genocide since it relies on the information, he has gathered through his interlocutors in his field trip to Rwanda. Additionally, Semujanga criticises the fact that historians have produced historical knowledge about from African countries from 'distant lands'. In this aspect his novel needs to be analysed from a historical and epistemological perspective by examining its function as an act of commemoration by an African voice. The text presents itself as a first-hand account that informs the reader about the genocide, and in so doing '[…] the narrative participates in the process of mourning'.[35]

We can hence conclude that the analysis of the techniques used to create a historiographic metafiction has revealed three crucial methods. First, by including a forward and afterword, the author adds intertextual references to explain the context of the novel to the

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[34] Semujanga, *Narrating Itsembabwoko*, 111.
[35] Ibid., 111.

reader. Secondly, Diop makes use of characters who share similarities with historical figures to add the intertextual nature of the text and to express his critic towards the West's implication in the genocide. Finally, alike the technique of intertextuality, the incorporation of various perspectives blurs the sharp line between fiction and historical fact.

3.3 Cornelius' Role and His Relation to Historiography

In *Murambi*, Diop makes use of Cornelius, an exiled Rwandan history teacher, to portray the genocide and its aftermath. Cornelius returns to Rwanda after spending 25 years in exile in Djibouti to find out what happened to his family during the genocide and his father's role in the massacre at Murambi Technical College. He contacts remaining friends and family members, who try to help him piece together the story of what happened, which he intends to turn into a play. 'In disparate fragments, scenes of the past and the present crossed each other in his mind.'[36] Cornelius is the only character both the reader and the writer can identify themself with because, similar to them, he is an outsider who has to confront his absence during the genocide. As a homodiegetic narrator, Cornelius narration is presented in the third person narrative, creating thus, a distance between the reader and the protagonist and forcing the former to remain an outsider. In so doing, Diop, to a certain extent uses of Cornelius as a representative of the global community, as explains Catherine Kroll '[…] in this crafted 'he', there is a space made for a we'[37]. This identification between the reader and Cornelius forces the former to actively piece together story fragments to arrive at a general understanding of the violence that ensued. Karin Samuel further elaborates on the reader's role and their identification with Cornelius when she states:

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[36] Diop, *Murambi*, 43.

[37] Catherine Kroll, "Rwanda's Speaking Subjects: the inescapable affiliations of Boubacar Boris Diop's Murambi," *Third World Quarterly*, 28:3 (2007): 658.

In a sense, readers are performatively holding the narrative together as they are forced to play an active role in piecing together the fragments presented in and by the text, and in this way reconstruct what occurred in Rwanda. The readers, also absent during the genocide, like Cornelius, are encouraged to struggle to come to terms with that absence through the figure of Cornelius.[38]

Diop creates an expressible narrative that establishes a relationship between the person who tells the story and the person who reads the story. Through the reading, the reader is asked to interpret the past. Cornelius, who assumes the role of the outside witness, establishes the conditions for the reader to gather the information needed to comprehend the (hi)story of Rwanda. Additionally, through the character of Cornelius, the reader realises the consequences of the global community's absence during the genocide. The novel thus ceases to be a fable or a product of the author's imagination and instead assumes an epistemological and educational role. As states Semujanga:

Although it is outside of fiction, the postscript reconnects with the narrative. It acts as the link between the words of fiction and the first-hand account of the author. In doing so, the novel ceases to be a fable, a product of the imagination. It becomes a first-and account narrative, which, contrary to novelistic discourse, attempts to attest to the facts and reflect upon the event.[39]

Comparable to the author, Cornelius returns to Rwanda to make sense of what happened whilst also confronting his own absence during the genocide. Cornelius research parallels with

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[38] Karin Samuel, "Bearing Witness to Trauma: Narrative Structure and Perspective in Murambi, The Book of Bones," *African Identities*, 8:4 (2010): 367.

[39] Semujanga, *Narrating Itsembabwoko*, 110.

that of the author who, like him, is trying to reconstruct the horrors of the genocide. Thus, Cornelius and Diop behave like a traditional historian or researcher who relies objectively on interviews to reconstruct the past and create a general rational picture of the event. Similar to Cornelius's journey of reconstructing, the past is well-marked with a beginning, middle and end. Although the novel introduces multiple characters to depict the complexities of the genocide, the plot is seemingly structured around Cornelius journey. As such, the reader is compiled to follow the plot and connect the fragments of the story as they are presented.

Chapter 4: L'ombre d'Imana: Fragmented Stories of the Rwandan Genocide

L'ombre d'Imana (2000) by the Ivorian author Véronique Tadjo adopts an experimental literary technique to create a historical fiction about the Rwandan genocide. This chapter begins by contextualizing Tadjo's novel. Then it proceeds with an analysis of the methods applied to develop a postmodern novel, such as an un-chronological and fragmented narration, multiple literary forms/styles, and a self-conscious author. This chapter will argue that Tadjo makes use of these devices to create a typical example of historiographic metafiction.

4.1 About the Novel: Context and Creation

The following section provides insight into the novel's context and the author's journey to Rwandan to produce an understanding of the novel's content before proceeding with an analysis of the techniques adopted by the author to narrate the Rwandan genocide.

