

“A Puzzle Viewed From Within”: Problems with and
Alternatives to Humanitarianism and Savior Narratives for
Ethiopia and Rwanda

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to our son, Nelson, and Baby #2, who will make his or her appearance soon. You both inspire my work and make it all the more urgent. My dream is that you may carry this work forward, as well.

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Preface

This project has many origins, but its most concrete beginning is with the novels about Rwanda by Tierno Monénembo and Boubacar Boris Diop, which Frieda Ekotto introduced me to. My reading of them and fascination with them was shaped by courses I took around the same time: several dealing with human rights, another on violence in Africa, and another on citizenship. The theme of human rights clearly came up many times, but conferences, lectures, and conversations also led to thinking about the role of humanitarianism. All of these influences lingered in my mind as I read through many histories of Rwanda and accounts of the genocide.

In the meantime, two conference papers gave me the space to think of each novel in relationship to depoliticization – a theme that resonated strongly when people wrote about the genocide. Based on these accounts, I looked at media coverage of the genocide and included comparisons in my conference papers. The frequent depoliticization piqued my curiosity: why was it so easy to write about Rwanda in this way? What other references did writers have in mind when they saw Rwanda without a political lens, as a place of natural or inevitable crisis? Anyone familiar with African literature and history will know that misrepresenting Africa is not new, but in my pondering, I recalled one of the moments that shaped my own childhood knowledge of Africa – the famine in Ethiopia, which, as a child, I saw mainly through the lens of the song “We Are the World.” Intrigued, I began reading histories of Ethiopia and read through the lyrics of the song, as well as “Do They Know It’s Christmas?” and “Tears Are Not Enough,” and saw a similar vein of depoliticization. Though vastly different and highly political, the famine and the genocide were written about in ways that obscured their histories, insisted on the importance of humanitarianism, and often made the North the focus of the story. The unexpected similarities in the discourse convinced me that looking at both Ethiopia and Rwanda would shed light on the problems of the discourse, as well as some alternatives. In this way, I brought the project into focus by looking at how the media

and humanitarian advertisements constructed the stories of the two countries around strikingly similar savior narratives and humanitarian discourses. Comparing each country shed light on the other – revealing further problems with the discourses, and yet also promising alternatives.

This project has been challenging in three often-related ways: on the one hand, the subject matter is difficult and, though compelling, also heart-wrenching. These are stories of hundreds of thousands of lives lost and the sheer size of that loss is nearly overwhelming. This leads to my second point: that, though I feel compelled to learn about this, and then to share what I've learned through conversations or teaching or writing, this response often feels inadequate. And challenging humanitarianism – a movement which is saving lives *now* – feels audacious, at times, even as I keep in mind the bigger goal of reshaping the world such that humanitarian interventions are no longer necessary. These finally lead to my third point: that my personal challenge has always been finding and trusting my own voice in my research and writing. Setting myself this project has not made my task easier! But in teaching undergraduates and discussing my project with colleagues both inside and outside of academia, I remain convinced that these three significant challenges make the project all the more critical, in respecting those lost, challenging the status quo.

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Introduction: On Depoliticization, Savior Narratives, Rhetoric, and Power in Humanitarian Discourses

In writing about the Holocaust, scholar Yehuda Bauer argues, “It has often been said that if the Holocaust is totally inexplicable, utterly mysterious...then it is also outside history and therefore irrelevant to rational discourse....if the Holocaust is a onetime, inexplicable occurrence, then it is a waste of time to deal with it” (14). Against this view, he makes clear that he believes in studying and demystifying the Holocaust because “we ought to do everything in our power to make sure [the Holocaust] is a warning, not a precedent” (3).

These sentiments from Bauer’s book – recommended to me by a professor in Rwanda – have stayed with me as I started my research on problems of humanitarianism in relationship to the 1984/85 famine in Ethiopia and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. In my project, I study the literature in which the media and humanitarian advertisements, songs and novels explain the famine and the genocide, how they fit into history and rational discourse, with the hope that, indeed, they do not become a precedent.

From another angle, Peter Redfield and Erica Bornstein observe the great number of secondary, undergraduate, and graduate students who look at the state of the world and “want to ‘do something’” (26-7). Redfield and Bornstein recognize the benefits of this desire so, in trying to probe the field of humanitarianism, they conclude, “Rather than sweeping denunciation [of humanitarianism], therefore, we suggest something more of an aporia, a puzzle viewed from within rather than from a distant mountaintop” (27). This observation is important because it attests to the facts that others also want to “do good” and are thus drawn to understanding the paradoxes of humanitarianism from close up – “a puzzle viewed from within rather than from [the] distant mountaintop” of detachment.

I juxtapose these two quotes both to lay out my own relationship to this project, but also because one of the guiding impulses behind this study has been to ask – in face of such problems as the famine and the genocide, “what is to be done? What can we

do?”. As someone who wants to “do something,” these questions are both academically and personally compelling for me. In order to get an informed and detailed knowledge about the paradoxes of humanitarianism, in this project, I will look at two case studies from Central and Eastern Africa, namely, Ethiopia and Rwanda. I have chosen these two cases because, though the famine and the genocide were vastly different, the discourses about them in the media and humanitarian advertisements are disturbingly alike. Both the similarities and the differences shed light on the problems with humanitarianism, and the urgent need to look for alternatives.

To understand the complexities of the problems on the ground and the conflicting nature of the humanitarian aid coming from without, I am going to engage in a comparative analysis of these case studies, and present them in the historical context that generated these crises in the first place. To substantiate my findings, I will use photographs, fundraising lyrics, and texts as well as, when pertinent, engage with the current debates on humanitarianism aid.

Despite its definition, stated goals, and successes in helping those in peril, I argue that humanitarian aid is nevertheless fraught with the risks of discourse ranging from depoliticization to perpetuating savior narratives, to disempowering both Africans and the European and American audiences who support humanitarian actions. In the cases of Ethiopia and Rwanda, the risks were also made manifest on the ground when the aid to Ethiopia helped to prolong the wars that helped to cause the famine, or when the aid to Rwandans helped to support armed camps of those who had helped to lead the genocide. All the while, the discourses of and for humanitarianism – in the form of media coverage and humanitarian ads – depicted the two political events of the famine and genocide as merely natural, and even inevitable, crises. In light of this, I also look at songs and novels which, despite the strength of these problematic tendencies, suggest alternatives to them – alternatives which include, I argue, emphasizing community and learning, as well as politically-aware stories and ways of understanding.

I will construct my argument using these primary sources: news stories covering each event; photographic advertisements requesting donations to help with the famine in Ethiopia and support the victims of genocide in Rwanda; the following songs, written specifically to raise awareness of Ethiopia’s famine: Band Aid’s “Do They Know it’s

Christmas?”, USA for Africa’s “We Are the World,” and Northern Lights’ “Tears Are Not Enough”; and two novels about the Rwandan genocide: Boubacar Boris Diop’s *Murambi: The Book of Bones* and Tierno Monémbo’s *The Oldest Orphan*. My argument is strengthened by using a theoretical apparatus composed by the works and theories of Karl Marx, Hannah Arendt, Alex de Waal, Miriam Ticktin, Wendy Brown, Mahmood Mamdani, Carol Quillen, Liisa Malkki, as well as Melissa Wall and Jo Ellen Fair. Using one of the strengths of my Comparative Literature field, my contribution uses this diverse array of theorists in order to raise questions in a variety of cultural productions as represented by the media coverage, humanitarian ads, songs, and novels. Furthermore, the cultural productions help me to interrogate and illustrate points raised by the theorists in new and valuable ways, especially by looking at the alternatives some of these productions present, beyond the troublesome dichotomies found in depoliticized humanitarian discourses.

My main aim is to challenge the preconceived idea that humanitarian aid is a fully non-interested act and activity and to explore alternatives to its discourses. By using the above-mentioned primary sources, I point out the use and manipulation of rhetoric to represent and secure the interest of various groups and nations involved in such endeavors. I am interested in showing how, in the case of famine-stricken Ethiopia and genocide-ravaged Rwanda, the humanitarian activities and discourses also perpetuated a strong us/them divide which, together with depoliticization and savior narratives, made humanitarianism appear to be the only viable answer to the question “what can be done?”, while also distancing European and American audiences from the Ethiopians and Rwandans being helped and disempowering both groups, too. Where humanitarian discourses might acknowledge changes needed, these changes are restricted to changes within Africa – generally accomplished via humanitarianism – thus obscuring the need for more in-depth changes in Africa and the North to the structures of inequality which helped to create the problems in question. In addition to showing these problems with humanitarianism, I look to the songs and novels for ways to subvert these distancing and disempowering strategies which include imagining stronger alliances and implying the need to change the structures which the distancing and disempowering strategies otherwise obscure.

Before I detail the findings of my research and present my hypotheses, it is important to understand the present day debates around humanitarianism. Moreover, we need to understand why humanitarianism becomes one of the only available responses to Ethiopia's famine or Rwanda's genocide. The problem is, of course, vastly complex, so I will look specifically at depoliticization, savior narratives, and rhetoric in order to point to the dilemmas these present, and possible ways around them.

In defining my use of the term "humanitarianism," it's first useful to acknowledge Didier Fassin's important point that "the humanitarian world always exceeds what we can say about it" – that "its manifestations are so diverse and indeed contradictory that its purpose seems nearly impossible to apprehend" ("Noli Me Tangere" 35). Specifically, then, when I say "humanitarianism" or "humanitarian discourses," I refer to the discourses of, about, and for the humanitarianism that addressed the famine and genocide. These discourses emerge from the primary sources that I read: the ads that humanitarian organizations ran to raise money, that others ran to raise money for them, and the media coverage which built up humanitarian aid. This is still a large category, but, as I argue in the ensuing chapters, these sources share a great deal in common. What's more, the specific field I address is clearly related to the other fields of humanitarianism – thus the problems and alternatives that I address can be relevant to wider debates, while the research done on other fields of humanitarianism can inform the research on my own. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize the diversity within humanitarianism. For instance Liisa Malkki points out that "Two different organizations that deploy the same representational devices for fundraising might have very different organizational and political strategies" ("Children, Humanity, and Peace" 82). While their on-the-ground strategies may differ, however, part of my critique is that – from the outside, from the audience's perspective – the two organizations would appear nearly identical. Importantly, the picture of a depoliticized Africa (in the cases I'm analyzing) remains in the foreground. As Malkki points out (quoting Erica Burman), this image is a serious problem since, for those in the North, "disaster imagery constitutes a major source of information about the South" ("Children, Humanity, and Peace" 59). So while their practical strategies may be different, the many different organizations that rely on depoliticized representations of Africa create an image of a helpless Africa and a savior

from the North. As I have argued, this makes the distance between Africa and the North seem insurmountable, while disempowering change from the North and Africa, both.

Indeed, Fassin speaks of the distance between North and Africa as being part of a constituent tension of humanitarianism. In *Humanitarian Reason*, Fassin names “The tensions between compassion and repression” (x) as one of the inherent tensions in humanitarianism. Compassion, in this instance, is part of a bringing together of North and Africa – namely where Africa is brought into the North via calls for humanitarianism. But Fassin notes that this “politics of compassion” is one of both “solidarity” and “inequality” (3). So while Africa might be brought closer to the North via humanitarianism, it occupies an unequal position: “a critique of compassion is necessary,” writes Fassin, “because...it always presupposes a relation of inequality” (4). The recipients of this compassion, he adds, “are expected to show the humility of the beholden rather than express demands for rights” (4). As Chapters One and Two will make clear, the image of a helpless and passive Africa, showing humility instead of demanding rights, is intrinsic to the discourses of humanitarianism. I argue that the distancing thus implied in Fassin’s explanation comes to appear natural rather than political and that it disempowers both those in Africa and audiences in the North.

In continuing my definition of humanitarianism, I want to acknowledge two more important details. On the one hand, both Didier Fassin and Peter Redfield acknowledge the self-searching done by different humanitarian organizations. Redfield writes of the questioning Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) did after the problematic Rwanda/Zaire situation after the genocide (69) (problems which I will detail below), while Fassin speaks to the challenges MSF confronted with regards to their choice to stay in Iraq during the opening of the US-led invasion there in 2003, or Médecins du Monde’s troubled attempt at neutrality with regards to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (“Noli Me Tangere” 44-8). What these examples spell is the possibility for change that the humanitarian organizations, themselves, exhibit – an important possibility for making use of the alternatives.

At the same time, however, my second point is that change is difficult to accomplish. Writing of some of the paradoxes inherent to humanitarianism, Fassin refers to the “dysfunction intrinsic to [the] very functioning” of humanitarian actions that

“admit of no solution in the state of the contemporary world” (“Noli Me Tangere” 50). In other words, some of the impasses he notes are central to how humanitarianism fits into the wider world. Along these lines, Amal Hassan Fadlalla notes the “forces that have instituted humanitarianism as part of a neoliberal political economy” (227). As both Fassin and Fadlalla make clear, then, humanitarianism exists as part of larger global structures: challenging the problems that humanitarianism presents means challenging these larger structures – a significant undertaking. But understanding this – making this larger challenge visible – is part of addressing the problems and searching for solutions.

With this understanding of my use of the term “humanitarianism,” it’s important to unpack further terms. In this vein, Wendy Brown provides a useful definition for depoliticization when she describes it as the process which

involves removing a political phenomenon from comprehension of its *historical* emergence and from a recognition of the *powers* that produce and contour it. No matter its particular form and mechanics, depoliticization always eschews power and history in the representation of its subject. When these two constitutive sources of social relations and political conflict are elided, an ontological naturalness or essentialism almost inevitably takes up residence in our understandings and explanations. (15, emphasis in the original)

Power and history are left out, instead leaving “ontological naturalness or essentialism” to take their place in explaining a situation. Mahmood Mamdani adds to this when he describes the “culturalization of politics” as the problematic belief that “every culture has a tangible essence that defines it and then explains politics as a consequence of that essence” (quoted in Brown 20). Like Brown, Mamdani finds that explanations of politics are reduced to referring to an essence: a kind of static culture which drives a person. One has only to look at Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s nineteenth-century description of Africa as being “no historical part of the world” (quoted in Mamdani 298), or then-French president Nicolas Sarkozy’s 2007 comments that “Africa has not fully emerged into history” (quoted in Ticktin 51) to understand that Africa is very frequently depoliticized in that its history is overlooked.

The political dimensions of the famine and the genocide were often overlooked in the media, creating instead the impression of cultures destined for these catastrophes,

catastrophes which were seen as natural and even inevitable, rather than political and avoidable. But, importantly, when the famine and the genocide are imagined as natural or inevitable, then few responses are left available. Instead, they become catastrophes that are best dealt with via humanitarianism because, if they are natural or inevitable – a symptom of the essence of what it means to be African – than no change can be expected from within Africa¹. Crucially, this cycle severely limits the vocabulary even available to think and talk about the problems of Ethiopia and Rwanda. Instead, I argue that an archetypal savior narrative often fills in the space.

As I use the term here, I mean “savior narrative” to encompass the overall discourse which paints Africa as the dark continent in need of saving with the help of Northern (read European and American)² benevolence. I point to other examples in Chapter One, but one has only to think of Rudyard Kipling’s “White Man’s Burden” to grasp that the concept of “whites saving blacks” is older than the new humanitarian order, and is, in many ways, an extension of that used in the colonial discourse for “civilizing Africa,” as we will see in Chapter One. All the same, the narrative is highly relevant still – where the White Man is bidden to “fill full the mouth of Famine / And bid the sickness cease” (19-20), sentiments revived in responding to both the famine and the aftermath of the genocide. A central part of this savior narrative is its reliance on an us/them divide – where “we” from the North are saviors, and “they” from the South are savages or victims. This us/them divide is more easily upheld via the mechanisms of depoliticization where, again, another culture – especially an Other culture – is reduced to an essence, one which is vastly different from “us.” By leaving out history, power, and politics, bridging the gap between “us” and “them” becomes nearly unimaginable and thus the generalizations come to seem even more natural.

Though I use the term “savior narrative” to understand and explain humanitarianism better, other writers explain the idea as it is used in related fields in ways which shed light on my usage. For instance, Makau Matua looks at human rights as

¹ I use the terms “African” and “Africa” here consciously to note the frequent tendency to obliterate the differences between the more than fifty countries.

² I combine Europe and the United States into “the North” as a kind of short hand, even while acknowledging the potential for essentializing “the North,” as well. The term is meant to capture the idea that Europe and the U.S., despite many differences, share many things in common – especially in their relationship to Africa and what they stand to gain in savior narratives.

relying on a savage-victim-savior paradigm, one which is fundamentally racial and which supports a hierarchy of “superior and subordinate positions” (10-12). Later in this chapter I will return to the relationship between humanitarianism and human rights, but for now it is useful to note that the savior narrative spans disciplines, as well as time. In the same vein, Sherene Razack looks at the Canadian peacekeeping mission in Somalia in 1993 and also concludes that it rested upon a savior narrative, deeply related to the colonial project of “civilizing Africa.” Razack makes several points which help to elucidate my own use of the “savior narratives. Her point about the “deeply internalized myths about our civilizing mission” (8) underlines my point that this narrative, because it is so internalized, can be a fallback position when other descriptions of and solutions for a situation is lacking – as in when the problems of Ethiopia and Rwanda are described as natural and not political. Similarly, when Razack points out that “such narratives...achieve coherence only if we imagine the world to be divided between the civilized and the uncivilized” (10), this underscores my argument about the importance of the us/them divide to savior narratives. Finally, Razack argues that “The profound emergency in the lives of racialized peoples...requires that we divest ourselves of the fantasy of the white man and his burden at both the national and international level and begin to acknowledge how we are implicated in the crises of our time” (13). This line of reasoning is crucial because it points to the ways in which the North must reimagine itself in the world: if we agree that changes must occur to stop famines and mass killings, then Razack’s point illuminates the ways in which the North must be a part of that change, just as it has been part of the problems.

What this also implies is that we need to work to uncover just what the North has to gain from the savior narratives and humanitarianism, itself. Briefly, Fassin speaks to this when writing about responses to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Though recognizing the “goodwill...altruistic engagement and charitable efforts” of those who gave, he nonetheless adds, “one cannot avoid thinking how rewarding was this generosity. For a fleeting moment we had the illusion that we shared a common human condition” (*Humanitarian Reason* xi). This illusion, of course, went far to mask the inequality – refusal of asylum seekers, deportations, and other exploitations, past and present, of Haiti by the US and France, especially (xi-xii).

Deeply related to depoliticization and savior narratives is the use of rhetoric in supporting these: I argue that, in terms of rhetoric, the media and humanitarian ads persistently appeal to emotion, most often at the cost of intellectual appeals. As I will show below, the famine and the genocide were complex situations which called for nuanced understandings and responses, but these passed when sources relied on emotional appeals. Brown's definition of depoliticization hints at this since the intellectually challenging topics of history and power are left out when an event is depoliticized. Indeed, Brown argues that, aside from obscuring sources of political problems, the phenomenon of depoliticization also "substitutes emotional and personal vocabularies for political ones in formulating *solutions* to political problems" (16 emphasis in original). As such, depoliticized representations of Ethiopia and Rwanda easily appeal to emotions to suggest an emotionally-fulfilling and intellectually-starved savior narrative as a solution. As Miriam Ticktin observes, humanitarianism is largely "advocated on the basis of emotion" ("Where Ethics" 36). In his book on Darfur, Mahmood Mamdani observes the same problem when he argues that the American campaigns to "save Darfur," having depoliticized Darfur's crisis, invited Americans to "save Darfur" out of "largeness of heart" (*Saviors* 62). He argues that acting in this way for Darfur allowed Americans to "feel good" and to feel like "powerful saviors" (62), underlining how depoliticization relates to emotion and savior narratives. This is not to argue that emotion does not have its place in discussions about the famine or genocide – but in essence, I argue that this *overreliance* on emotional appeals is a way to promote savior narratives over political responses. A further implication of this overreliance is that it also weakens any relationship between Northern audiences and those being "saved," because, instead of seeing ways of connecting both intellectually and emotionally, audiences are only offered a vision of a simplistic, and hierarchical, relationship.

Along these lines, what these many writers who deal with depoliticization, savior narratives, and humanitarianism help articulate is the power that undergirds and is upheld, or withheld, where all of these fields overlap. This is a topic that returns in each chapter of this project, but central to my thinking has been Wendy Brown's observation that, regarding the question of intention, "While depoliticization may not be an explicit aim of the powerful, it does conserve the status quo and dissimulates the powers that

organize it” (211). While she recognizes that those in power might not “intentionally and consciously” use depoliticization, nonetheless depoliticization “may well issue from a certain blindness about power and dominance that is the privilege of the powerful” – a position she concludes that is in line with both Marx’s and Foucault’s ideas about power (212). Brown leaves these ideas as a footnote which she cannot explore further, but in trying to understand specific situations that have been depoliticized, I want to apply these ideas and take them further to make instances of power visible. I borrow from Miriam Ticktin to observe the difficulty in holding accountable power which is not visible (*Casualties* 22). For a Northern audience, this means making visible the global play of powers and structural inequalities which made the Ethiopian famine and the Rwandan genocide more possible, but which are rendered invisible when the two events are read as not being political. In Chapter Four, for instance, I note how Diop and Monénembo also bring power to the foreground in their narratives in ways which both undermine the savior narratives of humanitarianism and underscore how power sometimes functions. But also crucial is understanding just what the North stands to gain in upholding humanitarianism and savior narratives - the power that, while difficult to perceive, nonetheless permeates the structures, a line of argument I pursue in all three chapters.

In order to understand how these questions of humanitarianism, savior narratives, depoliticization, and power play out, I turn now to an overview of the histories of Ethiopia and Rwanda. From there, it is easy to move into some specific critiques of humanitarianism – first building off of the problems that occurred in the Ethiopian and Rwandan contexts, and then opening up further to understand the limitations of the field. Much of my own critique is of the ways humanitarianism fits into and shapes certain discourses, but this critique has grown out of an awareness of how the discourse and the on-the-ground problems complicate and build on each other. To that end, I turn now to the respective histories of Ethiopia and Rwanda in order to explain my arguments further.

Historical Background: Ethiopia

Ethiopia’s ancient history comprises a series of different kingdoms, dating as early as the eighth century BCE. The boundaries, and thus inhabitants, of these kingdoms varied over time, meaning different peoples in the regions felt more or less bound to the kingdoms. This variety is echoed in the religious diversity, as well: rulers in

the fourth century CE adopted Christianity as the state religion, while the country contains what is regarded as the earliest Muslim settlement in Africa and an ancient Jewish population, as well.

A look at the history of Ethiopia since the time of the European “scramble for Africa” sheds light on events that shaped the 1984/85 famine. Under Emperor Menelik II (who ruled from 1889 until 1909), Ethiopia was both centralizing control and extending outwards (Woodward 15). With weapons purchased from other European powers, Menelik was able to defeat Italy’s advance into Ethiopia – one important stage in retaining Ethiopia’s independence from European colonization (Woodward 15). The 1906 Tripartite Convention between France, Britain, and Italy seemed to impose on Ethiopia’s independence but, as Woodward observes, “by a combination of strength at home and skilful diplomacy abroad, Menelik was able to resist this threat and keep Ethiopia as one of the two states...that did not come under European imperial control as a result of the scramble for Africa” (16). However, the European presence did thwart Ethiopian desires to establish seaports (Woodward 15) – a factor in Ethiopia’s later desire to annex Eritrea. Menelik and his successor Haile Selassie (who ruled as regent from 1916-1930, and as emperor from 1930-1974) modernized Ethiopia along Northern lines: creating a postal service, hospitals, a ministry of education, abolishing slavery, and establishing a bi-cameral parliament – though the parliament’s impact was severely limited (Woodward 29).

However, this independence was interrupted in 1935, when Italy conquered Ethiopia. Selassie went into exile in Britain and appealed to the League of Nations to help. Though the appeal was unsuccessful, *Time Magazine* named Selassie Man of the Year in 1936. Thus Selassie’s popularity speaks to why he returned to power in Ethiopia, rather than – as Woodward conjectures – the country being put under foreign, likely British, rule (30). As Woodward remarks, this international experience also led Selassie “to diversify his foreign policy,” especially by strengthening his relationship with the United States and establishing Ethiopia as the home of the Organization of African Unity (30).

At the same time, improved communications in Ethiopia meant Selassie had an easier time centralizing his own power and undercutting that of local rulers (Woodward

31). Selassie's increase in power is also seen in the fact that what industrialization grew became centered around Ethiopia's capital of Addis Ababa and that "a number of the large enterprises were owned by Haile Selassie, his family and favoured courtiers" (Woodward 32). Selassie's power only grew when, with US support, Ethiopia federated and eventually annexed Eritrea in the 1950s and 60s (Woodward 31). However, as Penrose and Harris observe, "The indulgences shown to Haile Selassie by Western governments, other African states and those classes whose interests were linked to his own, obscured the dangerous realities of the failures and omissions of his rule" (87). Notably, there was little economic or political growth for Ethiopians (Woodward 31-2), while Eritrea's war for independence from Ethiopia, started in the 1960s, dragged on.

In this context of mild dissent, the Wollo province of northern Ethiopia suffered a famine and the loss of between 40,000 and 80,000 lives in 1973 (de Waal, *Evil Days* 58). While drought, economic stagnation, and the specifics of the peasants (nomads in competition for resources, and farmers who did not own their own land) were important factors in the famine, Selassie's government did its best to ignore and cover up the famine, as well (de Waal, *Evil Days* 58-60). Penrose notes that "the main reasons for this high level refusal to acknowledge the seriousness of the situation [in 1972] were political. Ethiopia had an international reputation for stability and progressiveness and a position to uphold as host to the OAU" (98). Or, as de Waal notes, "The Vice-Minister of Planning... astutely identified 'political embarrassment' as the government's main fear: hunger itself was of secondary importance" (*Famine Crimes* 107). But as more news of the famine became known, "Revolutionary actions came from students, town dwellers and junior army officers, who used the symbolism of famine as part of a new political idiom" (de Waal, *Famine Crimes* 108). Thus, in 1974, Selassie was deposed and an organization from within the army, the Derg (or Dergue) took power, with Colonel Mengitsu Haile Mariam eventually emerging as leader.

In light of the recent famine, the new government made changes to address future famines, especially including the founding of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, which would play a role in the 1984/85 famine. However, as de Waal observes, "The shortcoming [of the reforms] was that while the *famine* played a role in the revolution, the *famine-vulnerable people* did not" (*Famine Crimes* 108, italics in the original): the

reforms did not act, as de Waal argues, as any kind of “political contract” to protect those most vulnerable (*Famine Crimes* 109). In addition, Penrose notes many issues facing the new government with regards to addressing future famines: the need to address what had caused the 1973 famine and could cause further problems – lack of food, oxen, money, and land, complicated by “the absence of fully-developed institutions” to address this and future problems, and the “uncertain political atmosphere which followed the overthrow of Haile Selassie” (102). So while changes were made, the challenges of addressing any future famines would be significant.

In the meantime, the new government under the Derg and Mengitsu eventually received support from the USSR, after shifting away from its US alliance. The military, which had grown especially with the help of the United States under Selassie, continued to grow under Mengitsu, particularly in response to an attack from Somalia in 1977 and unrest in Ethiopian provinces, especially Tigre in the north (Woodward 92-3).

Mengitsu’s alliance with the USSR would play an important part in the discourse of the 1984/5 famine, while the role of the military, it is largely agreed, essentially created that famine in the first place.

While most now agree that the famine in northern Ethiopia in 1984 and 1985 was “induced by government oppression and civil strife” (Cooper 98, see also de Waal, Woodward, Duffield), a great deal of attention was placed on drought as the cause of the famine at first. Significantly, blaming drought – as we will see in the next chapter – often meant attributing the famine to natural causes, instead of political ones, which fed into both savior narratives and the vision of Africa as depoliticized: stripped of the history and the power that shaped events.

Even though Angela Penrose’s account of the famine largely holds poor rainfalls and overpopulation responsible for the famine, I note her explanation in order to point out that even her account attributes far more agency to Ethiopians, as well as far more politics, than most of the accounts and coverage we will see in the next chapter and in the songs in Chapter Three. Penrose’s account also highlights the complexities of

understanding a famine – complexities which make emotional and unnuanced understandings and responses to the famine so ineffective and even harmful.³

In considering the drought as a cause of the famine, Penrose argues that “The development of a disastrous famine in 1984 must, therefore, be seen against the succession of poor rains and inadequate harvests in the four years after 1980” (134) because “However poor and malnourished, people rarely die of starvation as a result of the failure of one harvest. It is a succession of poor harvests that signals danger” (133). In other words, there was a specific history to the 1984 famine. Crucially, by ignoring the “succession of poor harvests,” one can remain ignorant of the many and important ways in which people survived the preceding years – particularly of the agency and resourcefulness of people, known only as victims in the media and humanitarian accounts. By seeing only one poor harvest, this view also obscures the planning and pleading for attention and help that came before – it obscures the fact that many foresaw the crisis (based on attention and analysis) and tried to call attention to it, but were ignored – often for political reasons. And political reasons there were, since – following the coup in 1974 – Ethiopia had moved toward Communism and had ties with Moscow. In the context of the Cold War, critics suggest that the US, for one, stopped aid for fear that donations would free up money for the Ethiopian government to secure its own power, rather than address the famine (Penrose 149; she quotes from GAO report here, too). Again, it’s important to note that, even if drought were the biggest underlying factor – even if it could be considered a purely natural phenomenon – countries saw Ethiopia, itself, in a political light and responded as such. Much of this is obscured or glossed over in the songs I will be analyzing – “Do They Know It’s Christmas?,” “We Are the World,” and “Tears Are Not Enough.”

Contrary to Penrose, Alex de Waal concludes that the famine in Northern Ethiopia was caused by the government’s policies in trying to counter the insurgency in the north (115), and that blaming “drought, overpopulation and unsustainable land-use practices” was expedient for both the Ethiopian government and outside donors (126).

³ In addition, it’s significant to note that Penrose’s account is in the same volume as the account by Kurt Jansson, who was the head of the UN Relief Operation in Ethiopia from December 1984 through January 1986, which contextualizes her account as being in support of the “largely effective [UN] operation that saved millions of lives” (Harris xx), since others strongly argue the effectiveness of that operation.

De Waal notes that while visitors in 1984 saw evidence of drought – dry fields and wells – he observes that “a visitor can only see a single year of drought” – and, agreeing with Penrose here – “that is not enough to cause a famine,” so previous years of drought were invented (115). Thus, while de Waal observes that drought, harvest failure, and the government’s economic and agricultural policies all played a role, he finds that the most important cause was military strategy against the Tigray (or Tigre) People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) insurgency (115). “The zone of severe famine coincided with the war zone,” writes de Waal, “and the phases of the developing famine corresponded with the major military actions” (115). He notes, for instance, that a 1980 military campaign into Tigray severely disrupted crop production – displacing people, destroying houses, crops, pastures and livestock (117). When another military push came early in 1983, people – whose means of production and survival had already been destabilized – were less able to cope, turning to emergency shelters (117). Other military strategies made famine far more likely: these included bombings, especially of markets and transportation, and restrictions on travel (which further limited trade and the money-making capacity of laborers) (118-20). Mark Duffield borrows from de Waal to argue that coping strategies are key to people’s survival during times of famine – even more important than food aid (49), but that “Violence disrupts people’s coping strategies or prevents them from operating at all. In these circumstances, especially when such actions are deliberate, frank starvation is often the result” (50).

The salient point here is that the famine in Ethiopia had a variety of sources, but the political factors were tremendous. In addition, though they disagree on the causes of the famine, both Penrose and de Waal agree on the importance of the actions of the Ethiopians, themselves, in surviving. Importantly, both of these views, on the complicated sources and the agency of Ethiopians, are largely invisible in the depoliticized savior narratives that supported humanitarianism as the best response to the famine.

Historical Background: Rwanda

To understand the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, it is useful to look at its past, particularly to understand the relationship between the Hutu and the Tutsi. Mahmood Mamdani’s book is particularly useful in this endeavor because he finds the causes to

have been largely political, and he suggests political solutions, as well. Since the 1994 killings were triggered by Hutu/Tutsi tensions, Mamdani gives an overview of the debates about what the difference between the two groups is before concluding that the difference was political, underlined by their relationship to the state – first the pre-colonial kingdom of Rwanda, and later the colonial state under German and then Belgian rule. In the pre-colonial kingdom, Tutsi were set apart from Hutu because they were allowed “petty privileges” and were “exempt...from forced labor” (74).

If this was roughly the pre-colonial situation, then it is also important to note, first, that the kingdom of Rwanda was rapidly expanding at the end of the nineteenth century, thus drawing more people under its rule as Hutu people; and, second, that this expansion happened under the rule of Rwabugiri (who ruled 1853-1895) who came to tighten the Hutu/Tutsi differences in order to bolster his power, thus making the Hutu status more onerous than it had ever been. And if Hutu and Tutsi are political identities, and colonialism built off of existing state structures, it stands to reason that the Hutu/Tutsi difference between rulers and ruled could carry over, as well.

For Mamdani, the important point about colonialism is that the Tutsi were deemed an alien race, particularly in accordance with the Hamitic myth which constructed them as more advanced foreigners than the native Bantu population, though still (of course) inferior to those of the white race. At the same time, the Tutsi were kept in power over the Hutu. This created a bipolar situation between Hutu and Tutsi; once solely a political identity, Hutu and Tutsi were now naturalized into “racial” identities, according to Mamdani (101). Moreover, these racial categories were institutionally upheld – through a census and resulting identity cards which cemented the two “races” (no longer were Hutu able to become Tutsi, and vice versa), and through differing education systems (which translated into practically no Western education at all for Hutu), a factor which fed into Tutsi dominance in Church and government jobs. Since the Tutsi were considered “customary” authorities, those in power were also easily able to manipulate the system to the point where force became standard in the forms of forced labor, forced crops, and forced sales (95-6). Importantly, one form of forced labor, *ubureetwa*, originally imposed under Rwabugiri (66), was only ever enforced on Hutu and remained a staple throughout colonial rule; as Mamdani points out, this *ubureetwa*

“testified to the existence of Tutsi privilege in colonial Rwanda and highlighted the social separation between the *petit* Tutsi and the average Hutu... [such that] Tutsi privilege in colonial Rwanda set *all* Tutsi apart from *all* Hutu in their relation to power” (98). Altogether, colonial rule acted to naturalize and further heighten the Hutu/Tutsi differences considerably.

By the 1950s, some Hutu had in fact been able to establish themselves as an elite counter to the Tutsi political elite (Mamdani 106). Mamdani observes that, “Locked into a subordinate status by a legally enforced identity, this socially frustrated group developed – for the first time in the history of Rwanda – into a political counterelite” (106), a counterelite which quickly gained traction in the move to decolonization. Although there were plenty of political currents in Rwanda at the time, the Hutu elite were able to garner support from the Hutu masses by appealing against Tutsi abuses, while Tutsi-Belgian relations were souring. Mamdani points out that “the political violence that ushered in 1959 marks a significant departure from political violence in the preceding period” where Hutu and Tutsi had united against unpopular rulers (105). Importantly, this undercuts the assumption often made in media representations of Rwanda about an “age-old ethnic hatred.” These events, referred to as the social revolution of 1959, saw more killing of Tutsi and the exile of many more (the official number of exiles was 336,000 by 1964, according to Prunier (62), while Grégoire Kayibanda, a Hutu politician, became the first president after the 1961 election.

After independence, during Kayibanda’s twelve year presidency, Tutsis were essentially kept out of the political arena and smaller massacres took place until 1964, while sustained campaigns were held to enforce a strict quota system allotting an official 9% of school seats and jobs to Tutsis, said to account for their 9% of the population (Prunier 60). Such a campaign to enforce the quota system in 1972-3, also reacting against domestic economic shortages and massacres of Hutus by Tutsis in neighboring Burundi, was particularly strong such that “the economic and psychological effects of this hate campaign were sufficient to trigger another massive wave of Tutsi emigration” (Prunier 61).

In this context, Juvenal Habyarimana took over the country in a bloodless coup in 1973 (Prunier 61). Again under his presidency, the quota system was kept intact

(Mamdani 138-9), with the difference that Tutsis were given a minority status, allowing them some limited access to politics (Mamdani 138). While the status of the Tutsi was largely considered improved under Habyarimana's rule, more economic shortages combined with post-Cold War international pressure to create a climate for internal political opposition to rebel against Habyarimana's one-party rule in the late 1980s and clamor for more political parties.