Véronique Tadjo was born in Paris and raised in Côte d'Ivoire. She is a writer, journalist, painter and academic. She has written poetry, articles, children's books, and novels. She is the author of *Le Royaume aveugle* (2008) [The Blind Kingdom (2008)], *Chapms de bataille d'amour* (1999), *Reine Pokou* (2005) [Queen Pokou (2009] and Loin de mon père (2010) [Far From My Father (2014)], amongst others. Her *novel L'ombre d'Imana: Voyages jusqu'au bout du Rwanda* [The Shadow of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda] was published in 2000 and translated into English by Veronique Wakerly in 2002. Tadjo's novel is issued from the Fest'Africa project in which she and Diop participated in 1998. Her book that reads as a travel journal, documents her expedition to Rwanda in 1998. In *L'ombre d'Imana*, Tadjo presents a fragmented and discontinuous story of the Rwandan genocide through a collection of short stories. The novel comprises of six main short stories, *The First Journey*, *The Wrath of the Dead*, *His Voice*, *Anastase and Anastasie*, *Those Who Were Not There* and

The Second Journey, who share a mutual dependence. *L'ombre d'Imana* begins with the author expressing feelings of uneasiness concerning her presence, as an outsider, in Rwanda to explore the aftermath of the genocide. Like Diop, Tadjo raises questions of authorial right in the literary representation of the genocide as she states, '[…] our imagination will never be able to get anywhere close to the reality'[40]. This concern is reflected in Tadjo's novel, which is discontinuous in space and time. The narrative is portrayed in a chaotic manner and in a series of disconnected events, which speaks to the difficulty in representing such an event as genocide.

   L'ombre d'Imana is a dedication to remember and construct a memory of the genocide. The feeling was that one could not continue without addressing what happened in Rwanda, Tadjo explains:

   To forget Rwanda after the sound and the fury was like being blind in one eye, voiceless, handicapped. It was to walk in darkness, feeling your way with outstretched arms to avoid colliding with the future.[41]

Tadjo points to the significant impact that the genocide will have on future narratives. What happened there, therefore concerns us all.

   Amidst her quest for knowledge, Tadjo gives voice to those whom she met survivors, prisoners, victims, lost children, women, the sick and refugees to make their pain and fear known to the world. Comparable to *Murambi*, *L'ombre d'Imana* incorporates these various perspectives to create an overall picture of the genocide without falling into ethnocentrism. To achieve this, Tadjo borrows the mechanism of a travel narrative and juxtaposes them with

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[40] Véronique Tadjo, *The Shadow of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda* (USA: Waveland Press, Inc., 2015), 15.

[41] Ibid., 3.

journalistic devices, first-hand account, and scriptural strategies. In so doing, Tadjo presents the genocide through a creative mosaic of destinies and her reflections.

4.3 The Experimental Technique in L'ombre d'Imana

In the following section, I will establish the techniques employed by the author to create a metafictional novel. To create a base for the comparative analysis in Chapter 6, I will focus on three techniques employed by the author, namely, unconventional/anti-linear chronology, multiple literary forms and techniques, and a self-conscious narration. It is important to note that, although the author makes use of other metafictional techniques such as intertextuality and multiple perspectives, I have chosen to only focus on these three techniques because they allow for a broader discussion on the novel's approach towards history.

The unconventional chronology of *L'ombre d'Imana* contributes to the novel's status as historiographic metafiction. A traditional historian employs time in a progressive and forward-moving space. A linear pattern is commonly adopted to show how one event led to another event, and in so doing, a causality between the events is created. In *L'ombre d'Imana*, however, Tadjo narrates the story in an unchronological and fragmented manner as time elapses forward and backwards throughout the novel. She presents her text as a travelogue punctuated by flight details, names of places and people she visited. Unusual for fiction, in *L'ombre d'Imana,* the story starts with the author's journey from South Africa to Rwanda and ends with her second return to Rwanda. It is thus unclear for the reader when the story begins and where it ends, as the plot does not follow a coherent structure. Another way the author refuses to adhere to a conventional portrayal of time in the novel is by reversing the binary between past and present/future. Tadjo travelled to Rwanda to write about the aftermath of the genocide.

Upon arriving in Rwanda, the author notices that 'everything seems to be going quite normally'.[42] Nonetheless, the legacy of genocide continues to lurk in the dark as she notes:

> The stars keep their painful secrets to themselves. Nothing can pierce the impenetrable darkness. We have to remember that time of endless night, return to that time of great terror, […].[43]

In *L'ombre d'Imana*, time is symbolically portrayed through the trauma that continues to exist in the present. In this context, the author uses trauma as a representational tool, to problematize the concept of time because 'trauma is an eternal present occupied by an unspeakable experience which no escape is possible'.[44] In *Consolate's Story,* for instance, Tadjo portrays the eternal past through the protagonists' anguish concerning her mother's imprisonment. During her visit to the prison, Consolate reflects on the past, present and future.

> She yearns to find in her mother's eyes reflections of the past, but they are veiled by a shadow, a screen through which nothing can pass. So, Consolate has mourned the future. The future no longer exists for her. Her days are nothing but a long anguished wait, a desire to leave for another place. The world stretches beyond the other side of those hills, far from death, far from this prison, from her captive memory, fixed, frozen in time. [45]

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[42] Tadjo, *Imana*, 9.

[43] Ibid., 9.

[44] Russell West-Pavlov, "Regardez la vie reprendre: Futurity in Véronique Tadjo's L'Ombre d'Imana/The Shadow of Imana," *Tydskrif vir letterkunde*, no.2 (2014), 125.

[45] Tadjo*, Imana*, 29.

For Consolate, the genocide has profoundly disrupted the present, to the point where a future is no longer imaginable or tangible. It has cast a 'shadow' on both victims and perpetrators; thus, the memory of the past challenges the linearity of time. However, Consolate's Story lacks precision and information. The reader never learns why her mother and brother are in prison, how her father died and how she and her sisters managed to survive. I regard this deliberate lack of information as an expression of Tadjo's ambitious attempt to portray a character who must come to terms with and make sense of a past that lacks logic and reason. Tadjo problematizes the traditional concept of time because the genocide is so absurd that life cannot possibly resume normally after it, even if it seems so. The author assumes a critical perspective that allows her to investigate how such a horrific event profoundly disrupts the lives of individuals. Traditional historiography tends to follow a linear structure of events that lead to the genocide because its focus is by definition on the context that led to the genocide rather than the histories of the actual victims.

Furthermore, Tadjo makes use of multiple literary forms/styles to create a historiographic metafictional novel. As mentioned, (see section 4.1) the book is structured around six main short stories, and various of them are written in a different literary form and style. The first short story, *The First Journey*, is written in a travel journal style, as the author reflects on the genocide and the importance of her fieldwork there. The following short stories of this section are introduced by the name of the places adhering thus to the conventional aesthetic of a travel journal. However, in the *Nyamate Church* short story, the author adopts a case history approach by providing additional information about the protagonist of the short story and the number of dead at the site of genocide. The last short story, *The Second Journey*, is narrated similarly. In contrast, in the short stories, *The Wrath of the Dead*, *His Voice*, *Anastase and Anastasie*, and *Those Who Were Not There,* Tadjo uses a more traditional approach. In these narratives the author abandons the first-person voice and instead uses an

omniscient narrator to chronicle the characters' personal stories. By using an epistolary narration, case history and traditional fictional devices, the reader must connect the events narrated in the novel to make sense of the historical reality. Each style has its function, which allows the reader to create different interpretations of the event.

For instance, the epistolary form, which can be found in the first and last main short story of the novel, gives the novel its metaphysical aspect. In these short stories, the novel ceases to be a product of the imagination. The author details the number of dead, describes the massacre scene, reminds us of the site of genocide, gives dates, specifies the type of weapons used, and provides personal information about the victim.

Nyamata Church

Site of genocide.
Plus or minus 35,000 dead.
A woman bound hand and foot.
Mukandori. Aged twenty-five. Exhumed in 1997.
Home: the town of Nyamata.
Married.
Any children?[46]

This type of narration reads like a traditional historical account that focuses on the context in which the genocide took place and the statistics of the event. By incorporating this literary style that resembles a reportage, next to more traditional devices of fiction, Tadjo invites the reader to reflect on the process of (historical) writing but also to face the truth. 'The narrator makes the reader see the genocide, even though the description here loses its poetic and entertaining character'.[47] By using various techniques, Tadjo guides the reader through their reading and

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[46] Tadjo, *Imana*, 11.
[47] Semunjanga, *Narrating Itsenbabwoko*, 120.

the suspending of a literary form for a another, a pause is created in the narrative which allows the reader to reflect. The reader is thus likely to believe the events in this short story since they are described in a realist mode.

In *His Voice*, however, the protagonist's life after the genocide is introduced through the mode of allegory. Isaro, a widow, has to deal with her grief over her husband Romain's death. Unsure about the circumstances leading to her husband's suicide, Isaro bitterly has to face that his death is possibly proof of his guilt. Her narrative exists as an allegory for life after death and raises questions concerning responsibility and how to move forward. However, since this short story lacks description, the reader is likely to think of it as fable or a product of the author's imagination. The story is presented in fragments of text that narrate the protagonist feelings and thoughts; it appears that she never concludes on her thoughts.

> She thought again about the meeting. It was ridiculous. Had she left because of a bee? He must have thought her behavior silly, childish.
>
> Isaro remembered Romain's burial. Very few people attended, only a few family members. She had not told the priest that Romain had committed suicide.[48]

Between the first and the second passages, there is a break in the narrative as Isaro reflects on a date she went that evening before she looks back on her husband's funeral. Through Isaro, Tadjo invents a protagonist, who does not have a clear perspective about the events that affect her immediately. In mixing various literary techniques, the author disorientates the reader, making it difficult for them to assemble the parts to form a coherent and reliable narrative. In this manner, the novel '[…] can be seen as a novel that overtly challenges both the realist novel's representation of the world of consistent subjects who can offer an origin of meaning

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[48] Tadjo, *Imana*, 56.

and action and also its presentation of a reader position from which the text is easily understandable'. [49]

In traditional historiography, the historian appears as an authority figure whose understanding of historical events is not questioned. In the postmodern understanding, however, the author is self-conscious about his writing process. As such s/he treats the evidence of the past as text and thus history is treated as a literary artefact. In her novel, Tadjo incorporates her reflections as an integral part of the narrative by incorporating historical facts and fictive elements, which gives the story its metafictional character. For instance, at the beginning of the novel, the author establishes herself as a witness by depicting post-genocide Rwanda. She describes the scene of Kigali and the people she encounters in detail:

> From a distance, the city seems to have forgotten everything, digested everything, swallowed everything. The streets are full of people. The flow of cars is never-ending. […] everything seems to be going along quite normally. […] In the face of so much tranquility, how can you conceive of the violence that filled these very streets, took these very same meandering paths, invaded this very space. […] The truth is revealed in people's eyes. Words have so little value. You need to get under people's skins. See what's inside.[50]

Conventionally, the author is not expected to incorporate her personal reflections in the story being narrated. Therefore, the interference of the author's thoughts and feelings in the story gives the impression that the story is not entirely fictional but that her writing is also partly factual. Thus, the separation between fact and fiction is removed. In this way, the reader must

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[49] Hutcheon, *Poetics*, 169.
[50] Tadjo, *Imana*, 9-11.

question the legitimacy of her/his own previous reading about the past. Furthermore, it is typical for the self-conscious author to be aware that s/he cannot represent the historical past entirely arcuately . Therefore, to speak about the genocide is to invent a new language. As Tadjo states 'words have so little value'.[51] Accordingly, Tadjo chooses the travel narrative because of its testimonial posture and establishes herself as a witness to the witnesses.

In conclusion, this chapter attempted to show how Tadjo's novel, *L'ombre d'Imana,* is an example of *inverted* historiographic metafiction. In traditional historiography, the author employs a linear sequence of time. The novel at hand rejects the conventional conception of historical writing by inverting the chronological order of the narrative. In so doing, the narrator leads the reader to think about the construction of historical facts, and thus to think of it as an artefact. *L'ombre d'Imana* employs multiple literary forms and styles to undermine the role of the traditional historian who assumes a clear and consistent narrative about the historical event. The author uses different literary forms and styles to blur further the boundary between fact and fiction and, in so doing, problematizes the traditional understanding of the past. In contrast to the traditional historian, Tadjo is self-conscious about her text being a literary artefact rather than factual truth. The reader is thus pushed to think about the methods and practice of historical writing and the function of these techniques. The author's self-conscious attitude yet again to blur the boundary between historical fact and fiction, which constitutes a fundamental aspect of historiographic metafiction. In *L'ombre d'Imana*, fact and fiction are blurred to emphasize that both are literary artefacts, subject to the same process of construction.

Following the analysis of Tadjo's novel *L'ombre d'Imana* as historiographic metafiction, the next chapter will focus on Jean-Philippe Stassen's graphic novel *Déogratias* in terms of its approach towards history writing. The novel's relation to historiographic

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[51] Tadjo, *Imana*, 11.

metafiction will be interrogated by focusing on the techniques employed by the author to create

a metafiction representation of the Rwandan genocide.

Chapter 5: Deogratias

In *Déogratias* (2000), Jean-Philip Stassen makes use of a journalistic graphic novel to depict the Rwandan genocide. The novel's metafictional character is marked by visual iconography, intertextuality, a focalizer point of view and an arbitrary end. In this chapter, an analysis of Stassen's novel will reveal whether the graphic novel constitutes a historiographic metafiction by elaborating on the context of the novel before proceeding into an in-depth investigation on the various techniques used by the author to create a postmodern novel.

5.1 About the novel: Context and Creation

Jean-Phillipe Stassen's novel *Déogratias* was first published in 2000 in France and was translated into English by Alexis Siegel in 2006. It is a multi-layered novel graphic novel that documents the story of the young protagonist, Déogratias, who was tragically affected by the Rwandan genocide. Through a series of flashbacks and present-day revelations the reader learns what happened to him before, during and after the genocide. Déogratias is a young man of Hutu ethnicity. Before the violence of the genocide ensued, he had an infatuation towards a Tusti girl named Apponilaire. When she rejects him, he pursues her sister Bénigne; it is made apparent in the novel that he cares about both deeply. When tension arises in the country that prompts the beginning of the genocide, Déogratais is in the company of Bénigne. He tries to save her by hiding her in his room. Despite his efforts to protect her from the slaughter, he eventually has to participate in the genocide or risk being killed himself. After the genocide, Déogratias becomes a madman as he is unable to process the crimes he committed as a Hutu militia for the Interahamwe. His individual life is set in contrast to the horrors of the genocide.

In contrast to the previously analysed novels, *Muarmbi* (2000) and *L'ombre d'Imana* (2000), *Déogratias* is a western artefact because it was written by an European. The novel is written by a Belgian ex-pat who arrived in Rwanda after the genocide, the novel is, therefore,

different from the previous analysed novels, who have a degree of proximity due to their authors status as Africans. Although, both Diop and Tadjo arrived in Rwanda after the genocide like Stassen, they are able to mitigate their outsider status through their ethnicity. Whereas Stassen as a European is confronted with questions of authenticity and proximity, especially considering Rwanda's colonial past. The outsider perspective of the author and his distance to the experience of the Rwandan genocide distinguishes his novel also from typical graphic novels that deal with similar subject matters. Works like *Maus* (1991) or *Presopolis (2000)* benefit from their authors' personal experience to the events they describe, which gives their text more credibility in its articulation of the historical past. Nonetheless, without oversimplifying the horrific violence that ruled in those 100 days of killing, the novel creates empathy for the perpetrator protagonist without obscuring his culpability. The author created a novel that demonstrates the complexity of the historical event. Stassen thereby creates a complex story that requires the reader to undergo a process of comprehension to draw their a conclusion.