In a context where Habyarimana was giving concessions to his political opponents and new political parties were forming, the Rwandan Patriotic Front, or RPF, invaded the north of the country from Uganda in October 1990. With the RPF consisting of mainly Tutsi exiles, Hutu extremists could stir up fears of an RPF victory as a return to Tutsi domination such as existed in colonial times (Mamdani 233). The peace negotiations which ensued in Arusha, Tanzania, gave room for many of the political parties of the new coalition government to stand with the RPF against Habyarimana's regime and the more extremist elements when a new government (the BBTG – Broad Based Transitional Government) was being negotiated (Mamdani 210). Of the political parties formed, it is important to note that the Coalition pour la Défense de la République (or CDR), generally thought of as the party of Hutu extremists and proponents of Hutu Power, was given no place in the BBTG. Due to this, Mamdani observes that “The Arusha Agreement was signed stillborn, mainly because it failed to take account of the extremist CDR, either by including it or by containing it” (211). For the extremists with nothing to gain and everything to lose with the BBTG, when pressure on Habyarimana to install the new BBTG was high, his death on April 6, 1994, was the signal for the killing of moderate Hutu political opponents and all Tutsi to begin. Mamdani stresses that the killings relied on fears of a colonial past and were constructed by those at the top as based on the racial difference that the colonial period had constructed (190, 194).

During the approximately one hundred days between April and July 1994, some 800,000 Rwandans died⁴. Sparked by the crash of (Hutu) President Habyarimana's plane

⁴ The numbers and identities of the dead are hard to pinpoint. On the one hand, 800,000 is a frequently agreed upon number, though this ranges from 500,000 dead to 1,000,000 dead, too. The identity of the dead is also difficult to establish: for example, Jared Diamond argues that economic hardship and population density played a significant part in patterns of those who died – such that the atmosphere of killings allowed some to take advantage of the situation to redistribute resources (325). University of Michigan Political Science professor Allan Stam, with Christian Davenport, on the other hand, tallied numbers and concluded that, in fact, while some 300,000 Tutsi are thought to have died, that

on the night of April 6, 1994, within hours, Hutu extremists had killed their moderate political Hutu opponents, and soon after set up an interim government whose goal was to consolidate power, in part by eliminating the Tutsi within the country. While estimates vary widely, most sources agree that tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands of civilians participated in the killings. The genocide was brought to an end when the RPF, which had begun its civil war in the country in 1990, effectively defeated the army of the interim government and pushed it into exile across the border into the Congo (then Zaire). With the interim government and defeated army went hundreds of thousands of Hutu civilians – some fleeing because of their guilt in the massacres, others fearing the RPF because of government propaganda, and others coerced by Hutu extremists into fleeing. Eventually, approximately two million Rwandans fled for the Congo, Tanzania, and Burundi – a situation which gave rise to a great deal of media and humanitarian attention. The French Operation Turquoise – said to have the humanitarian mission of saving Tutsi lives – was launched in June 1994 and in fact aided the retreat of the extremists into the Congo. The hundreds of thousands of (often militarized) refugees so near the border made the RPF project of setting up a new government, also in the midst of the chaos and trauma of the genocide’s aftermath, a considerable challenge.

In order to avoid the idea that Rwanda was isolated and thus had an inherent culture of violence or obedience, a depoliticized image we will see used by the media in the next chapter, it’s important to acknowledge the genocide as a regional affair, having sources and consequences intimately tied to other nations in the region. Instead, it is important to note Burundi, for example: just south of Rwanda, its population is also made up of Hutu and Tutsi, but its postcolonial legacy includes rule by Tutsi who massacred Hutu to solidify their power. The specter of Tutsi against Hutu violence was used to fan fears of the same in Rwanda, while massacres in Burundi created pockets of Hutu refugees in Rwanda who had real experience with Tutsi tyranny. To the north, Mamdani argues that the RPF found its impetus in the increasing alienation of Rwandan refugees in

means “more than half [of the dead] were Hutu” (65). Since the work by Diamond, Stam and Davenport, by pointing to the importance of history, power, and politics, all differ substantially from what the media and humanitarian organizations identified as causes of the violence. I mention these debates to highlight again the complexity of Rwanda’s situation – a complexity unseen in the media and humanitarian advertisements, and a complexity unplumbed when they rely on emotional appeals over intellectual ones.

Uganda under Museveni, even those soldiers who had helped propel Museveni to victory. Unlikely to gain citizenship in Uganda, Rwandan refugees began looking at the possibility of an armed return to Rwanda, thus forming the RPF (182). Mamdani also points out that the turmoil of the eastern Congo – while gaining great speed with the presence of the retreating Hutu extremists and other refugees after 1994 and the subsequent attacks by the RPF-led Rwandan government – had already been suffering a crisis of citizenship. Mamdani stresses these factors to illustrate the need for more far-reaching responses in order “to defuse a simmering volcano before it blows up yet again, this time engulfing the wider region” (282) – responses which, yet again, would be hard to imagine if the situation is depoliticized.

From here we can acknowledge the international ties even further afield: for example, historian Gérard Prunier condemns France’s part in the build-up to the genocide (strong diplomatic and military ties with Habyarimana’s regime, for example) and its Operation Turquoise as being evidence of a self-interested guarding of a francophone power against the Anglophone (because Ugandan) backing of the RPF (102-7; 281), identifying Rwanda as a crossroad of international dynamics. Of course, the UN’s largely ineffectual UNAMIR was present before, during and after the genocide and can be contrasted with the swift and successful extraction of foreigners from Kigali during the first days of the genocide by French and Belgian troops (Dallaire 284; 291). Similarly, in response to the Hutu refugee crisis in the Congo and Tanzania at the end of the civil war, massive amounts of international aid poured into those places. Also, in 1994, the ICTR (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda) was established, to be held in Tanzania. Finally, with the success of the RPF in securing the country, hundreds of thousands of long-standing Tutsi refugees returned to Rwanda; according to Gourevitch, within nine months of the end of the genocide and civil war when the RPF formed a new government, with 800,000 Tutsi dead, some 750,000 Rwandan Tutsi exiles returned to Rwanda – some, indeed, coming to the country for the first time in their lives (230). These scattered examples are assembled to reveal a portion of the ways in which Rwanda’s past, present and future were meshed with other nations and the international community – something of which novelists Diop and Monémbo, as foreigners, were probably keenly aware.

Critiques of Humanitarianism

With this historical information on both Ethiopia and Rwanda in hand, it is easier to understand the criticisms made of humanitarian action in each country. These problems were certainly not isolated to each country, so this examination points to a wider look at some of the problems of humanitarianism, a look which contextualizes my own understanding of the problems of humanitarianism, and my attempts to uncover how others – the song writers in Chapter Three and the novelists in Chapter Four – have pictured alternatives.

The critiques relating to the aid to Ethiopia cover a range – from prolonging the war that caused the famine and propping up the government making that war, to the preference for subservient pleas for help from Africans and unnuanced reports on the famine. All of these problems, however, speak to the problems of ignoring the politics of the famine and preferring savior narratives to more political responses.

Woodward recognizes the problems of not probing the consequences of aid when he notes, “The conflicts themselves [between the Ethiopian government and rebels in Eritrea, and the government and rebels in Tigre] did not stop for famine: instead, relief itself became a further dimension to be manipulated by the parties involved” (178). On the one hand, “At different times, all parties directed attacks on deliveries to areas held by the other side,” while on the other hand “relief could be used positively to gain support,” as well (178). But Woodward acknowledges that some of the government strategies, aerial attacks, in particular, caused the biggest problems (178). Alex de Waal opens up this topic further, concluding that international aid which worked alongside the Ethiopian government, while saving lives, “also served to further the government’s war aims, and prolong its life” (*Evil Days 2*).

Interestingly, this very dilemma of unintended consequences is an echo of an earlier one in response to what is often considered the birth of modern humanitarianism. This “birth” is often attributed to Henry Dunant’s work in founding the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 1863. After witnessing the Battle of Solferino in 1859, Dunant was horrified by the suffering of the soldiers in the battle’s aftermath, when there was little attempt to help the wounded or dying. In response, he helped to create the ICRC with the intention of having a volunteer body to help the wounded, no matter

which side of the battle for which they might fight. But Philip Gourevitch – inspired by Linda Polman – notes that Dunant’s contemporary, Florence Nightingale, condemned some of the principles of the ICRC (“Alms Dealers”). A nurse, herself, Nightingale “was outraged by Dunant’s pitch. How could anyone who sought to reduce human suffering want to make war less costly? By easing the burden on war ministries, Nightingale argued, volunteer efforts could simply make waging war more attractive, and more probable” (Gourevitch, “Alms Dealers”). In the case of Ethiopia, the influx of humanitarian aid has been criticized for making the government’s war easier, making it last longer.

Specifically, de Waal notes that, while humanitarian efforts hoped (but usually failed) to get 5-15 kilograms of food per month to most peasants in Tigray, government militia members in Tigray were receiving 90 kilograms a month, in addition to what might be given to their families (*Famine Crimes* 124-5). De Waal even quotes Jansson, the head of the UN mission in Ethiopia, acknowledging his discomfort with this discrepancy, but being assured by “the authorities” that it was needed (*Famine Crimes* 125). But the amount of food aid being given to the militia clearly underlines how the Ethiopian government was able to take advantage of the aid to help its cause against the rebels.

Several other critiques point to the problem of the self-interest of savior narratives – a self-interest which is difficult to see but made more visible by the steps the UN took in pursuing its aid agenda. In this vein, de Waal accuses the UN mission of being complicit with the Ethiopian government, relying on a “bargain...whereby the Western humanitarians allowed Colonel Mengitsu Haile Mariam to continue with famine-creating war strategies in return to access to some of the famine-stricken people” (*Famine Crimes* 106). Furthermore, de Waal cites the UN for going so far as to help cover up the lack of aid reaching most of the non-government held regions and quieting discomfort over the government’s policy of relocating peasants (*Famine Crimes* 124). He points to UN reports which helped to convince a US presidential commission that starvation was not being used as a war policy “at this time,” which opened up far more food aid from the

US government (*Famine Crimes* 125).⁵ At the same time, by engaging with Mengitsu's government and allowing it to help guide aid, the international attention helped to legitimate that government, instead of exposing it as being a large cause of the famine, in the first place. Again, a harmful strategy was pursued in favor of keeping the savior narrative. In this vein – and a point which is highlighted by Chapters One and Two which analyze media coverage, de Waal critiques the close relationship between the media and humanitarianism – wherein the media depended so heavily on humanitarian organizations for their “news,” while humanitarian groups had a vested interest in appearing successful, in order to continue their fund-raising, and indeed, their very reason for being (*Famine Crimes* 122).

Looking at the problems from a discursive level it's interesting to note that Penrose argues that Ethiopia's status as a nation that had not been colonized, aside from a few short years under Italian rule in the 1930s, left it with a “traditional perception of [itself] as an independent, civilized nation, culturally superior to the rest of Africa,” which made its role as a petitioner for aid difficult to swallow (88). In respect to Major Dawit, the head of Ethiopia's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission during the crisis, and thus the government's main representative in dealing with outside donors, Penrose observes that his “main fault...appears to have been his manner, which was clearly thought inappropriate in one asking for aid. The implication is that not only do donors have to be told the facts, but told them by someone with a suitably deferential and supplicatory personality” (142). This highlights the very hierarchical relationship that the savior narrative presupposes. Significantly, the implication Penrose finds dovetails all too comfortably with monolithic and two-dimensional representations of Africans in savior narratives: that, in relation to Westerners, they should be subservient, because they are merely the recipients of aid. The general representations allow for little room for Africans with a long history of pride – national or personal, even – and self-sufficiency.

In addition, in querying the initial poor response to the need for aid in Ethiopia, Penrose also finds that unnuanced reports caused problems. However, with the famine consistently depoliticized and read through an emotional lens, such reports were too

⁵ This reference points to the interesting note that the US did indeed hesitate to give aid to the Ethiopian government, for fear of prolonging the war. However, the US government's fears had to do with aiding a self-proclaimed Communist government, more than burdening the Ethiopian people with a destructive war.

easily accepted. Penrose notes several reports released in 1983 or early 1984 that warned of drought or food crises across several countries in Africa – that predicted problems in up to twenty-two countries, for upwards of 150 million people (142-3). Penrose supposes the large figures were given in hopes of eliciting large responses. Instead, she argues that “The overall reports – 150 million people facing starvation – provided a completely inaccurate picture of what was happening in Africa” (143). Her language below, echoing as it does the problem of a monolithic “Africa” is significant. Supporting the idea of the “inaccurate picture,” she writes,

Whereas in some areas of the afflicted states crop production was normal, the picture given was one of an entire continent equally stricken by distress. Public opinion saw only inefficient and chaotic conditions characterizing the African continent and failed to realize that some nations were at that time making strenuous and fruitful efforts to improve their economic position and policies. A result of the undifferentiated approach was to deflect aid from those areas which were severely affected. (143)

Where Penrose sees that the “undifferentiated approach...deflect[ed] aid,” I would argue that an “undifferentiated approach” to the continent is common, and a common stumbling block to a fuller understanding of, appreciation for, the challenges and victories of peoples on the continent, far beyond the disbursement of aid, even. Treating the continent as a whole necessarily entails glossing over the histories and relationships of power that shape the daily realities of the continent. With this simplistic reading, savior narratives become more common, though still as problematic.

These many problems – extending a war and thus human suffering, legitimating destructive governmental policies, and the warped relationship between humanitarianism and the media – were not isolated to the Ethiopia famine, and they speak to larger issues with which those who support humanitarianism – or the ideals of humanitarianism – must grapple. For now, I will look at some other issues that arise from looking at how humanitarian action played out in the Rwanda situation – specifically the problems with ignoring the politics of the refugee camps and poorly conceived practices on the ground.

Interestingly, a great deal of the criticism of humanitarianism in Rwanda’s situation touches on its ignoring the politics of the situation. It is important to note that

most of the humanitarian action with regards to Rwanda came in the form of helping the refugees fleeing Rwanda in the summer of 1994, especially the more than million people who fled to the eastern Congo. As I indicated earlier, this group of refugees was accompanied by – sometimes compelled by – the defeated remnants of the Rwandan army and the government which had led the genocide. Despite the very real history and power behind this movement of people, as Philip Gourevitch observes, “The border camps turned the Rwandan crisis into a regional crisis. It remained, as it had always been, a political crisis, but the so-called international community preferred to treat it as a humanitarian crisis, as if the woe had appeared without any human rhyme or reason, like a flood or an earthquake” (*We Wish* 167-8). Shaharyar Khan, who was the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative in Rwanda, the political head of the United Nation’s Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) from July 1994 through April 1996, specifies some of the implications of this attitude: he argues that “an overall political focus...was transparently lacking between UN headquarters and the humanitarian and development agencies in Rwanda with the appalling result that the genociders in the refugee camps defiantly converted humanitarian aid into arms and military training” (216).

The suffering in the camps was real, but treating only the suffering – and not the politics of the situation – meant the camps lingered and grew more militarized. Mamdani faults France (whose Operation Turquoise “create[d] a protective corridor to save those politically responsible for the genocide in Rwanda” (*Victim* 254-5)), and the international community which did not “impose a solution,” despite the fact that Mobutu’s Zaire was plainly incapable of imposing one, itself (254). Instead, aid was funneled in – some \$2 million a day at the height of operations, with the UN’s Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance for Rwanda estimating \$1.4 billion was spent over the first nine months of this crisis (Khan 35). But even in July 1994, Khan, among others, acknowledged that the refugee camps in Zaire were under the control of the defeated Rwandan army and the militias like the Interahamwe which had led the genocide (34). Some of the humanitarian organizations, themselves, were aware of these issues: for example, Médecins Sans Frontières, Oxfam and others actually left for this reason, but their place was simply filled by other NGOs.

Even where the humanitarian organizations can be credited with trying to save lives, problems with their proliferation and ill-advised practices still become evident. Lindsey Hilsum notes the problems with what was happening on the ground, especially around Goma, in Zaire. For example, she quotes Joel Boutroue, who led the UN High Commissioner for Refugees sub-delegation in Goma as lamenting the sheer number of aid agencies in Goma, saying “You cannot coordinate 100 NGOs” (176). The same view was echoed by the Save the Children-UK branch, who decided they would do better work in Rwanda, rather than with the large group of uncoordinated agencies in Goma (Hilsum 177). The lack of coordination was amplified by short rotations, where foreign volunteers worked two-week shifts before returning home. Hilsum notes that “Experienced health workers point out that two-week rotations are expensive and inefficient and that people with no previous experience in Africa could not possibly be useful in such a short time frame” (176). In a similar vein, one Oxfam worker noted that bringing in new people took up precious plane space that could otherwise have been used for equipment (Hilsum 177).

Other Critiques of Humanitarianism

As I have argued, the problems arising from the aid to Ethiopia and Rwanda were not specific to those countries. In order to understand more of the problems of humanitarianism, depoliticization, rhetoric, and savior narratives, we can look to further sources. These include noting the promises of close attention to specifics, rather than relying on general solutions, as well as the importance of local people and knowledge. In addition, Miriam Ticktin’s work – work which emphasizes the influence of humanitarianism on discourses, as well as the problems with focusing on short-term goals over long-term change.

In his book about the recent war in Sierra Leone, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, Paul Richards raises the importance of local people, their knowledge and resources. He notes that concentrating food aid invites raids by belligerents who can sustain themselves in this manner, not only materially prolonging the war, but also undermining local initiatives toward peace (156). Instead, he calls for bolstering “peace from within” with what he calls “smart relief” (155), efforts which could include supplying farmers with seed, particularly crops that can withstand periodic abandonment during times of

fighting, and crops that are not as susceptible to wholesale destruction and/or theft (158). Similarly, Richards is writing specifically about the Sierra Leonean context – but that specificity recognizes the kind of aid people could profit from: seeds that can withstand abandonment, rather than seeds that can withstand drought, for example. This is to say that Richards’ work can underline the importance of looking at each specific situation, rather than applying a broad “solution” to any emergency in Africa. Meanwhile, Richards’ points about “peace from within” links up with de Waal’s arguments about the importance of a local political contract between people and their government to prevent famine: what is important is the centrality of local people in creating that peace or contract, rather than having a cease-fire or emergency food brought in from the outside.