Déogratias embraces a wide range of issues such as regret, post-traumatic stress, dehumanization and addiction, amongst others. It is a novel that concerns itself with the human condition and what a traumatic event such as genocide does to the human psyche. The following chapter, however, will only look at the novel in terms of its portrayal of the historical past.

5.2 Déogratias: Fantasy as An Example of Historiography

Déogratias employs various techniques put forward by Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Modernism* (1988). The novel employs visual imagery for intertextual purposes and a focalisation perspective point of view, all which do not conform with the conventional methods of historiography. In using these various techniques, the reader is drawn to question the

functions of these techniques and why the author has decided to employ them. They also serve to remove the boundary between fact and fiction, which is more complicated in the novel at hand because it incorporates comic images. The visual aspect of the novel thus further emphasises its metafictional character and serves the question of how one might (re-)present the historical past.

Traditional historiography produces its historical knowledge and arguments mainly in the text through its analysis of (written) sources with reference to and in dialogue with other relevant theories. Although the comic narration and visual imagery do not conform to the traditional understanding of historiography, I would argue that the combination of imagery and narration can create a beneficial dialogue about realistically portraying and explaining aspects of the historical past. As explained by Michelle Bumatay and Hannah Warman:

> Given the added layer of image, bande dessinée creators must consider how they will use the visual element of their work to complement, highlight, or enrich the text. In addition, the unique structure of this medium produces a dynamic reading experience conducive to deconstructing complex issues.[52]

Stassen's *Déogratias* lacks traditional narrative strategies and instead allows the story to unfold visually. In so doing, the author creates a novel that will enable the reader to perform the act of reading about the genocide and experiencing it. Hence, I would like to focus on the novel's intertextuality, which is encoded in the text's dialogical structure and visual iconography. The only text in the novel is presented through the form of dialogue. Consequently, the book offers a highly visually but fragmented text. By providing a reading that does not follow a specific

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[52] Michelle Bumatay, Hannah Warman, "Illustrating Genocidaires, Orphans, and Child Soldiers in Central Africa," *Peace Review,* 24:3, (2021): 3.

coherence, the author places the burden of interpretation on the reader. Furthermore, by actively participating in the connection of the dispersed information provided in the novel, the reader becomes an integral part of the novel. Therefore, one can state that the reader partly fulfils the role of the traditional historian, who is charged to create meaning from the information he gathers of the empirical world. *Déogratias* depends, therefore, on both the language and the images to express the experience of the characters.

To facilitate the reading, the author uses different edges for the panel. For example, panels with thick edges indicate present-day events, while panels with thin edges indicate past events. Henceforth, the author uses images to complement the lack of language and visually render what he is unable to depict in words. For example, the images in the first panel depict Déogratias before the genocide, the borders are therefore thin almost invisible. The following images depict Déogratias after the genocide in conversation with the French soldier and the border of the panels are considerably thicker than in the above picture.

Figure 1: Stassen, Déogratias, 7.

There are other instances, in which this stategy is used, not only to guide the reading of the reader but to also to express the 'unspeakable' nature of the genocide. For instance, Stassen uses images to depict the tension between portraying Déogratias as innocent and as guilty.

Visually, he illustrates this by depicting Déogratias as human during daytime and as a dog during the nighttime.

> C'est la nuit que j'ai peur.... Qu'est-ce qui m'arrive? Je n'ai pas peur du jour… mais ma tête qui se répand, elle se répand dans le jour! (It's the night that I'm afraid of… What's happening to me? I'm not afraid of the day … but my head spills, it spills in the day!)[53]

In this excerpt of the novel, Déogratias slowly turns from human to dog, while the animal depiction in the novel will be analysed at a later point in the chapter, this example is indicative of the tension between Déogratias innocence and guilt. Stassen rejects any simplistic portrayal of perpetrators because he wants to demonstrate that anyone can turn into evil given the context.

Furthermore, the combination of visual iconography and the generic language is another technique used by the author to portray the metafictional character of the novel. As established in *Chapter 2*, intertextuality is a mechanism used in historiographic metafiction to demonstrate that no text stands alone and instead derives its meaning from other textual references and sources. In graphic novels, the intertextual nature of the story is portrayed through the images employed to depict the historical realities. For example, various depictions of the catholic church and foreigners in the novel, invoke Rwanda's colonial past.

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[53] Jean-Phillip Stassen, *Déogratias* (Belgium: Aire Libre, 2011), 54.

Figure 2: Stassen, Déogratias, 10.

In these images, we can see a missionary traveling from Europe to Rwanda before the genocide, in the third picture we can see that he is more concerned with learning the language, which is indicative that he is unaware of the rising tension in the country. This depiction can be seen as a representation of the West's ignorance towards issues that do not affect them directly. There are other similar examples in which the author seems to critic the western world.

Figure 3: Stassen, Déogratias, 24.

These visual iconography depicts foreign soldiers stopping Appolinaire and Déogratias to request their identity card to know their ethnicity. In *When Victims Become Killers* (2001), Mahmood Mamdani explains that racialization of the Hutu and Tutsi difference was established under colonialism. At the time the Rwandan genocide began, Rwanda was an independent country. Therefore, one can state that Stassen deliberatly depicts forgeingers requesting for identifation cards to emphasise the context that creates the hostility between the two ethnic

groups. Furthermore, by incorporating these images, the author asks the reader to reflect on that past and how it possibly influenced the genocide. As such, the reader is encouraged to reflect on his own ethical position in relation to the atrocities that happened in Rwanda.

Another scene that evokes the novel's intertextuality is when Appolinaire and Bénigne overhear the R.T.L.M radio emission. The panel shows a radio through which hateful remarks towards the Tutsi minority is expressed by the presenter Katano who is an actual historical figure. The existence of historical figures in the novel problematizes the traditional understanding of historiography because it blends fact and fiction. Thus the reader is likely to believe that despite its graphic character, which contributes to the text's fictional account, the novel is an accurate representation of the historical past.

Figure 4: Stassen, Déogratias, 34.

However, since Stassen's portrayal of Katano is consistent with the actual Katano**,** this constitutes a standard mechanism used in historical fiction and therefore does not support the metafictional nature of the novel. For it to be metafictional, the novel would have to abide by Hutcheon's theory that the inherent character of historiographic metafiction is to 'always work

within conventions in order to subvert them'.[54] Though I cannot explicitly state that Katano said those exact words, it is likely because he was essentially was known for this. Nonetheless, I would argue that for graphic novels to participate in historiography's academic discussion, an accurate representation of the historical past is crucial.

The visual nature of graphic novels suggests focalisation narrative to be the appropriate tool to narrate the story because of its visual-verbal hybrid mode. Déogratias is not the narrator of the story, but through the focalisation methode, the reader learns about the genocide through his subjective perspective. Consequently, the novel does not articulate how one should interpret the events, reflections and memories portrayed in the novel. For instance, Déogratias is the only character in the book who is subject to change.

Figure 5: Stassen, Déogratias, 54.

During the daytime, Dégratias is portrayed as a human, but at night, he turns into a dog. If one is familiar with the Rwandan genocide, one knows that Tustsi minorities were often referred to as *Inzenyi,* which translated means cockroach. Déogratias' transformation into an animal is, for the reader, thus a surprise. It is only towards the ending of the novel that one understands why he turns into a dog. By placing a perpetrator who turns into an animal at the center of the plot, the author asks the reader to negotiate their own (previous) readings and moral judgements. In addition, by only focusing on Dégratias story, the author demonstrates that collective

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[54] Hutcheon, *Poetics*, 5.

knowledge about the genocide can be disrupted by individual experience. The reader is thus made aware that historical accounts are not objective but constitutes a subjective representation of the historical knowledge the historian wants to produce. White explains:

> How a given historical situation is to be configured depends on the historian subtly matching up a specific plot structure with the set of historical events he wishes to endow meaning of a particular kind. This is essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making operation.[55]

In *Déogratias,* the author has chosen a specific plot structure to conceive an argument about historical realities that are less documented. Consistent with White's statement, Stassen's novel unveils the parallels between writing history and literature and suggests that both are acts of constructing meaning that does not naively reflect reality. Furthermore, the animalistic depiction of Déogratias serves the purpose of showing how annihilating such an event as the genocide is. Déogratias is both human (like us) and a monster (inhuman). However, he does not transform into a dog willingly. The transformation occurs slowly over several panels and Déogratias, which demonstrates how his past consumes him. Stassen consciously chooses the dog as animal because during the genocide, and as it is portrayed in the novel, dogs were seen eating the corpeses of Tutsi victims.

5.3 Iconography and its Relation to Historiography

In the previous section, I have briefly explained how iconography aids in the novel's intertextuality. I analysed how Stassen uses images and dialogue language to reference Rwanda's historical past. Nevertheless, I would like to further analyse the metafictional

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[55] White, *Tropics*, 85.

implication of using visual content to reflect on the process of historical writing and the creation of historical knowledge. Stassen uses simple allegory to critique how we gather and conceive understanding about the past. In so doing, he wants to demonstrate that an unreflective and uninformed consumption of historical representations can lead to dangerous oversimplification.

One can see this, for example, in the scene where Déogratias attempts to pursue Appolinaire by showing her a romantic comic he bought with stolen money.

Figure 6: Stassen, Déogratias, 15.

In the first panel, Déogratias and Appolinaire are sitting next to one another, and in the following panel an excerpt of the romantic comic can be seen. The passage depicts a woman sitting alone on a couch, looking downward. Given her facial expression, one can assume that she is unhappy or heartbroken. Another part of the same panel shows a man rubbing his face, perhaps in annoyance or frustration. Déogratias seems to interpret the images differently from Appolinaire. For Déogratias the images represent a romantic relationship despite its unattractive representation. When Déogratias implies to Apollinaire that they could be like the couple in the comic, she rejects him. Stassen creates a situation where the tension between representation and reception is portrayed. Déogratias believes that he has shown Appolinaire his romantic feelings for her, however, she interprets those images entirely differently and rejects him.

Figure 7: Stassen, Déogratias, 17.