The point also raises the problem of how humanitarianism tends to rely on “experts” rather than other forms of knowledge: de Waal acknowledges the problem that “the struggle against famine has become professionalized and institutionalized” – taken far from the hands of those who actually suffer famine (*Famine Crimes* 5). De Waal faults the trend (in such institutions as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and UNICEF) of “treating famine as a technical economic issue rather than a political one” (53-54). As a technical economic issue, it is again taken out of the hands of local people and put into the hands of experts.⁶ De Waal looks at this from the point of view of creating a political contract between those vulnerable to famine and those in power who can prevent the famine. But even Penrose acknowledges the importance of local knowledge in preventing famine, noting that “More consideration should be given to indigenous competence, expertise, experience and local conditions, particularly local techniques and equipment. This exhortation to ‘buy talents and products locally’ was linked to the point that local knowledge is too often and easily underestimated by both expatriates and central governments” (166). Although borrowed from divergent viewpoints, both writers agree on the importance of local participation. These observations on the importance of local people to humanitarian is highly relevant, especially because – as we will see in the examples in the next chapter – local people are

⁶ I also think of Edward Said’s *Representations of the Intellectual* here, in which he exhorts intellectuals to avoid the narrow specialization of “professionalization,” which includes the obscuring use of jargon, and instead to work toward an “amateur” level, a position “fueled by care and affection rather than by profit and selfish, narrow specialization” (82) which better allows them to “speak truth to power.”

rarely heard in the media coverage and humanitarian ads. Instead, a savior narrative, one which pictures “us” saving “them” fills the space.

From these observations about the issues with how humanitarianism plays out on the ground in different situations in Africa, it is useful to look at Miriam Ticktin’s work, *Casualties of Care*. In particular, Ticktin stresses humanitarianism’s impact on discourse. In this book, Ticktin looks at how humanitarianism plays out in the French context, where undocumented workers in France (or *sans-papiers* – literally, those without papers) must play certain roles, as sick or as victims, in order to obtain papers via humanitarian clauses to otherwise very restrictive immigration laws. Ticktin argues that these supposedly “apolitical” clauses in fact shape definitions of and perceptions of humanity in very political ways (2), an argument which points to the role of discourse – a role which my own project focuses on. For example, the point about how these “regimes of care” create a new notion of humanity is relevant because it in many ways applies to most of the African continent. When most of what the North knows about Africa is about its emergencies, its “need” for humanitarian intervention, this creates the notion of a different type of humanity in Africa – one that is different from “us,” and exists only in states of emergency. The next chapters will provide many examples of this – where Ethiopia and Rwanda are reduced to suffering by media and humanitarian representations, where local voices are generally silenced. Instead, all we see of Africa is a place in need of saving.

Ticktin also points out how humanitarianism's rise has led to a focus on short-term goals, rather than long-term ones. She points to the important difference between "caring" and "curing," where caring is associated with short-term treatment of pain, and curing with the reasons for suffering, in the first place (62). In this vein, Ticktin argues that in the "sociopolitical realm, this has meant that, rather than change the conditions in which people live and thereby improve human life on a broader scale, the focus is on alleviating pain in the present moment" (62). The problem is that the longer-term view "is displaced in favor of emergency response" (62). Indeed, Ticktin points out that "in the absence of other types of long-term structural responses (i.e. curing) coordinated or enacted by political movements, or even by institutions like the state, humanitarian NGOs end up filling in the gaps; the result is a conservative management of social and political problems, one that works to retain what is already there, rather than to change it or plan for a different future. This leaves no room to imagine a better world, no place to ground hope that spans more than the time of an emergency...care for most disenfranchised only when their suffering becomes unavoidably visible" (63).

Ticktin's points here hit the very crux of what intrigues me: the balance between long-term and short-term help/goals. Treating famine does not merely mean providing food for a few months. While that food might be critical, the underlying problems of how people came to lack food – through population policies, war strategies, and the very survival strategies of selling off seeds and farming equipment – will remain. Moreover, preventing future famines means addressing all of these and putting policies into place that would ensure the most vulnerable have recourse before it becomes too late – political contracts, as de Waal would argue. But a humanitarianism that depends on quick treatment and outside help that is not accountable for longer-term goals would struggle to achieve this. As regards a genocide, because aid organizations and international governments focused so closely on the short-term goal of helping the refugees, many failed to recognize that, as de Waal points out, few of those in the camps actually fit the legal definition of a refugee (*Famine Crimes* 195). This short-sightedness also meant that, while large amounts were spent on those across the borders, very little was spent to help rebuild Rwanda (Khan 35). Finally, the presence of so many militarized Rwandans just across the border helped to destabilize the entire region, Rwanda and the Congo, in

particular. The first and second Congo wars which soon followed are, in part, testament to the effects of these short-term goals at the cost of the long-term goals of trying to bring peace and justice to the region.

Critiques of human rights and the liberal humanist tradition

To understand some of the other problems with humanitarianism and its discourses, it is useful to look at critiques of human rights and the liberal humanist tradition from which they both spring. This move sheds light on similar problems within humanitarianism and its discourse – specifically the problems of abstraction and the promises of community, as well as how we understand questions of power and difference.

To this end, I look at Karl Marx’s critique of rights where he argues that the problem of rights stems from a split between the private individual and the public citizen. For Marx, the rights of the private individual are “the rights of egoistic man, of man separated from other men and from community.” These rights – like equality and property – are predicated on the separation of actors as opposed to the community of actors. This act of abstracting, of separating “man” and “citizen,” pits people against each other. Instead, Marx sees “human emancipation” as coming when a person has brought “man” and “citizen” back together and “has recognized and organized his ‘own power’ as social powers.” This echoes my argument for the importance of recognizing the distancing and disempowering effects of humanitarian discourses, especially in order to find ways of bridging distance and reempowering.

Looking at the plight of refugees in Europe between the world wars, Hannah Arendt also argues for the importance of community. She argues for the importance of living in a community where one’s speech will have relevance – “a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective” (293). Abstracted from such a community, Arendt finds humans uniquely vulnerable. Arendt’s point not only touches on my own about empowering people, but her observations also highlight the problems that de Waal and Ticktin make about the serious problem of humanitarianism taking the place of government – especially when, as in the case of international humanitarian organizations, these have no accountability to the people they are helping. Instead, those

people's voices and actions become less "significant" and "effective," per Arendt's words.

Finally, Carol Quillen critiques the liberal humanist tradition for abstracting and thus its failure to engage with the material circumstances of individuals enmeshed in societies. By focusing on individuals and not their social surroundings, Quillen insists that a conception of *systematic* inequality cannot be described and thus redressed. She argues that "We need instead a view of the human self that acknowledges the conditions of his/her emergence and existence, a self embedded in human relations and social structures that both constrain and enable him/her" (100). Without this sort of view, we cannot begin to understand the complexity of humans or, as Spivak would argue, that subjects can desire against their own interests (68-9). Like Marx and Arendt, Quillen points to the importance of forming alliances due to shared experience (117): finding power with and through others.

Further highlighting the divisive power of the us/them divide upon which savior narratives rely, Quillen also argues the importance of recognizing that rights tend to privilege the normative – whether in terms of national rights, of gender, of race, of class or the many other categories that are divisive today, thereby upholding various hierarchies, rather than combating them. Abolishing such differences by arguing in favor of some abstract equality requires an agreement on what the norm for that equality will be, necessarily excluding some – again pointing to some of the problems of using a rights discourse for long-term change. In addition, establishing norms implies power: the power to decide and regulate what is the norm, what is different

What these three theorists underline is the problem with abstracting – of separating actors, assuming individuals separate from each other – and thus, the potential for action when power is seen in communities, instead.

Synopsis

As Joseph Slaughter points out, these critiques of rights have become more common – and, following Wendy Brown, he asks – what next? He urges his readers to look for the "productive possibilities" of this and other such paradoxes of human rights (13). I will do the same as I proceed to construct my argument/make a case for my argument in the subsequent chapters, as follows:

Chapter One: Media and Humanitarian Ads for Ethiopia: Capitalism as Savior and Chapter Two: Media and Humanitarian Ads for Rwanda: Distancing and Disempowering will attempt to understand how the media and humanitarian representations of Ethiopia and Rwanda are crippled by the paradoxes of humanitarianism. Using photographic and textual evidence, I will show how the media and humanitarian coverage of the events trend toward answering the question “what can be done” with the too-simple “respond with humanitarianism: give money to save lives,” a trend bolstered by a divisive type of savior narrative. This is important because it highlights the ways in which both Northern audiences and Africans are disempowered and the status quo of unequal relationships is upheld.

Chapter Three: Songs for Famine Relief: From Savior Narratives to “Tears Are Not Enough” will analyze “Do They Know it’s Christmas?” by Band Aid, “We Are the World” by USA for Africa, and “Tears Are Not Enough” by Northern Lights which were written to raise money for Ethiopia. The songs are held back by the paradoxes inherent to the humanitarian field, but they also attempt to engage with the questions of difference and power. In this way, “We Are the World” and “Tears Are Not Enough,” in particular, try to envision alternatives to the depoliticized discourses of humanitarianism and savior narratives.

Finally, in Chapter Four: Novels About the Genocide: Countering Humanitarian Discourses and Imagining Alternatives, I engage with *Murambi: The Book of Bones* by Boubacar Boris Diop and *The Oldest Orphan* by Tierno Monémbo, to see what “productive possibilities” they suggest as they acknowledge the lure of depoliticized humanitarianism, but also go beyond it to picture other ways of engaging their audiences and drawing them toward action. In particular, I look at and question the categories of history and power to reveal how the novels view the genocide as politicized, thus opening more possibilities for thinking through it. By looking also at the theme of storytelling, I end the chapter by analyze the novel *Notre-Dame du Nil* by the Rwandan writer Scholastique Mukasonga to investigate how she addresses the genocide, humanitarianism, and alternatives.

Based on the evidence used to support my argument, the Conclusion: Empowering and Looking Ahead will expand my original argument, and reframe it in the

context of future relevant studies.

It is my hope that, by showcasing the inherent problems of humanitarian intervention and possible alternatives in these two case studies from Central and Eastern Africa, “A Puzzle From Within”: Problems with and Alternatives to Humanitarianism and Savior Narratives for Ethiopia and Rwanda will bring to international scholarly attention these particular and important cultural examples and thus contribute to the developing banks of knowledge in postcolonial studies, humanitarianism and development studies, as well as reconciliation, peace, and justice studies.

Chapter One: Media and Humanitarian Ads for Ethiopia: Capitalism as Savior

In the following two chapters I am going to examine the media coverage of and humanitarian ads for Ethiopia (Chapter One) and Rwanda (Chapter Two). My examination will reveal similar strands in each – an abundance of emotional appeals that bolsters the use of the Africa as Other trope, and a reliance on savior narratives, all of which limit answers to the question “what can be done?” These similarities reveal some of the power at stake in the savior narratives used, though the benefit gained differed slightly between the time of the Ethiopian famine and the Rwandan genocide, I argue. Looking at both Ethiopia and Rwanda exposes how the discourses disempower people, as well as the distinct self-interest in humanitarian discourses and savior narratives. Methodologically, I will be using primary materials from the BBC News, NBC News, the New York Times, the Washington Post, The Observer, The Guardian, and the Wall Street Journal, which are aided by historical evidence from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Mahamadou Diallo, Jeanette Eileen Jones, Kristof Haavik, and Dana Hale. Finally I use the theories of Jo Ellen Fair, Liisa Malkki, Mahmood Mamdani, Melissa Wall, and Beverly Hawk to bring my argument to fruition. I am doing this now in order to understand the many-layered problems in the discourses these sources use. By understanding the problems of the humanitarian discourses and savior narratives in Chapters One and Two, we can begin to look for alternatives in the songs I analyze in Chapters Three and the novels in Chapter Four.

In this first section on the media coverage of Ethiopia, I will also refer to earlier historical representations of Africa in order to show how far back the trend of seeing Africa as Other, of the growing us/them divide, as well as how savior narratives emerged – narratives which especially helped to justify Northern interests like the African slave trade and colonialism. These historical trends of a deep us/them divide and the North as savior of Africa are present in each of the sections of the chapter, which I argue

demonstrates that the trends can and do appear natural (as opposed to constructed and political), becoming a fallback or substitute when a deeper analysis of the situations are lacking. What's more, one of the crucial elements in this argument is that the discourses I detail curtail the types of relationships between Africa and the North that a Northern audience of them can imagine. A relationship of equals is nearly unthinkable, but rather a relationship between superior/savior/us and inferior/victim/them (and the economic corollary of this (i.e. of unequal trade)) is made to seem inevitable and natural. The audience of these pieces is left with an impression of Africa as Other, inferior, and inactive, such that saving Africa via humanitarianism from the North seems the obvious and perhaps only answer.

As I use the term "savior narrative" here, it is meant to describe the view of the world where Africa needs to be saved, in this case by the benevolent North. The narrative shifts, so that at one time Africa needs to be saved from slavery, or from famine, or from disease, or from its violent self, but the underlying assumption that it needs to be saved and that only the North can save it, is a frequent refrain we will see throughout. I'll elucidate this more as we go, but one of the premises of my argument is that the North benefits from this narrative: again, the benefit can shift, but the basic idea that the North gains something important from this narrative remains the same – be that a sense of its own benevolence, a chance for capitalism to one-up Communism, or a chance to guard profits. In this vein, the coverage of Ethiopia – both media and humanitarian appeals – continues the savior narrative, including a strain particular to the Cold War context in which the 1984/85 famine occurred. This particular narrative put the generosity of capitalism at the center of the story, pushing Ethiopia to the sidelines of the story purportedly about it. By the time of the Rwandan genocide in 1994, the Cold War had ended and some change or insecurity was inevitable, so the savior narratives created by the media and humanitarian appeals in covering Rwanda functioned to uphold the place of the North as savior and Africa as victim in the midst of a changing world order. In many ways, the savior narrative – while purportedly about Africa – is mostly a story about the North, for the North. The important points about this type of savior narrative is that it can vary, but the North gains something from it, as the hierarchical relationship upon which it relies is upheld.

Media Coverage of Ethiopia

In discussing the media coverage of Ethiopia, an obvious and important place to start is with the two news segments by Michael Buerk for the BBC from October 23 and 24, 1984⁷. These were some of the first times the famine in Ethiopia broke into the mainstream news, on the one hand, and on the other, they directly inspired Bob Geldof to start the process which resulted in the song “Do They Know it’s Christmas?”, one of the central pieces of the next chapter. In addition, NBC News in the United States picked up Buerk’s pieces and aired parts of them in early November: this speaks to how central the Buerk pieces were to the public where Ethiopia was concerned. The original Buerk piece was eight and half minutes long, the second was almost seven and a half minutes, and the NBC Nightly News originally showed a four and a half minute segment, apparently taking footage from both of the BBC segments, with follow-up on both the Nightly News and their Today Show.

A condensed version of Michael Buerk’s BBC segments (which I will detail below), the NBC and the BBC coverage put Ethiopia in the spotlight for their respective countries, but they relied on depoliticized tropes that built savior narratives. The written description from NBC’s archives of the video they first aired on the Ethiopian famine captures many of problems with the media coverage of Ethiopia.

MAP FEATURES AFRICA WITH ETHIOPIA HIGHLIGHTED WITH NEEDY
CHILDS FACE SUPERED ON MAP. IN KOREM; HUNGRY PEOPLE SEEN.
AILING BABIES & CRYING YOUNGSTERS SEEN...SICK & DYING
PEOPLE SEEN. PEOPLE CARRY DEAD PEOPLE. MOURNERS STAND
OVER BODIES. BUERK DESCRIBES DESPERATION OF HUNGRY
PEOPLE. PEOPLE PLEAD FOR HELP. RELIEF WORKER EXAMINES
BABY. NURSE CLAIRE BETSCHINGER SAYS MANY HUNGRY PEOPLE
ARE TOO SICK TO CARE FOR BUT OTHERS CAN BE HELPED. FOOD
DISTRIBUTION TO SELECTED PEOPLE SEEN. LENIN POSTER OVER
CROWD OF HUNGRY PEOPLE. MALNOURISHED BABY SEEN. BUERK
SAYS PEOPLE SHOULD BE HELPED & ETHIOPIAS RADICAL POLITICS

⁷ These two segments are available on the BBC website.
From October 23, 1984: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8315248.stm>
From October 24, 1984: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8316830.stm>

SHOULD BE ARGUED LATER. TRUCKS POUR GRAIN INTO STORAGE BINS. STARVING MAN PICKS AT STRAY KERNELS OF GRAIN DROPPED ON GROUND. BUERK SAYS FOR MANY HUNGRY PEOPLE IT IS TOO LATE BUT SOMEONE HAS TO DO SOMETHING.

For example, the emphasis on “hungry people,” “ailing babies & crying youngsters,” and “mourners” all point to the pervasive use of emotional appeals, appeals which especially paint Ethiopians as victims and undergird savior narratives. Meanwhile, the reference to the “relief worker” and “nurse Claire Betschinger” make clear that salvation will come in the form of aid workers and foreigners – framing the savior narrative further. Indeed, the actions of the nurse and relief workers are contrasted to the seeming helplessness of the Ethiopians; Ethiopians are portrayed as hungry and ailing, as mourning and desperate. Their actions appear confined to receiving aid, pleading for help, or picking for “stray kernels dropped on the ground.” This inaction seems mirrored in the lack of information on Ethiopia, itself: the only reference to Ethiopia’s history or current politics are in the form of the “Lenin poster” mentioned and Buerk’s comments that “Ethiopia[’]s radical politics should be argued later.” These details speak both to the lack of analysis of Ethiopia’s complex politics, as well as to how the media framed the story of aid to Ethiopia in the frame of the Cold War, with communism as the problem and capitalism as the solution. Overall, the written description outlines the themes for my analysis of the media coverage of Ethiopia: first, that Ethiopia was portrayed as the Other, using many different techniques. Both building off of this and feeding into this picture of Ethiopia as Other is the emergence of a savior narrative, wherein Ethiopia needs to be saved by the North. Reading these trends closely will reveal not only how they limit the kind of response an audience could have, but also what the North stands to gain from this type of narrative.

Much of the media uses explicit and implicit emotional appeals, often at the cost of intellectual appeals, a strategy which implicitly promotes an emotional response over an intellectual one and reinforces an us/them divide. That the news appealed most to emotion over intellect is in fact visible in a quote from James Sheffield of UNICEF in a New York Times article about people calling to donate money: “A lot of people who call don't even know where Ethiopia is,” he said. “They don't know how to spell it. But they're

really horrified by the tragedy” (Berger). The quote speaks to the idea that the overuse of emotional appeals narrows the type of reaction the audience will generally have so that the savior narrative becomes the obvious and seemingly only narrative available.

In the Buerk pieces, this reliance on emotional appeal is visible in many places: in the first night’s broadcast, Buerk presents a scene of mourning where grieving relatives bring the dead from the day and night before to be accounted for and buried. This section includes several images of the bodies covered, including dead mothers shrouded together with their dead children, and then film of those family and friends mourning the lost. This segment accounts for about ninety seconds in the piece, which, again, was about eight and a half minutes total, thus emphasizing the grief. Similar grief is witnessed in the second night’s presentation, where, in a feeding camp, Buerk notes that a man has just died, with film of the man’s daughter, rocking with grief. Many other scenes focus on malnourished children – sometimes just on the children, sometimes as children are being weighed as a means of judging their growth, or lack of growth. At one point, Buerk observes softly that one of the children had died while the crew was filming. Life in Ethiopia is seen as frail and in danger, especially in contrast to the living and watchful and benevolent gaze of Northerners – both those filming and those viewing afterwards. The emotional impact of these scenes, and others, is immense – even nearly thirty years after they were filmed. Yet, while gripping, the concentration of emotional appeals, especially taken with other us/them divides I will describe later, limits the response from audiences.

Again, the written description from their archives of the NBC segment on Ethiopia captures how pervasive the emotional appeals were in these media examples. The description of the four and a half minute segment is striking since nearly every phrase evokes an emotional response: “crying youngsters,” “hungry people,” “ailing babies.” The fact that a “needy child[’s] face” is superimposed on the map of Ethiopia only underscores the notion that Ethiopia is reduced to nothing but famine, need, and misery – a reduction which deepens the divide between us and them. It is clear in the description that the piece concentrated many of the emotional appeals from the BBC footage – with the same consequence for limiting the kind of response from an audience.

Print media would have a hard time mirroring this exact amplitude, but they could still avail themselves to a variety of techniques that echo similar emotional appeals. Many articles related a variety of bleak statistics on the malnourished, predictions of death, and food needed. For example, one article by Clifford D. May on the need for food aid cites many bleak statistics: victims who “will require huge shipments of emergency food supplies for at least a year and possibly beyond,” that “Up to seven million Ethiopians are said to be ‘at risk of starvation,’” and that “Many others will suffer the effects of prolonged malnutrition,” for example, and that children are most vulnerable. The same article also channels audience reactions through relief workers in stating, “Relief workers who have toured many camps say conditions range from grim to hellish.” The sentence invites readers to see the situation as anything from “grim to hellish,” as well, since the statistics surrounding it reflect the same emotional range.

It is important to note that a great many articles appealed to their audience’s emotions by using children. Notably, when photos accompanied text stories, they most frequently included children – a clear method of appealing to an audience’s emotions. In writing about the use of pictures of refugees, Liisa Malkki notes the prominence of pictures of women and children and argues that such images are used “when our intent is to address the very heart of our humanity” (111). This use of children in the media coverage is complicated by historical references to Africa which reduce it to a child-like continent. For example, Hegel dismisses Africa as “the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of conscious history is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night” (quoted in Mamdani 78). In the context of calling Africa unhistorical, labeling Africa the land of “childhood” isn’t supposed to indicate innocence so much as immaturity, especially in comparison to the mature North.

I would argue that the use of children goes beyond images to encompass text, as well. For example, one article in the Guardian led with the headline “10m children facing death,” and opened with the line “More than 10 million children are likely to die in Africa by the end of next year because of the drought, according to relief experts” (Lean 7). These grim words are accompanied by a picture of “three orphans” who were receiving food aid. But the article is otherwise about a conference on the environment and development. While the conference concentrated on the desertification that was

aiding the famine, the title and leading paragraph make no reference to the conference – leading with the emotional appeal, instead.

Thus, in addition to appealing to emotions, this emphasis on children in the media coverage of Ethiopia risks infantilizing the problem of the famine: presenting it as a problem of and for children risks making the adults also at risk appear as childish. Given the rhetoric of the “child”-like nature of Africans, this possibility is particularly troublesome. In addition, while adults in the audience may pity the children, they would not expect to connect with children intellectually, widening the us/them gap when so many of those Ethiopians seen are children.

This us/them gap is further extended by ways of making Ethiopia appear exotic or Other to a Northern audience. For example, Melissa Wall notes that when writers refer to the Rwandan genocide in Biblical terms, it makes the genocide appear otherwise inexplicable, or “unfathomable to rational, Western minds” (268), thus making Africa far different from “us.” In other words, Wall argues an audience would understand Biblical references to be ancient, often inexplicable or irrational. To use them to explain Rwanda or Ethiopia implies that Rwanda and Ethiopia are ancient and often inexplicable or irrational.

Skewed or partial representations of Africa

And references comparing Ethiopia to the Bible abound: the quote from above where a relief worker referred to relief camps as “hellish” falls into this category (May Nov 18 1984). Importantly, this quote only echoes language heard in the opening lines of Buerk’s BBC report. There, too, workers in Ethiopia call the camps “the closest thing to hell on earth.” Such references not only make Ethiopia appear far different from the North, they also undermine the possibility of acting against the famine.⁸ Buerk also refers to the scene in Korem as a “Biblical famine,” again exoticizing the problem.

This notion of Ethiopia as being ancient or timeless also has resonances in historical representations of Africa. In particular, as even the quote above by Hegel makes clear, Africa was often depicted as being “beyond the day of conscious history” (quoted in Mamdani 78). Elsewhere, Hegel writes: “At this point we leave Africa, not to

⁸ I will return to this point later, but such examples challenge action by both Ethiopians and Northerners.

mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit” (quoted in Mamdani 298). This idea of Africa as outside of history is significant in how it aligns with Brown’s definition for depoliticization of leaving out history. That’s to say, one can observe again the continuity of seeing Africa as not being part of history from at least Hegel through the crises in Ethiopia and Rwanda. Then-French president Sarkozy’s comments in Dakar, Senegal in 2007 only serve to reinforce how embedded this concept is in relationship to Africa: “The tragedy of Africa is that the Africa has not fully emerged into history” (quoted in Ticktin 51). Instead, this “unhistorical” Africa is, according to Hegel, “still involved in the conditions of mere nature” (quoted in Mamdani 298), a comparison that has also been repeated many times since. The significance of this pits history against nature, and Hegel’s “development” in the North against a cyclical movement of time in Africa. Again, these terms resonate with eerie strength in descriptions of Ethiopia and Rwanda’s crises.

A look at essays by Mahamadou Diallo and Jeanette Eileen Jones point to the ways in which aligning Africa with nature both pictured Africa as “outside of time” and as in contrast to the civilized North. The examples from their essays will demonstrate that referring to an ahistorical Ethiopia, one subject to cyclical time instead of progressive time, exoticizes the country and makes connections between “us” and “them” harder to imagine. The essays by Diallo and Jones also present evidence that this trend of picturing an ahistorical, exotic Africa is an old one – not unique to the present humanitarian discourse.

Mahamadou Diallo’s essay “The ‘Literature of Empire’ and the African Environment” looks at books by British writers from the late 19th through the early 20th century, including H. Rider Haggard, Joseph Conrad, Gerald Hanley, and Evelyn Waugh, among others. Diallo focuses on how they wrote about the African environment. The examples that Diallo presents make clear how Africa’s environment was perceived as deeply Other – primitive, dangerous, even corrupting. This depiction is important because nature is seen as less than civilization – an important point since Africans are seen as subject to nature, not masters of it – all of which put Africans as Other and as needing help from the North.

On the one hand, Diallo notes the repetition of the idea of Africa containing the “primeval” forest, or of the continent as a “living example of the early stages of creation...where all things have been standing still” (106). While somewhat mild on the surface, we have only to recall the strand of seeing Africa as “out of history” to see how this trend bolsters it. For that matter, the emphasis on an untamed nature would also support the nature vs. history divide, where nature is cyclical, but history entails progress – thus again excluding Africa from the idea/ideal of progress. Indeed, Diallo notes that “the notion of evolution is rampant” in the examples, with Africa as the “yardstick for evolution,” since it has not progressed at all (118). Diallo specifically does not look at the role of African people in this literature he analyzes, but one can add to his argument the idea that the nature of Africa is so strong that Africans have not been able to subjugate it – a cornerstone for “civilization” (as we will see below). Thus, again, Europeans are called for to tame this environment for civilization.

Diallo also notes the effect that this African environment has on Europeans – supposedly bringing out either the best or the worst in them, though Diallo notes that the successful European is generally overlooked in favor of the worst (114). This is in keeping with his argument that “the obvious aim is to expose the evil side of Africa” (114). But this notion that Africa so “beats” Europeans down, that it can corrupt even them, only bolsters the argument that it needs the North for a cure.

In this context, Diallo concludes about the writers:

Usually happy and proud to belong in a powerful, conquering nation, they used their talents as writers to, among other things, depict a negative picture of the conquered lands, this for two main goals: firstly to justify the domination itself (a bad environment in a savage land needs to be transformed for the better by the providential hand of civilization); secondly, they were hoping to bring out ‘their’ positive image against the negative one that they were making of Africa. (122)

By examining the role of nature, we see a savior narrative based on Africa as Other emerging as a justification for colonialism, as well as a self-serving, self-aggrandizing, self-congratulatory refrain.

In her essay, “‘In Brightest Africa’: Naturalistic Constructions of Africa in the American Museum of Natural History, 1910-1936,” Jeanette Eileen Jones demonstrates

that two seemingly different discourses of Africa share the same underlying assumption of Africa as uncivilized and primitive; implied in this assumption is the need for the North to save Africa from this fate. Jones tells the story behind the 1936 opening of New York City's American Museum of Natural History's (AMNH) Akeley Memorial Hall of African Mammals, named for naturalist Carl Akeley. In order to understand the exhibit's and naturalist's vision of "Brightest Africa" – and the drawbacks of this vision – Jones recounts the pervasive image of "Darkest Africa" against which Akeley was reacting. For example, Jones comments that many people at the hall's opening "awaited confirmation of their knowledge of the so-called 'Dark Continent,' gleaned from the pages of H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* and Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan series, and viewed through the lenses of Cherry Kearton's wildlife films" (195). Akeley's desire was that "African Hall [would be] scientific proof that 'Deepest Darkest Africa' was nothing more than the figment of two imaginations fused; those of Henry Morgan Stanley...and Joseph Conrad" (196). According to Jones, "It is in Stanley's description of the Central African forest where many of the tropes associated with 'Darkest Africa' emerge (197). Jones quotes Stanley to underline the vision of "Darkest Africa" as a place of danger, disease, impenetrability, and ruthless nature (197-98) – all of which set Africa apart from the North as uncivilized and primitive, as "Other" needing the civilizing influence of the North.

Jones argues that Carl Akeley found these representations of Africa as the dark continent unworthy, so he sought to counter them – but ended by replicating some of the same stereotypes. In order to counter the "Darkest Africa" theme, Akeley's own book on East Africa was titled *In Brightest Africa*, while his wife, Mary Jobe Akeley, "titled her book on the Congo expedition *Congo Eden*" (198). It was this vision of "Brightest Africa" that guided the AMNH's African Hall – but Jeanette Eileen Jones concludes that this vision, too, served to justify colonialism. On the one hand, Jones notes that when the hall opened, it contained many animal specimens, but no human subjects, and she suggests that "The inclusion of African objects and cultural profiles of Africans may have broadened the scope of the museum's images of Africa" (203). But even this would "not remedy the limited image of Africa that Akeley embraced" – because it was an image of Africa as "a timeless, unchanged land – a place where modernity and civilization had not

yet triumphed” (203). For example, Jones asks why the museum chose not to include an anthropological hall, as well as a zoological one, as had been done with the North American wing (204). In answer, she argues that “The presence of whites in America seems to have rescued the continent from the designation ‘primitive,’ by bringing it into a narrative of modernity and civilization – into history” (204). But Africa didn’t enter the same trajectory, didn’t enter history, because, with few exceptions, “Europeans did not envision colonizing Africa on a permanent basis, unlike British colonization of America” (204). So, by choosing to emphasize Africa’s naturalness in the museum exhibit, the “Darkest Africa” idea of the continent as uncivilized survived: “Describing Africa as ‘natural’ was synonymous with characterizing it as ‘primitive’ or ‘uncivilized,’ for in Western thought the mark of civilization is the ability to subdue and conquer nature” (205). This is a very striking example because, while “Brightest” and “Darkest Africa” seem so different on one level, Jones’ conclusion that they shared the same premise of Africa as outside of history, as uncivilized, underlines the pervasiveness of this image and how it served to justify outside intervention.

The emphasis on nature in both Diallo’s work and Jones’ underscores the notion that Africa and Africans were seen as closely tied to nature, in a negative way. As seen in both of their works, Africans were seen as not having “conquered” their natural surroundings – thus implying the need for Northern help to do that. What’s more, nature is also part of other dichotomies so that, by association, Africans were assumed to be less rational, a notion that also highlights the serious drawback of the lack of rational appeals in the media, that we have already seen. By being subject to nature, rather than masters of history, Africans were also seen as being without history – tied to cyclical time, rather than in a trend of progress. This becomes particularly relevant when the media and humanitarian ads imply that Ethiopia’s famine or Rwanda’s genocide were cyclical, natural, and/or inevitable: those tropes from 1984/5 and 1994 fit in all too well with the historical tropes we have seen above.

To return to the media coverage of Ethiopia’s famine, their exoticization of Ethiopia went beyond referring to Ethiopia in Biblical terms. For example, as the long scene of mourning in the first BBC segment is drawing to a close, Buerk notes that “by Korem standards, it wasn’t a bad night” since only thirty-seven died. This statement

makes rampant death appear the standard for Korem, even though the number of deaths was surely an exception from its normal state, as much as it would be an exception in most places. Instead, Korem is made to seem as simply a place of death – unlike the North.

One more aspect of making Ethiopia appear exotic is in the lack of ordinary Ethiopians who are quoted in the news pieces. Fair argues that the media coverage had a discourse of aid giver and aid recipient – meaning the governments and organizations giving aid and the governments receiving aid, and that “The discourse of the people [Ethiopian, in this case] appears less frequently than the other [discourses]. This discourse of the African poor, of the hungry and of the refugees, is really about them, not by them” (116). Fair goes on, “Of the 134 stories about U.S. food aid sent to Africa, only a handful of stories used as sources the common person, Africans unconnected to governments or relief agencies” (116). Again, the impact of this is multiple, but one of them is that the audience is given very little possibility of bridging the us/them difference. Instead, most of the stories in which ordinary Ethiopians appear tend to “ground the story in an exoticized Africa distant from the West” (116).

In this vein, though they appear in footage and photos, few Ethiopians outside of the government and relief agencies speak. Again, this infantilizes the famine since, like good children, apparently Ethiopians are expected to be seen, but not heard. Importantly, Ethiopians are not given a chance to put words to their pictures, words to their own experiences which are being presented to audiences thousands of miles away. Without voices, the people in the picture are more easily taken to be Other, to be objects of pity: as we have seen, these trends of representing Africans have long histories, and these representations do not counter the tendency. In addition, those Ethiopians who are photographed or filmed are almost never named. This reinforces an us/them divide in many ways – first, Ethiopians are kept from being seen as individuals: they are either part of a mass of starving humanity, or – if pictured individually – they are meant to represent that mass. Second, without names or occupations acknowledged, an audience would have a hard time connecting with an Ethiopian.

Finally, a close look at the BBC pieces also reveals another problem: even when Ethiopians are included in footage, they appear more passive than the white Northerners

interviewed – another way of seeing Africans as Other in the coverage, as in need of saving. In the BBC television pieces, this is plainly visible since, in fact, there are no interviews with ordinary Ethiopians in the two segments. Instead, there are interviews with the Save The Children (STC) head in Britain, with a (white) “Anglo-Swiss” nurse on location in Ethiopia, and with a white MSF doctor on location. There are two potential exceptions to this in the second night’s segment, when a black nun and a black man (presumably a doctor, given his stethoscope) are seen – but neither is named, unlike the three white people. What’s more, the words associated with the two black people in the segment are significant: Buerk notes that the nun “can do nothing but watch the situation get worse,” while the man asks, “what can we do?”

Both are seen as virtually helpless and/or hopeless, and thus implicitly as passive because: what can be done? And this is in contrast to the three white people interviewed: the STC head comments that the famine was forecast eighteen months before, while he is angry over the lack of response from the governments in response: implied is the action of forecasting the famine and notifying world governments. The MSF doctor and Red Cross nurse, while faced with seemingly overwhelming problems, are both seen as acting – the doctor talking of giving injections and of being, not a politician, but a witness, while the nurse notes her role in having to choose those who will receive medical attention. What they share is again a more active role, which stands in contrast to the passive one seen in the Africans.

Overall, when Ethiopians are so rarely heard from, are seen as children and as passive, and when their only role seems to be to receive food aid, then it is very difficult for an audience to picture any other kind of relationship that could exist between “us” and “them.”

For that matter, there is little on Ethiopia itself: it is characterized as a place of famine, drought, and war, with a Marxist government celebrating its ten-year anniversary. Though the media mention the wars – largely in the context of explaining the difficulty aid workers or journalists have in reaching areas and/or as one of the causes of the famine – there is not insight into what types of wars they are. Instead, the brief mention tends to simply normalize war as a way of life for Ethiopia: another example of distancing “us” from “them.” And though such articles recognize that the Marxist

government is only ten years old, there isn't mention of the governments that came before. Ethiopia's unique history of being one of two countries not colonized during the "Scramble for Africa" is not mentioned. Selassie's celebrity in the North in the WWII era, when Italy did invade Ethiopia and Selassie was in exile in Britain, is also unmentioned. When the 1970s famine is mentioned, it seems more predecessor, and an indication of the cyclical (read non-historical) nature of famine in Africa, not as one of the catalysts to social change, and a regime change that ended Selassie's more than thirty years in power.

Savior Narratives

Indeed, making the story more about the North than Ethiopia is also evident in the wording near the beginning of the second of the BBC segments: the opening commentary notes that the, in the Tigre province, the civil war there "makes aid work extremely difficult." In essence, this puts "aid work" at the center of the story, rather than the survival of the Ethiopians who live there. It is not that life, farming, etc are "made difficult" by the civil war, but that aid work is difficult. This is a story about "us" saving "them" – a version of a savior narrative clearly emerges.

To see this savior narrative, it's also instructive to note how both of the BBC pieces end: with mention of, or interviews with, relief agencies. This, in essence, channels much of the energy produced from the pieces, themselves, to humanitarian action. Somewhat mitigated by the mention of the MPs who were urging the EEC to increase aid, and the scolding by the STC head of governments for not acting sooner, when agencies first warned of famine. But overall, this points to the need for "us" to save "them," especially via humanitarianism.