On the following page, the scene is repeated, except now, Déogratias shows a Appolinaire's sister Bénigne a comic excerpt of two western couples kissing. This romantic depiction is more attractive than the one he showed to Apollinaire. Consequently, when Déogratias asks Bénigne if she wants to re-create the images in the comic, she accepts it, not knowing that he asked her sister the same question first. This repetition illustrates how the way things are represented affects how they are received. Bénigne accepts Déogratias because she does not know the whole story. By portraying two similar situations with different outcomes, the author self-consciously implies that the forms of representation matter as much as the representation itself. Ironically, the example of the romantic comic constitutes a mimicry of the author's own choice of representation and forces the reader to reconsider the traditions and conventions of the genre involved. In so doing Stassen adheres to Hutcheon's postmodern theory, in which historiographic metafiction is supposed 'to call attention to both what is being contested and what is being offered as a critical response to that, and to do so in a self-aware that admits its own provisionality'.[56] Stassen demonstrates the provisionality of his novel by showing how the individual panels of his own work have to be read in relation to the others, to adequately understand their representation. Bénigne's character teaches the reader to be

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[56] Hutcheon, *Poetics*, 13.

objective in his reading and question his consumption of (visual) texts. Thus, the novel asks the reader to recognize it as a provisonal and partial representation of the Rwandan genocide.

To conclude, this chapter has attempted to show that Stassen's novel Déogratias incorporates metafictional techniques to create an example of historiographic metafiction. By incorporating visual iconography and intertextuality, the novel obscures the line between fact and fiction, which constitutes the most important aspect of metafictional novels. Additionally, this chapter has also discussed the novel's provisional character in representing the Rwandan genocide. Consequently, *Déogratias* uses Hutcheons metafictional techniques to question historical writing and ironically criticizes its own medium of representation.

Having provided an analysis of *Déogratias* as a historiographic metafiction, the next chapter will compare the novel to the previous analysed novels, Diop's *Muambi* and Tadjo's *L'ombre d'Imana*. Moreover, their similarities and differences will be identified to come to a conclusion about their depiction of the Rwandan genocide.

Chapter 6: A Comparative Analysis

The chapter aims to bring together the three novels analysed in this thesis, Diop's *Murambi: le live ossements*, Tadjo's L'ombre d'Imana and Stassen's *Déogratias*. The central texts of this thesis, which have thus far been considered in separate chapters, will be analysed in contrast to each other to conclude on their literary possibilities to re-write the historical past. Thus far, I have already contemplated the various techniques employed by the authors to negotiate the issues raised by the fictional writing of the historical event. I have also touched upon the importance of the novels' context and creation, which foreshadows the narrative strategies assumed by the authors to narrate the complex stories of the Rwandan genocide. In this chapter, I intend to answer the research questions of this thesis: why use historical (meta)fiction as a medium to re-write the historical past? What can historical (meta)fiction say or do that a traditional historical account cannot, and to what extend? In other words, I want to dedicate this portion of the thesis to what I would argue is an unavoidable consideration in the novels: in what ways can the historiographic (meta)fiction contribute towards the reconfiguration of the historical past?

First, let us consider the implications of the outsider status of the authors in the texts analysed in this thesis. In the novels, the authors all have the outsider status since all neither of them is from Rwandan nor they were present during the genocide. Their text thus inevitably assumes an outsider perspective. Nonetheless, these outsider perspectives have varying degrees and shape the way they represent the Rwandan genocide. For example, the authors of *Murambi* and *L'ombre d'Imana* benefit from their status as African writers, which amplifies the text's authenticity. As a result, although all three of the authors are confronted with questions of responsibility, absence and complicity, the extent to which they have to consider these questions is different. Diop and Tadjo are more directly connected to the event than Stassen, Tadjo, for example, states in her novel that 'everything is so similar to my own home that it

breaks my heart'.[57] Diop is Senegalese, and as an African, he felt responsible to write about the genocide, which he mitigates through the character of Cornelius (see Chapter 3). As a white French author, Stassen's novel foregrounds the outsider position of the Westerner to a certain degree. His work, for instance, opens up with Déogratias' encounter with the French sergeant, who has returned to Rwanda after the genocide as a tourist. The sergeant appears to be excited to see Déogratias again and shows him the pictures of gorillas he has taken on his wildlife reserve trip. In this context, the sergeant represents the western community, to whom the genocide lies in the distant past. In contrast Déogratias, a native Rwandan, is still coming to terms with what happened. All this suggests that their text is as informed by what happened as by the author's positionality. The author's positionality is an aspect that is rarely considered in traditional historiography. The historian is assumed to be able to reconstruct the past as it was, through their analysis and understanding of primary sources. I, therefore, argue that traditional historical accounts are limited because they fail to consider their texts as subjective interpretations in the construction of the past.

Furthermore, the novels analysed in this thesis are suspicious to the possibility of reaching a stable meaning or single truth. They use various literary techniques such as intertextuality, subjective narrator, unconventional chronology, iconography, and multiple perspectives to problematize the narrative. The texts are ambiguous, which disorients the reader who no longer can produce a stable interpretation of the events presented in the novels. As explains White:

[…]no given set of casually recorded historical events can itself constitute a story, the most it might offer to historians are story elements. The events are made into a story by the suppression of subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by

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[57] Tadjo, *Imana*, 9.

characterization, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative

descriptive strategies, and the like – in short, all of the techniques that we would

normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel of a play.[58]

In light of White's statement, it can be said that the novels are similar in terms of

problematizing the knowledge of the historical past. For example, the novels all include

references of the past by the employment to intertextuality. However, at a closer look, one

recognises a difference in the way they employ intertextuality. In *Murambi*, Diop references

the French army to emphasise their involvement, or lack thereof, in the genocide. Tadjo

references the historical past to clearly show how Rwanda's colonial history led to the

aftermath of the genocide. In a sense, we can therefore conclude that their employment of the

textual past is to emphasise the question of what we consider as historical truth. Their texts

function to problematize traditional historical writing, which tends to represent such events in

the continent as barbaric and unreasonable violence without acknowledging how it has been

orchestrated and perpetrated by the West. Stassen's graphic novel, however, incorporates

intertextuality to emphasise that what is represented in the text is historically accurate. In