These many examples of Ethiopia – seen as Other and exotic, distant from "us" and in need of saving, examples which also often emphasize humanitarianism as the only response available – all point to the importance of savior narratives in the media coverage of Ethiopia. To understand the pervasive use of savior narratives, and particularly how the narratives reveal what the North gains from them, we can turn to several examples of savior narratives from history.

By the time of the Enlightenment, Kristof Haavik argues that the savior narrative was already emerging. Haavik observes that French Enlightenment writers were ready to

admit their own knowledge of Africa was incomplete, but in spite of this – or perhaps because of it – a version of the savior narrative grew, one which depended on an us/them divide and assumed the “us” would need to save the “them.” Haavik points to Fenelon’s 1699 work *Telemaque* as an example where Africans are seen as “shepherds as savage as the country itself” – but savages who could be “uplifted” by “the beneficent presence of an educated European” (129-30). Thus savage is contrasted against educated European – terms that would continue to resonate, even as – or, again, perhaps because - interactions with Africans expanded and the North needed to understand them.

The slave trade elicited a complex set of contradictory attitudes – from condemning it to upholding it based on us/them assumptions reified by “science.” In relation to ending slavery, a savior narrative with regards to Africa appears, relying strongly on a continued us/them divide. Thus, Hegel called for a gradual emancipation – all with the underlying assumption that exposure to the civilized North would allow Africans to “mature,” readying them for freedom (Buck-Morss 859). Indeed, this savior narrative is more widespread and even underpinned contradicting attitudes toward slavery. In her book, titled *Races on Display: French Representations of Colonized Peoples, 1886-1940*, Dana S. Hale notes two of these different attitudes toward slavery:

In the early nineteenth century, many western abolitionists supported the end of the slave trade and plantation slavery as a means of ensuring that black Africans could be properly educated in an environment free from abuse and hypocrisy.

Slave-owners argued just the opposite; they believed that the Caribbean plantation was an ideal setting in which to convert and civilize Africans. (23)

Though opposed in their opinion on slavery, the two viewpoints shared the assumption that Africans needed to be civilized – saved – by Europeans. This simply underlines the way the savior narrative became so entrenched, and the idea of African as “Other” upon which it relied.

With the increased interaction between Europe (the North) and Africa through colonization, representations increased: the purposes or consequences of the representations also increased, sometimes diverging, sometimes contradicting, but the general trend of seeing Africa as Other and – quite related – as needing to be saved by the North – these all continued. In essence, the justifications for slavery became justifications

for colonialism. Haavik also notes that the contradictory views by Enlightenment thinkers serve as the basis for colonialism: “colonial ventures would be justified by the endlessly repeated mantra of ending the slave trade and spreading civilization. In this way those who were at least in one sense Africa’s first defenders against European depredation would provide the excuse for full-scale invasion and conquest a century later” (132-3). Important to both of these is the notion that Africa, uncivilized and primitive, subject to “absolute” slavery in Hegel’s opinion, is in need of the North to make it civilized, advanced, and free. Thus we see how the North was able to profit from an early version of this savior narrative – both through the slave trade, and then through colonial justification.

To understand how colonialism was justified with savior narratives, we can look at examples given by Dana Hale. In her book, Hale examines ways in which France used displays to bolster colonialism, both at home and abroad, a study which allows us to think about what France gained from the us/them and savior narratives. Specifically, Hale “explores France’s imperial identity by examining the uses of racial ideas in French world’s fairs, colonial expositions, and commercial trademarks” (2). Hale’s work “highlights two images of Africa – as a primitive region controlled by many vicious rulers and as a rich land with tremendous economic and labor potential,” findings which resonate with other works on Africa in the popular press of France, and leads to the idea of “a role for France as the salvational power that would provide development and stability” (3). Of course “salvational power” is another way of saying “savior narrative,” while Hale’s point about Africa seen as a “rich land” points to France’s strong economic interest in sustaining such a narrative. Though Hale finds that the savior narrative shifted, particularly following World War I, the essence of the idea of saving Africa through colonialism remained the same.

These historical examples show just how varied savior narratives can be. To return to media coverage of Ethiopia’s famine, an essay by Jo Ellen Fair reveals a central savior narrative in the media coverage of the Ethiopian famine, one that will help to further explain the media coverage of Ethiopia, as well as to frame my reading of the humanitarian ads for Ethiopia in the next section. In her essay, “Are We Really the World? Coverage of U.S. Food Aid in Africa, 1980-1989,” Fair reads the *New York*

Times' coverage of the U.S. food aid to Africa in the 1980s (which includes the Ethiopian famine of 1984/5, but also before and after) and concludes that the coverage was, at heart, a story about the U.S. and capitalism's "moral victory" of saving Africa. Building on this, I would argue that the media coverage constructed savior narratives, with capitalism as one of the saviors, especially by using a variety of familiar us/them dichotomies. Fair's reading helps to highlight just what the North had to gain in promoting a savior narrative in the Ethiopia story.

Fair points out that "in the ideological environment of the 1980s, Africa was a site for superpower struggle for influence," with the U.S. competing with the U.S.S.R. (113). In arguing that the U.S. is the focus, she points, for example, to how many of the stories were datelined in the U.S., and not abroad (114), and looks at how much more coverage there is of the discourse of what she refers to as the "aid givers" than of the "aid recipients," a tendency we saw above. To argue that the North was pictured as "saving" Africa, Fair notes the importance of the "discourse of crisis" in the New York Times' coverage (114). By insisting on a time of crisis, the coverage suggests the need for saving, and underlines that this savior role is appropriate for the United States since it was "an action...the Soviets could not or would not undertake" (115). Fair finds many other instances of how the *Times* coverage emphasized the Cold War. For instance, she looks at how the media reported the causes of the famine: "According to the *Times* sources, Ethiopia's famine was caused by the country's failed Soviet-inspired collective farming system, corruption, and mismanagement" (Fair 116), explanations which emphasized Communism over the complex Ethiopian politics. Fair also notes that, in the rare stories where ordinary Ethiopians are interviewed, farmers are the most frequent type interviewed, and this is often a chance for the story to critique the Marxist Ethiopian government for its role in farming and obstructing Western imports (116). In the end, Fair concludes that, "Africa was merely a context for East and West opposition. Africa was a site of moral victory for the United States" (117). She further observes, "The implications for Africa's media image – or more broadly, the construction of social reality about Africa – is that Africa becomes a secondary player in events that occur within its own boundaries. Africa is reduced to just another trouble spot or basket case where Soviets and Americans vie for power. And Africans are precluded from defining

events that affect them and from positioning Africa on its own terms within the world community” (117).

Fair is not alone in her critique of the media. Robert Kaplan observed, “The media were more interested in the politics of relief agencies than in the politics of Ethiopia” (7). De Waal notes that, “The entire war was seen through relief lens” (*Famine Crimes* 126), while Jansson writes that, “On reflection, I believe that the reporting on Ethiopia in the Western press was greatly coloured by hostility towards its Marxist regime” (69). Penrose, too, writes, “At this global level the impact of the media was extraordinary, although many deplored its sensationalizing approach and its failure to take advantage of the opportunity to educate and analyse” (155). But she goes on, “What should be realized is that this process was fairly arbitrary. There is no guarantee that humanitarian stories will always be given such prominence. October 1984 was a relatively uneventful time in Europe, there were no important stories already commanding the headlines” (156).

And for savior narratives to work well, they tend to rely on an us/them divide – in this case, to continue to depict Africa as Other. This is important because humanitarianism, wearing a mask of neutrality, becomes a way for capitalism, and capitalist states, to legitimate themselves, at the cost of Africans. Within these structures, promoting capitalism becomes the priority over understanding and addressing the complex problems within Ethiopia: the war for secession in Eritrea, the civil war in Tigre, the urban/rural divide, and so on. This is another version of short-term gains over long-term ones, of treating symptoms rather than the root causes, and of accepting surface-level analysis because it meshes with one’s world view rather than probing for deeper understanding – which, in this case is also a version of connecting emotionally but not intellectually, as well. All of this also points to how the apparent neutrality of capitalism’s humanitarianism covers the very vested self-interest in sending the food aid to Ethiopia in these circumstances – appoint which becomes more clear in the next section. But the self-interest is visible when, as Fair does, one considers the predominance of Northern voices over Southern in the coverage. Or, again as Kaplan concludes, “The media were more interested in the politics of relief agencies than in the politics of Ethiopia” (7).

In characterizing Ethiopia in these narrow terms, of famine, drought and war, without reference to other histories, how else can it be thought of? By exoticizing Ethiopia and making it Other, and then by showing Northerners as active in saving “them,” the media makes the story of Ethiopia’s famine into a story about the goodness of the capitalist North helping the victims of African Marxism, a tendency we will see further emphasized in examining the ads for humanitarianism in the next section. What my analysis has made clear is that the trends of seeing Africa as Other and of a savior narrative which pictures Africa in need of saving by the North have precedents in previous centuries, but were widely used in the media coverage of Ethiopia. These trends were particularly useful in shifting the story of the famine from being about Ethiopia to being about the victory of capitalism. The next section will reveal how humanitarian ads run to raise money for Ethiopia continued the same trends of Africa as Other and savior narratives, and made the interest of the savior narratives in capitalism even more evident.

Humanitarian Ads for Ethiopia

Advertising to raise money for humanitarian intervention in Ethiopia exploded after the BBC piece, with a far larger numbers of ads in November and December 1984 in each the New York Times, The Washington Post, The Observer, and The Guardian than any other months. If, as I have argued, humanitarianism is a form of savior narratives, then it is not terribly surprising to find themes of savior narratives in ads run to solicit donations for Ethiopia. The savior narratives come through especially through some familiar techniques of exoticizing, adding to discourse of crisis, by appealing to emotions, and using children’s images. But many of the ads go further and reveal the ways in which capitalism, more widely, or individual and organizations more specifically, stand to gain from these savior narratives.

Of course, as I have said in the Introduction, much of the humanitarian impulse – to help those in need – is laudable. Along these lines, some of the ads for Ethiopia do challenge some of the depoliticizing discourse and the status quo and invite more of an active response from an audience, even, sometimes, a relationship with those being helped.

To begin with, several ads – for example some for CARE (9 Dec 1984), for Oxfam (23 Dec 1984) – underline that the problem of famine was not, at that time,

restricted simply to Ethiopia but was more widespread. This is something of a double-edged sword: acknowledging the breadth of hunger lends itself to seeing Africa, as a whole, as a continent of crisis. But by specifying the countries which were experiencing food problems, the ads also can educate their audience and, when done carefully, can break past the problem of referring to the continent as a whole (as a place of problems), instead of being specific.

In addition, some smaller organizations tried to spell out the problems facing the region more clearly. A 21 February 1985 ad run by Eritrean Relief Committee points to the specific problems faced by Eritreans – people affected by drought, but also the on-going war for liberation from Ethiopia. By referencing the annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia and pointing out the challenge most humanitarian organizations face from the Ethiopian government in getting aid to Eritreans, the ad challenges any simple reading of the situation. The ad should also be read as supporting Eritrea against Ethiopia – it refers to the annexation as “illegal” and accuses Ethiopia of seizing food aid meant for Eritrea, while the Ethiopia army “continues its campaigns to suppress our struggle for freedom” – but this only makes its own agenda a little more clear, a little more honest. What’s more, the Eritrean ad’s use of “us and our” – a sign that the organization is from Eritrea – can in some ways be read to invite readers in – as opposed to the frequent use of “them” and “you” in other ads, which tends to separate the reader from those in Ethiopia.

In addition, the Relief Society of Tigray posted one ad of its own in the Washington Post (2 Dec 1984) and partnered with War on Want (10 Feb 1984) to post one in The Observer, both emphasizing that they were working to provide food to areas “outside [Ethiopian] government control.” While the ads offer little more information, they highlight the idea that there was more to the story of famine that can invite its audience to ask questions.

But, as I have indicated, many more of the ads play into the problems of savior narratives, in ways that are strikingly similar to the issues of the media coverage. So for instance, many of the ads contain no pictures or photos at all. But among those that do, the vast majority picture children. Again, this can be read as emotional appeal, as well as a practice that tends to infantilize the situation. Again echoing the media, there is one ad that references the “drought moving across Africa like the plague” (International

Christian Relief 15 Dec 1984), a phrase which brings to mind the Biblical language to describe the famine. In addition to exoticizing the famine, the phrase lumps all of Africa under the umbrella of plague and drought. All of these – drought, plague, famine of Biblical proportions – stand in opposition to what the North sees of itself, a strong reminder of the us/them dichotomy. Many other ads add to what Fair calls the “discourse of crisis” by using phrases like “Emergency in Ethiopia S.O.S.,” (Oxfam 13 Sept 1984) or “Ethiopia: Please help us now!” (Oxfam 4 Nov 1984). The sense of urgency evoked in such ads contributes to the idea that Ethiopia must be saved – and, of course, the North must do the saving. The Oxfam ad with the title “When will it end?” can also build the idea that Ethiopia is stuck in a cycle of drought and famine – which again alludes to the idea from earlier times that Africa, outside of history, is stuck in cyclical time and subject to nature, instead of conquerors of it (Oxfam 6 Feb 1985).

And, of course, a great many ads feature an abundance of emotional appeals which feed the savior narrative. So, for instance, a CARE ad features a large picture of a small child over the words “Millions of children are dying silently. Famine has left them too weak to cry – their parents too weak to hope” (9 Dec 1984). And while the emotional appeals and (brown) child add to the us/them divide, the next sentence clinches the savior narrative: “Through CARE you can bring food and other critical supplies to millions of people.” The repetition of emotional appeal with discourse of crisis with the insistence that “you can help by donating money” is nearly relentless in the ads and underlines my argument that the overuse of emotional appeals limits the type of responses to apolitical ones and the type of relationship the audience can imagine with those being “saved.”

Then there are the two ads which reference the price of life, a reference which continues the us/them divide but also raises serious issues. While the Help the Aged (6 Dec 1985) poses this as a question – “what price life?”, the International Christian Relief (ICR) (15 Dec 1984) ad’s headline is simply “The Price of a Life.” While the question form is more useful, by engaging its audience to ponder the question, the ad acts against this tendency by quickly answers its own question: “In Ethiopia it’s just £9.87,” thus putting the question to rest. While the ad is arguably trying to emphasize the fact that even small contributions can help, the act of putting a price on an African life recalls the history of African slavery, where African lives were bought and sold by Northerners.

And while the small amount given in the ad might encourage even small contributions (which might otherwise not be given, if they were thought too small), the small value seems to represent the small value placed on African lives by those outside. Overall, these ads contribute to a distinct us/them divide and begin to point to the role of capitalism in Africa's past and present.

In this vein, where most ads continue various us/them trends, some also continue revealing what can be gained through the savior narratives used. Of course humanitarian organizations have an obvious interest in the continuation of their own organization, so name recognition is one aspect to be gained in any ad. But individuals also stand to gain, and the following examples begin to illustrate the balance between using one's fame to aid a cause, versus using a cause to aid one's fame. In other words, both humanitarian organizations and individuals could gain a certain amount of social or cultural capital which could translate into economic capital, as well, a problem which these ads uncover.

There are a range of ads in this category. For example, one Oxfam (13 Sept 1984) ad featured a picture and quote of Glenda Jackson, an actress, who in the 1990s became an MP. International Christian Aid (ICA) (10 Dec 1984) in the U.S. ran an ad with a large picture of an emaciated looking child - cradled, of course, by white hands, just to underline the savior narrative at play. Though no other pictures were included, in the text of the ad, twenty names are listed as "people [who] support ICA. (Members/Board of Reference)," people who range from actors and sports figures to then-L.A. mayor.



The Price of a Life

Ethiopia is only the tip of the African famine iceberg. Drought is moving across Africa like the plague, destroying everything in its path -- crops, livestock and thousands of people, mainly children. 24 countries are in dire need. Please help us to help the innocent in **Ethiopia**, Kenya and Uganda. Send your donations with a completed coupon to me, Leslie Crowther at International Christian Relief. **Today.**



I would like to help the starving children of
Ethiopia Kenya Uganda
or where most needed


Here is my donation of £

NAME

ADDRESS

..... POSTCODE

Please tick if you would like a receipt.

 Regd. 270659

Cheques should be made payable to: G3/12.84
INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN RELIEF
International Christian Relief, PO Box 180,
16 St. John's Hill, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 3NP

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Figure 1 – Advertisement for International Christian Relief, run 15 Dec 1984

This balance of name promotion and generosity is also visible in the ICR ad I mentioned above (see Figure 1). The same ad with the headline “The price of life” has a picture of three young black children (unidentified but clearly meant to be assumed to be victims of the famine) and also has a picture of a young-ish white man, in suit and tie and a large smile. The smile alone seems out of place, given the picture of the children below (and it can be read as a very simple us/them: us – smiling, them – starving), but this smiling photo seems especially out of place since its subject is also not identified by a caption – his relationship with Ethiopia is not at all obvious. However, the text of the ad appears to clarify this when it states “Send your donations with a completed coupon to me, Leslie Crowther at International Christian Relief.” The inclusion of the picture and the name of a specific individual in the text appears mildly self-serving, especially as it does stand in opposition to other organizations who, at most include a name as part of the address on the coupon, which several ads included – as in “send to Guy Stringer, Oxfam” (30 Nov 1984).

World Vision used star power in many ways, again demonstrating the tension. In a 25 November 1984 ad (yet again featuring a large, picture of a starving black child, as always unnamed), eight photos are listed as “friends of World Vision [who] invite you to join in this humanitarian effort to save the starving people of Ethiopia.” But World Vision also ran a ten-hour national television special, and an April 1985 ad for this contains ten celebrity photos, as well as the lists of those will appear on the special – Hollywood celebrities, politicians, and so on. Near the top, the ad also contains a picture of the hosts, one of whom is actually cradling a black child. What I want to underline is that some people will be identified in photos, but not all of them: though four of the five ads I described above contained pictures of sickly children, as well as well-known Northern celebrities, the children were never identified. Their role is to silently, namelessly, solicit pity, while the social capital benefits others.

There were also a number of ads run by companies about donating to help the famine in Ethiopia, and they cover a range of generosity and self-advertisement. At the end of the spectrum of more generous is an ad by House of Lloyds, from 15 December 1985. Even the date of its publication is significant, given it was a year after the first media explosion about Ethiopia – hence probably a time when donations had been

waning. The ad asks its audience to send checks for one of three charities to House of Lloyds, with the promise that House of Lloyds will match funds, up to \$1,000,000, to send to the three charities. While the ad has familiar drawbacks (a drawing of mother and child; no history of the famine, but a description of the company's work with the charities and its previous donations), the promise to match funds is certainly generous. The company is certainly gaining extra name recognition, especially recognition as a generous company, but it also promises to give directly, at considerable cost to itself.

Further along the spectrum is a February 1985 ad by Glen Rosengarten, President and COO of Shopwell, Inc, which operated chains of grocery stores in the New York area at the time. Like the ICR's ad, this one features both a photo of an African child, and, separately, of a well-dressed white man (presumably Rosengarten). The ad introduces the stores' new "Ethiopia Week," during which "Our corporate profits for the week will be donated to the people of Ethiopia...beginning with our guaranteed minimum donation of \$50,000." Like the other companies, Rosengarten lists the organizations through which the money will be donated (Oxfam, CARE, etc). Important to note in this ad is the promise to donate "corporate profits," since this amount is unknown: unlike the House of Lloyds which promises a matching donation, the Rosengarten ad emphasizes that "The more purchases you make in our stores this week – the more money we will be able to donate to fight starvation." I admit, I do not know the relative amount of corporate profit from a chain of grocery stores to a chain of Christmas stores, nor whether Rosengarten had to fight a board of directors or similar to win this concession, but – while the name recognition is similar to the other ads – the generosity seems less. And, importantly, though patrons are also encouraged to donate money, they are specifically asked to purchase more for themselves in order to give to Ethiopia. This might meet people where they are able to give, if they would otherwise not be able to donate, but it also firmly links consumption in the North with donations in the South. In other words, buying seems to be becoming the new giving. Not only does the corporation seem to gain from this ad, but so does increased consumption – the life-blood of capitalism – which points to one of the real winners in the savior narrative.

Still seemingly less generous is the ad by Lancers (13 June 1985), an imported wine. The ad includes a coupon which buyers can send back to Lancers. In returning the

coupon, buyers can choose to have a one or two dollar refund (depending on what they had purchased) returned to them – and Lancers will donate the matching amount to CARE – or buyers can choose to donate that one or two dollars to CARE, as well. The ad certainly increases Lancers’ name recognition, especially as a generous company, with the logo “Open your heart to CARE when you open a Lancers,” but only promises to donate if people go through the process of returning a refund for an already-purchased product. The balance of fame versus generosity seems far more tilted toward fame, in this instance. But importantly, consumption is again associated with generosity and compassion.

And then there’s the odd, terribly ambiguous ad from ComputerLand (28 May 1985) run in the *Wall Street Journal*⁹ [see Figure 2]. On the positive side, the text of the ad recognizes that simple donations, while helping short-term hunger, do not address the long-term causes of hunger (like I’ve mentioned some organizations/ads which also address this). The ad also acknowledges the tremendous use of emotion in the television coverage of Ethiopia, and asks that we “put aside for a few moments, if you can, these terrifying images of the effects of hunger, and consider its causes. Their goal, then is not just helping Ethiopia, but ending “World Hunger” (capitalized in the ad), and the ad also cites studies which suggest that a shortage of food in the world is not the problem – enough food exists, but it needs to be distributed better: “Not a problem of resources but of logistics,” to quote the ad.

Here’s where it gets interesting, because the ad goes on to say that they “believe there is no group in the world more capable of solving exactly these sorts of problems [of logistics] than the men and women who comprise Corporate America.” “American business leadership” is asked “to do what it does best” in ending World Hunger. And since, of course, part of what businesses “do best” is earning money, this is also part of the ad: “Obviously, helping to feed starving people is not bad for a company’s image,” the ad reports, “And there are more specific benefits to new markets for a wide spectrum of goods and services currently unavailable in these devastated areas.” In helping Ethiopia and ending World Hunger, business leaders can also look forward to more “low-

⁹ This, and its follow-up, were the only display ads regarding Ethiopia in the *Wall Street Journal* that I found in my research.

cost work forces” abroad, while the “currently weak global financial system will be stabilized and strengthened.” The ad does acknowledge that there are “the other, more personal benefits” leaders will “reap” by helping, but then defines the “values of a human being” as being fulfilled through “your actions as a business executive [in] help[ing to] improve the lives of others.” So these values are apparently only available to business executives, the bastions of capitalism.

WHY COMPUTERLAND DECIDED NOT TO SEND MONEY TO ETHIOPIA.

Today, many Americans, from school children to rock stars, are contributing money to provide short-term relief for the people of Ethiopia. Yet this effort will not supply the long-term solutions to the causes of hunger, which continue to devastate Sub-Saharan Africa and many other regions of the globe. We at ComputerLand believe it is time for the brightest, most powerful minds in Corporate America to develop the long-range programs that can eliminate World Hunger permanently, before the end of this century.

It isn't easy to ignore the emotions that television coverage of the tragedy in Ethiopia evokes. Scenes of starvation and death have haunted us constantly in recent months. But put aside for a few moments, if you can, these terrifying images of the effects of hunger, and consider its causes. For it is only when the causes of World Hunger are identified and attacked that any real progress will be made. And that the related problems of disease and overpopulation, so inextricably tied to hunger, will cease to torment the underdeveloped areas of our planet. It is for these reasons that the ComputerLand Corporation decided to ask the most efficient problem-solving body in the world, American business leadership, to do what it does best.

SURPRISINGLY, FOOD IS NOT THE PROBLEM.

At this moment, while Ethiopia starves, there exists enough food for every man, woman and child on Earth.

Independent studies by The Presidential Commission on World Hunger, the Brandt Commission and the National Academy of Science all confirm there is ample cropland, agricultural technology and financial resources to grow, harvest and distribute the food necessary to end hunger everywhere, by the year 2000.

So the problem is not one of food, but of distribution. Not a question of resources, but of logistics. First, it is a matter of marshalling the expertise required to transfer the food, technical skills, agricultural equipment and medical supplies to the places on Earth they are needed.

In the longer term, ending hunger is a matter of helping these suffering countries develop strong, self-sufficient economies that can support their people, instead of depending on an endless chain of food shipments from abroad.

At ComputerLand, we believe there is no group in the world more capable of solving exactly these sorts of problems than the men and women who comprise Corporate America.

Their problem-solving abilities, management skills, business systems and their goal-oriented philosophy can get the job done with the utmost efficiency.

All that is needed to put this remarkable machinery to work is a fundamental decision that World Hunger is worth ending. Not some day. But now.

WHATEVER YOU ARE GOOD AT, THERE'S A NEED FOR IT.

Obviously, no one corporation, agency or government can shoulder the responsibility for developing a master plan to end World Hunger.

But be assured, there is an enormous need, somewhere in the world, for exactly the talents and experience your company possesses.

Whether you turn your attention to short-term relief or long-term solutions, your company's expertise, personnel and resources are what you can contribute.

be gained.

For instance, corporate educational programs not only improve worker skills in underdeveloped areas. They are also tax deductible costs of doing business.

Hard economic facts will also bear out that the end of World Hunger will create immense



Put simply, you should do what you do best. Even if your business doesn't operate internationally or isn't directly related to food, farming, medicine or distribution, with a little thought you will find the connections that will complement the efforts of others.

In fact, a tool as simple as your telephone may be the best way to find other business people who need your skills to make a contribution of their own.

But most of all, you must make the decision that working to end hunger is a worthwhile priority. That hunger is a problem that your company can and will do something about.

Once you make that commitment, you will find many ways your organization can help. And the benefits of such a commitment will serve your company well for years to come.

A TOUGH JOB WITH TERRIFIC FRINGE BENEFITS.

Obviously, helping to feed starving people is not bad for a company's image.

It is a clear demonstration of good corporate citizenship to many publics, including customers, stockholders, and employees.

And there are more specific benefits to

new markets for a wide spectrum of goods and services currently unavailable in these devastated areas.

Agricultural and industrial production for export in these countries will rise. Which will lead to profitable two-way international trade.

Large, vigorous and low-cost work forces will emerge virtually everywhere. And the currently weak global financial system will be stabilized and strengthened, as long-term debts are repaid.

But besides these business benefits, we ask you to consider the other, more personal benefits you will reap.

For when your actions, as a business executive, help improve the lives of others, you have successfully integrated your professional skills with your values as a human being.

And you are practicing the finest form of business anyone can practice.

In fact, that is precisely why we at ComputerLand decided to run this ad.

As a communications organization, we decided not to contribute money directly to Ethiopia. But to use our time and resources to bring you this ongoing public forum, in the belief that the results will be more enduring and of greater effect.

In future weeks, we will speak to the business community about other aspects of the problem of World Hunger and what specifically can be done.

And we will continue our efforts until the goal is achieved.

Because when you consider the wealth of abilities and resources we possess here in America, while millions elsewhere starve, it would be unthinkable for us not to help

ABOUT OUR COMMITMENT: ComputerLand Corporation, the world's largest and most experienced computer service and global network of over 800 retail stores operating in 24 countries for 10,000 employees, is an equal opportunity employer and is proud to provide services to diverse and individual. As part of our commitment to end World Hunger, we have created a special department to provide you with complete information about ongoing programs, private relief agencies and government organizations. At ComputerLand, we believe World Hunger is a critical goal that requires a long-term commitment from corporate leadership. Please write to make this an immediate priority. Please write to: Bill McLeod at: CHIEF OF THE CHAIRMAN, WORLD HUNGER, c/o ComputerLand Corporation, 30901 Serrano Street, Hayward, CA 94544.

ComputerLand

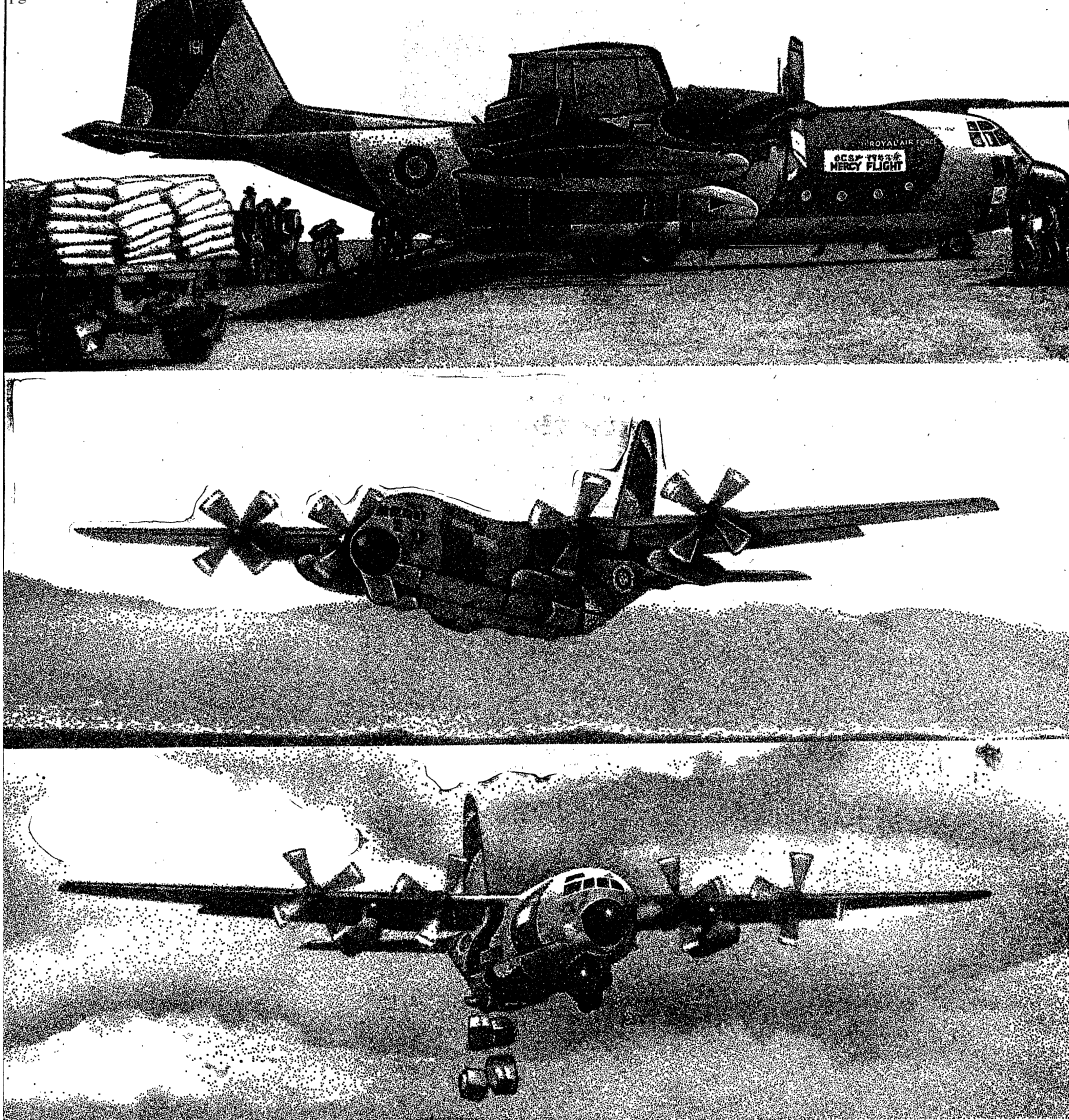
HUNGER WILL END WHEN WE MAKE ENDING HUNGER OUR BUSINESS.

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Figure 2 – Advertisement for ComputerLand, run 28 May 1985

Meanwhile, the Royal Air Force ran an ad on 27 March 1985 in *The Guardian*, featuring pictures of an RAF plane doing a food drop in Ethiopia [see Figure 3]. The ad, urging those interested in joining the RAF to be in contact, touts the “Royal Air Force with its professional skills [in] making a valuable contribution” to moving food to and in Ethiopia. Praising the skills of officers, logistic experts, “groundcrew, engineers, and other support units” in making the airlifts possible, the ad concludes: “If that sounds like the kind of career you would find satisfying, we would like to hear from you.” While the ad again captures the generosity of sharing resources with those in need, it ignores the role of Britain’s military in its colonial past, when interventions were so often used as justification for colonialism and its continued role in neo-imperialist ventures. Ignoring this past and suggesting that being a part of the Royal Air Force would be all about saving lives – not taking them? – seems disingenuous, especially when using the famine to promote this agenda.



1,000,000 lbs OF FOOD SUPPLIED A WEEK.

Transporting food into the worst-hit areas of Ethiopia quickly and efficiently has been a major problem.

That's where the Royal Air Force with its professional skills is making a valuable contribution. Organising and implementing an operation of life-saving importance.

Operation Bushel, as it is code-named, began in early November 1984, since when an average of 1,000,000 lbs of grain and other food supplies per week have been air-lifted by Hercules on detachment from RAF Lyneham. Each aircraft transports a payload of between twenty and forty thousand pounds on each flight.

Numerous RAF Officers have been involved in Operation Bushel, drawn from many different branches. But all share the

basic responsibility of every RAF Officer around the world, leading, managing and inspiring the trust of those they command.

The logistic experts, organising and operating the supply chain are as vital as the Hercules' aircrew. So are the detachments of groundcrew, engineers and other support units. Together, they all form the majority of the British Military Detachment, Ethiopia.

Such operations present mammoth difficulties (ironically, in a country so cruelly hit by drought, many problems are caused by rain-affected runways).

It's a tough job. But it's certainly no thankless task. It's also an unusual challenge, even for the RAF. But the RAF is prepared to meet the unexpected every day.

If that sounds like the kind of career you would find satisfying, we would like to hear from you.

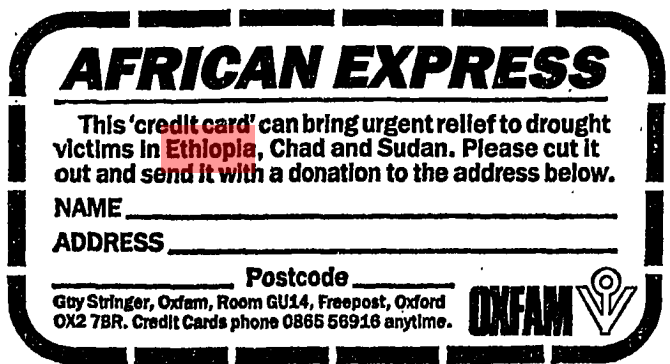
Call in at any RAF Careers Information Office (in the phone book under Royal Air Force) or write to Group Capt. P.E. Tarrett, OBE, LLB, RAF, at (OQ) Officer Careers (07/25/03) London Road, Stanmore, Middx. HA7 4PZ. Please state birthdate and qualifications. Formal application must be made in the UK.



RAF Officer

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Figure 3 – Advertisement for Royal Air Force, run 27 March 1985



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Figure 4 - Advertisement for Oxfam, run 19 Dec 1984

As I have argued above, much of the media coverage of Ethiopia was used as a way of promoting capitalism's values, and this is also visible in the ads. Even Oxfam seems to tap into this with an early ad they ran in The Guardian: about the size of a credit card, the ad's title was "AFRICAN EXPRESS," surely echoing the "American Express" credit card, an idea reinforced by the text: "This 'credit card' can bring urgent relief to drought victims in Ethiopia, Chad and Sudan" – one of only two sentences on the ad. While short and pithy, the ad makes explicit an uncomfortable link between humanitarianism and capitalism.

Overall, the ads asking for donations to help fight the famine in Ethiopia echo the media far more than I expected they would. By using emotional appeals and emphasizing photos of children, the ads keep an us/them divide and contribute to savior narratives. As with the media, one of these narratives celebrates capitalism as the savior, with many different organizations using the famine to promote their own cultural, social, and/or economic capital. In the Cold War context, the story of Ethiopia was easily used as a story of capitalism as the savior of Africa, thus shutting down other options for a more equitable partnership.

Chapter Two: Media and Humanitarian Ads for Rwanda: Distancing and Disempowering

To continue the analysis process started in Chapter One with Ethiopia, I will now direct my attention to the media coverage and humanitarian ads for the Rwandan genocide. After putting the genocide into more of a historical context, I will then detail the ways in which it was misrepresented. My most important goals in doing this are to showcase the similarities between how these two nations were described in media and humanitarian ads, descriptions which perpetuated old stereotypes, systems of value, and balances of power. In addition, I will further uncover some of the implications in the media and ads – their ways of disempowering both Africans and their Northern audiences and how they make the story about Rwanda a story about the North, instead. Importantly, I find that, by focusing attention on the North – and on humanitarianism as savior – the media and ads tend to disguise the unequal relationship between the North and Africa that is being upheld behind the mask of benevolent humanitarianism.