Déogratias the historical figures do not contradict the official history (see chapter 5), there are

incorporated in the novel to maximise its historical nature. In this perspective, Stassen is similar

to the traditional historian, who employs factual/textual evidence in his text without

problematizing them. In other words, while Diop and Tadjo's novels aim at blurring reality

with fiction with their employment of intertextuality to enhance the metaphysical nature of

their text, Stassen aims at establishing his text as a historical account. Stassen's approach can

be justified by the visual character of his text, which is in nature challenging to use as an

expressive medium for such a severe event as the genocide.

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[58] White, *Tropics*, 84.

To conclude, it can be claimed that the authors choose to write their novels in the mode of metafiction to emphasise the unreliability of traditional historical narratives. Diop, Tadjo and Stassen's novels propose a new kind of historical reality, self-conscious of its literary artefacts. *Murambi* incorporates metafictional characteristics through a self-conscious narrator/author and multiple perspectives to demonstrate the complexity of the genocide. Tadjo's novel *L'ombre d'Imana* uses a reversed chronological order and multiple literary forms to draw the reader's attention to the construction of the historical past, and *Déogratias* equally wants to participate in the discussion of historical narratives while problematizing it with intermediality and iconography. All there of three of the novels demonstrate how unpresentable the nature of genocide is with the various perspectives they include in their novel. Therefore, one can state that the novels suggest that this type of atrocity cannot be (re-)presented in a traditional way. To comprehend the violence that ensued during the 100 days of killing in Rwanda, the authors have to make use of a discourse that narrativizes or, as states De Certeau '[…] a discourse that feigns to make the world speak itself as a story'.[59]

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[59] De Certeau, *Content and Form*, 2.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis has analysed three postmodern novels, Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi: le livre d'ossemen*t (2000) [Murambi: the Book of Bones], Véronique Tadjo *L'ombre d'Imana* (2000) [The Shadow of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda] and Jean-Philippe Stassen's *Déogratias* (2000). This thesis sought to analyse the novels in terms of their depiction and handling of history. It has been established that all three novel's constitute an example of historiographic metafiction in their employment of techniques that align with Linda Hutcheon's postmodern theory. Nonetheless, it has been argued that although all three novels share a metafictional nature, *Déogratias* (2000), in contrast to *Murambi* (2000) and *L'ombre d'Iman*a (2000), does not uniformly fit into the category of historiographic metafiction like the latter.

The theoretical framework of this thesis has elaborated on the concept of historiographic metafiction by closely analysing the theories of Michel De Certeau, Hayden White and Linda Hutcheon. These postmodern theorists emphasise the fact that the writing of historical knowledge is ruled by the same semantics that rules the writing process of fiction. It has been alleged that historical accounts are the product of the historian's subjective interpretation and not an objective representation of the empirical world. One can therefore state that the narrative structure of historical accounts is similar to that of fiction. The crucial finding of these postmodern theories on historiographic metafiction is that they blend fiction with reality. This blending is achieved through a self-conscious author, who draws the reader's attention to the constructive character of his text. The text itself parodies the conventions of traditional historiography by overtly mixing techniques to create a self-reflexive text. The narrator or the protagonist in these types of novels are not unified but instead are fragmented or multiple to show the text's metafictional nature and question the traditional understanding

of historical writing as a unified subject. Historiographic metafiction thus undermines the status of traditional historiography as it draws attention to as a literary artefact.

The following chapter on Diop's novel *Muramb*i (2000) analysed the novel in terms of its handling of history by focusing on the techniques used by the author to create a metafictional representation of the Rwandan genocide. By first focusing on the context of the novel's creation, this thesis was able to show how it affected its production. Then, I proceeded with an analysis of the technique employed by the author, which were self-reflexivity/intertextuality, a self-conscious author and narrator, which make *Murambi* an example of historiographic metafiction.

Chapter 5 approached Tadjo's novel in a similar way, by first concentrating on the context in which the novel was created. Afterwards, the techniques employed by Tadjo, multiple perspectives, unconventional chronology, intertextuality, and various literary forms, were analysed to argue that *L'ombre d'Imana* (2000) is an example of historiographic metafiction.

Chapter 6 constituted an analysis of Stassen's graphic novel *Déogratias* (2000. The first part of the chapter, which focused on the creation of the novel demonstrated that Stassen being a European consciously affected the narrative of his novel. The techniques the author used are intertextuality, iconography and a focalizer point of view, which allowed him to blur the boundary between fiction and fact.

Lastly, chapter 7 proceeded with a comparative analysis of the novels included in this study. Although, the novels are all examples of historiographic metafiction, they do not have the same ambition. Equally, the techniques used by the authors foreshadow the aim of their novel for instance while *Murambi* shows the complexity of the genocide, Stassen's novel aims at drawing the reader's attention to the novel, and by extension historiography, being a literary

artefact. Finally, I concluded that traditional historiography is limited because it fails to consider the historian as a subjective author like the writer of fiction.

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