By the time the genocide in Rwanda started on April 7, 1994, the world had changed significantly in the wake of the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War. Africa was no longer a battleground between capitalism and communism, so what role would it play? Without the framework of the Cold War, the media and humanitarian coverage of Rwanda is a bit harder to explain. Where we can read the coverage of Ethiopia as being largely a story of the North saving the South, or more specifically of the triumph of the generous morals of capitalism, I would argue that much of the media and humanitarian coverage of Rwanda functioned to continue making sense of this new world order – and largely to uphold the hierarchies which kept the North as savior of the benighted South. In the upheaval and shifting relationships following the end of the Cold War, when the hierarchy of good (capitalism) and bad (communism) no longer framed most discourses from and for the North (and before the War on Terror provided another frame of “good” and “bad”), the coverage of Rwanda helped to reassert the notion of the

North as good, as savior of the South, a South desperately in need of saving but which could not help itself, mired as it was in its own essential savagery and cyclical lack of progress. What particularly interests me is how these representations also forestall a different type of relationship between the North and Africa – in contrast with how Diop and Monémbo, in their novels about Rwanda, allow for more possible interactions, as we will see in Chapter Four.

These representations are particularly disturbing because the violence in Rwanda was brutal and, in taking away a political understanding for the genocide, then readers are left with an assumption of brutality as essential to “Africanness.” But the brutality in Rwanda came out of certain political environments and histories – where Tutsi themselves were made “Other” to Hutu, where there was fear of war and of what had happened in Burundi, where poverty had made people more desperate, with little to lose, to name just a few of the factors which shaped the genocide. So by representing the brutality as the nature of Rwanda/Africa, such details are ignored. Whereas much of the media coverage about Ethiopia was a mapping of the Cold War onto Ethiopia, rendering Ethiopians nearly invisible in “their story,” Rwandans are visible in these stories – but made to be very Other: brutal, violent, passive, irrational – the categories overlap and sometimes contradict, but are always Other. And, in this case, Other in a way that makes them unapproachable. Yehuda Bauer’s point about making the Holocaust “inexplicable” again becomes relevant here: by making the genocide so unthinkable, readers cannot begin to think it through. “They” will always be Other and we can only relate to them through humanitarianism and/or economic exploitation, not as partners. No recourse is apparently available - until things have settled down enough that humanitarianism can come onto the scene. But no political solution is thinkable.

Media Coverage of Rwanda

In the early days of the genocide in Rwanda, the New York Times ran an editorial, “Double Tragedy in Africa,” whose language highlights the problems of much of the media coverage of Rwanda. Language describing the “bloodthirsty” radio broadcasts, or blaming “Tutsi warriors” for the “orgy of slaughter,” Tutsi who were “feudal overlords” to the Hutu: all of this builds on the us/them divide we have seen, especially dwelling on the image of Africans as savages. As these examples hint,

political analyses were neglected in favor of depoliticized explanations for the killings. In addition, the article refers to the violence as presenting “the prospect of a conflict without end,” which both makes the conflict seem inevitable and also makes Rwandans appear passive in the face of their own violence: the conflict will not end because they can not control it, nor, by implication, themselves. The violence controls them – a sentiment which echoes Mamdani’s point about politics being reduced to a cultural essence (quoted in Brown 20).

In addition, a Northern audience is also assumed to be passive in the face of this violence: after all, what can be done if this is “a conflict without end”? Similarly, the article holds “Neighboring states, the Organization of African Unity and the U.N.” responsible for “provid[ing] emergency relief and keep[ing] open doors for peacemaking,” not accounting for the specific roles of Belgium in its capacity as former colonizer, France for its help in arming the Rwandan government, or the U.S. for its help in training the RPF’s leadership – a move which further decreases the sense that Northern audiences could have an impact on the situation in Rwanda by pressuring their government about their foreign policies or trade policies. Further, by ignoring the politics, the article essentially upholds the status quo of these unequal policies. Finally, after assigning responsibility to others, the article further undercuts action by arguing, that “at some point the world may need to ask, if these efforts [in providing relief and peacemaking] fail, whether or not to stand aside if belligerents cannot agree.” Not only does this ignore the peace efforts which, though faulty, were in process, it again assumes the conflict is inevitable. Having reinforced the us/them divide, and portrayed Rwandans as helpless in their own conflict and yet in need of saving, and having made political action by outsiders seem futile, the article – building on so many savior narratives of the past – implies that salvation will come, if at all, through humanitarian action. One of the implicit arguments in this type of reporting is the appearance that nothing could be done: if the killings were bound to happen, then there was little use in thinking about or acting against them. Instead, when the world responded, it responded to the refugee crisis which could be treated with humanitarian actions.

To understand some of the problems in the media coverage of Rwanda, it is also useful to look at some of the difficulties in reporting on the Rwandan genocide. I would

argue that some of these difficulties made it easy to fall back on the use of the tropes of Africa as Other and in need of a savior narrative. Since those narratives were so readily used in other circumstances, they helped to fill in the gap when getting the story out was a challenge.

The difficulties of reporting on Rwanda have several layers – both at the level of those reporting on the ground (writers and photographers), and then at the level of the media corporations to which they answered (or sold their stories/photos). To begin with, journalists on the ground faced the challenge of understanding what was happening in order to report it. Several journalists who were in Rwanda during the genocide describe the confusing circumstances they found themselves in. Mark Doyle, writing radio and television reports for the BBC, is firm that he “got the story terribly wrong” at first (145). Later in April, he clarified what he saw as the two wars occurring in Rwanda at the time: the shooting war (between the armies of the government and the RPF) and the genocide war (led by the government against civilians) (145). But at first, he explains that:

Down on the ground, up-close – if you could get close enough, safely enough – it did look at first like chaos. I said so. I used the word chaos. What I could see clearly in the first few days was the shooting war between the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and the government, and dead bodies. It was not clear who had killed whom, not at first, and the shooting war appeared chaotic with shifting front lines, a lot of noise and a lot of red hot lead flying around. (145).

Doyle’s description makes clear the potential for confusion at the beginning – where the shooting war and the genocide war appeared at first to be only a shooting war, especially from an outsider’s perspective.

It is important to note that for the reporters, the genocide war was not often clearly visible, especially when it was taking place alongside the shooting war – that the shooting war could cover the genocidal killings taking place, at least at first.

Interestingly, this syncs up with the observation that there are very few – perhaps only three – recordings of actual killings taking place (Hughes 231, Chaon 163). Most pictures – video or still – capture the aftermath. With few of the genocidal killings (that is, particularly killings of civilians, by militias) visible, they could remain harder to interpret – at least until their scale became evident.

The logistical problems of reporting are also significant. Richard Dowden, a British reporter, relates the problems of getting to Rwanda to cover the situation there: no flights into the country¹⁰, no access through Zaire in the west because of Mobutu's policies, insecurity in Burundi because of the death of their president in the same crash that killed Habyarimana (249). That left a long journey through Tanzania to Rwanda, or the "officially closed" border with Uganda (249).

Given the stress, confusion, and urgency the reporters faced, perhaps it is no surprise that so much of the media coverage fell back on some of the familiar tropes we saw above, those emphasizing the us/them divide and a savior narrative, since these tropes were so well embedded in the discourse of Africa.

In addition to these difficulties that the reporters faced in writing and then sending stories out, the news corporations in Europe and America often placed strictures on the stories they wanted. While this, too, hampered the reporters in the field, it also speaks to a larger problem of reporting on Africa, where depoliticization and the use of old tropes is/continues to be the rule of thumb. Tom Giles, a producer for the BBC, observed some of these strictures on reporting – this relating to the nature of pictures the BBC would air. Giles explains that after complaints months before about the graphic nature of pictures from a massacre in Burundi, the BBC was hesitant to air pictures from Rwanda (236). For example, in mid-April, "An entire news piece, gathered at great risk to the BBC team filming it, was dropped. It was deemed too graphic for British viewers" (236). Instead, a cameraman had been advised to "make future pictures wider – less distinct, more impressionistic" (236). In addition to asking for specific kinds of pictures, once stories from the refugee camps began emerging (the refugee camps outside Rwanda were, after all, much easier to access than the interior of Rwanda), Giles observes that "London now wanted human stories from the camps, of getting aid to the refugees, of babies born in misery" (237). Again, this was felt as a limitation on the kind of story that would be published. When Giles did get a story from and about Rwanda to the BBC, he admits his regret that "much of the horror was carefully self-censored" (237). What's important is

¹⁰ The question of control of the Kigali airport was up in the air for a while – at times controlled by the Presidential Guard or military, at times by the RPF, at times by UNAMIR. Doyle's arrival was met by Dallaire, and certainly they controlled the airport long enough to evacuate ex-patriots, but with the withdrawal of most of UNAMIR's troops, this control was not guaranteed

that, in addition to the dangers of such self-censoring, the careful proscription of the kinds of stories that would be published could clearly curtail deeper, more in-depth analyses or understandings of what was taking place in Rwanda. “Less distinct” photos are akin to less distinct analysis. I’m not trying to say that the inability to air graphic photos was directly responsible for the depoliticized reporting that did come through, but there’s a strange and unsettling relationship suggested when a news corporation asks for “wider” pictures, this does not imply an interest (and thus a need) for a close reading of the situation on hand, either.

In addition to limiting the kinds of stories and photos that would be published, there is also the fact that there were very few people reporting on Rwanda during the months of the genocide (this would change when the refugee crisis in the Congo emerged). For example, sources agree that there were generally between ten and fifteen reporters in Rwanda during the genocide (Melvern 204; Thompson 5). These numbers can be contrasted against others: according to Linda Melvern, “In South Africa, in early May [1994], there had been 2,500 accredited press” (204), there to cover South Africa’s first universal elections. Arguably, many of the reporters who would have been covering Eastern Africa were on location in South Africa and thus unable to cover the unfolding events in Rwanda. Richard Dowden takes a more pessimistic look at this, commenting that “This group of journalists [in South Africa for the elections] included most of the stringers for the world’s press based in Nairobi who usually covered East Africa. Normally, they would have been in Rwanda on the next flight, but the world’s press could not apparently cover more than one Africa story at a time” (252). On the other hand, Hilsum notes that there were “some 500 reporters and media technicians” in Goma by late July to cover the refugee crisis there (167). This shift implies that the story where the North could “save” Africans, at less risk, made for the better story – a clear version of the savior narrative.

Although there were certainly restrictions on reportings (difficulties in obtaining information and getting it out of Rwanda, for example), nonetheless the overall picture the reportings give is of a hopeless and inevitable situation, one occurring naturally and without recourse to political explanations or solutions. Instead, the killings are often described in ways which make them appear inevitable and natural, and/or irrational. All

of these fit the previous discourses we've seen so far, as well as feeding into the savior narrative.

I will use Melissa Wall's article, "An Analysis of News Magazine Coverage of the Rwanda Crisis in the United States," as well as examples from other media sources, in order to argue that the media support a strong us/them divide, especially to make savior narratives seem inevitable. The sheer number of examples that emphasize the paradigm of Africa as Other indicates the importance of separating us from them in a time of changing world relationships. By relying on the us/them divide, these examples make clear the benefit to be gained in upholding this status quo, where the relationship toward Africa could be one of humanitarianism (unequal) and trade (unequal), but not other types that would enable a more equal partnership.

In this article, Melissa Wall analyzed thirty-eight articles in news magazines (Newsweek, Time, and U.S. News and World Report) that covered Rwanda in 1994 (263). Wall's analysis reveals many significant problems with the media coverage of Rwanda, and will help me to investigate some of the implications of the coverage. In particular, her article underlines the previous stereotypes and points to the savior narrative as one of the only possible responses to the genocide.

In her article, Wall

identified five overall themes in the magazine coverage of the Rwanda crisis:

1. The Rwanda violence was the result of irrational tribalism.
2. Rwandan people are little better than animals, ranging from the barbaric to the helpless and pathetic.
3. The violence is incomprehensible and, thus, is explained through comparison to biblical myths, supernatural causes, natural disasters or diseases.
4. Neighbouring African countries are just as violent and, thus, unable to help solve Rwanda's problems.
5. Only the West is capable of solving Rwanda's problems. (265)

Quite evidently, Wall's list of themes supports my argument: the first three categories underline how Africa is made Other, while the fourth theme fits the Africa as Other paradigm and points to a savior narrative, which is strongly suggested in the final category. Using Wall's examples and those from other newspapers, I will now outline

the many ways in which the us/them divide and savior narratives were upheld, and some of the implications of these.

As Wall's first theme makes clear, "tribalism" was a common term for describing the violence, but it was also a word which was used as an explanation for the violence. For example, Wall notes that the political, economic, and other causes behind the genocide were rarely mentioned; instead media stories explained the violence as "tribal," or sometimes "ethnic" (265-6). While the violence was, or started off as, Hutu against Tutsi, the simplified explanation of "tribal" violence misses many political nuances within Rwanda (where there were mainstream and extremist Hutus, for example), within the region (where the Rwandan Patriotic Front was based out of Uganda, or Burundi's very different history of Hutu/Tutsi relations), or in the wider international community (where France supported the Rwandan army, or Tanzania hosted peace talks). Instead, these complexities are flattened into merely "tribal" violence. Crucially, when the causes of the genocide are obscured and "tribalism" – read "Otherness" or "Africanness" – is blamed, instead, this allows the perfect entry for savior narratives: the stories of killings do suggest people need to be saved, and with "Africanness" at fault, this leaves "us" to save the day.

More importantly, the word "tribal" is fraught with meaning and deserves further explanation: Beverly G. Hawk notes that the language used by Northern media to describe violence in South Africa in the early 1990s (at the end of apartheid, a short time before Rwanda's genocide) was particular to the continent: "Vocabulary defines the story as 'African' and 'tribal.' The message for the reader or viewer is that African events require different vocabulary than those in Northern Ireland or Yugoslavia. Implicit in this vocabulary is that African events do not follow any pattern recognizable to Western reason. It is 'tribal' conflict" (7). Though Hawk is writing about South Africa and not Rwanda, I think the same dynamic is at work here: the violence in Africa is set apart from "us." Further, Hawk's point that "African events do not follow any pattern recognizable to Western *reason*" emphasizes Wall's observation that the violence was referred to as "*irrational* tribalism." A New York Times story echoes this precisely in referring to "the deadly irrationality of tribal and political violence" (Lorch "Heart of Rwanda's"). We have already observed that "irrational" has commonly been used to describe Africa, and it

again plays a similar function – making Africa Other. But calling the violence “irrational” – unrecognizable to reason – also labels it as “unthinkable.” I again refer to Yehuda Bauer here: if the killings are “unthinkable,” then they are not worth thinking about. The genocide is dismissed, and an audience is not drawn to engage with it further. Rather, the label “irrational tribalism” infantilizes the conflicts and implies the need for someone – someone mature, rational, political – to “fix” the problems. But the audience, though part of the North that will “fix” the problems, is also not asked to participate beyond feeling pity: by labeling the violence as irrational, the article precludes rational thought by the audience as well. Instead, experts will fill the void – further distancing “us” from “them,” since few of “us” happen to be experts in this field.¹¹

Jo Ellen Fair further investigates the nuances of “tribal” to describe violence, agreeing with Hawk that “what the word ‘tribal’ does is to instantly separate Africa from America” (15), or, implicitly, other Northern cultures. Specifically, Fair locates some of the “Otherness” of “tribal” in time or development: “‘Tribalism’ invokes the primordial; it invokes the ‘uncivilized,’ locating Africa in a time distant in evolutionary scale from ‘our’ contemporary and modern time” (15). This notion, of course, resonates with earlier representations of Africa as “primordial,” or a land without history – not developing but trapped in cyclical time, ideas which are all echoed in other ways in the media coverage of Rwanda.

Such references to Africa as being outside of history are frequent in describing Rwanda’s violence, where they deepen the us/them divide as well as present a nexus of important notions. Common instances are seen where one article attributes the killings to “a centuries-old history of tribal warfare” (Sciolino) and another to “the centuries-old hatred” between Hutu and Tutsi (Lorch “Rwandan Refugees”). Not only does this ignore some of the facts – for example, that Hutu versus Tutsi violence only started at the time of decolonization in the late 1950s – but the references also ignore the kinds of nuances I described above. Similarly, Wall notes the many Biblical descriptions of the violence and, as mentioned in the Ethiopia section, concludes that “These images seem to reflect the idea of a nation...from back in time, so far behind the West that what occurs there can only be related to bible stories” (268).

¹¹ I will touch further on this contradiction of experts, and passive audience, and the savior narrative later on.

This imaginary long-past history of bloodshed is made to seem cyclical in more ways: one April article refers to the massacres as “an uncontrollable spasm of lawlessness and terror” (Sciolino), for example. I will speak to the other terms in this phrase later, but the “lawlessness” can suggest the similarly imagined Africa of pre-colonial times – a land of lawlessness and death before Europe entered Africa with its laws and civilization. As I mentioned before, this notion of Africa locked in cyclical time is further underscored by another April 1994 article which refers to Rwanda’s violence as presenting “the prospect of a conflict without end” (“Double Tragedy”). Not only do such references bring back the notion of Africa as Other because uncivilized, but they imply that this must be Africa’s destiny because, so far, the continent has not been able to break this cycle of lawlessness – at least not for long, and not without the salvific power of the North.

There are several important implications to these references to Rwanda’s violence as taking place in a land without history, or locked in a cyclical history. As I have said, they continue the us/them division. Indeed, a land so different from ours that it can only be explained through Biblical metaphors is a land that readers would have a difficult time relating to, leaving few ways to bridge that division. Instead, if Rwanda is an example of a “conflict without end,” with the killings inevitable, the audience is again left with the impression that there is little to be done there – and the audience is thus rendered passive when faced with the killings. Fair builds on this from another angle: she quotes an article which refers to Africa as “simultaneously connected to some memory of Eden and to some foretaste of apocalypse” (17). Noting the importance of time in this quote, she observes that “Africa’s past as birthplace of humanity is important to us, and so is Africa’s future inasmuch as it may foretell ‘our’ survival,” and concludes that “Africa’s present, [however]..., is made largely irrelevant to us” (17). Though I find few references to Africa’s future in the Rwanda articles, Fair’s notion of “Africa’s present...made largely irrelevant to us” resonates all too well with the many distancing techniques used in referring to Rwanda and its place in history. Yet again, there is little to relate Rwanda to us, other than humanitarianism.

Not all articles failed to mention history, but these can present problems, nonetheless. One impressive one by Mark Fritz from May 21, 1994, succinctly mentions the role of pre-colonial and colonial tensions, the changes with independence, as well as

post-colonial upheavals as background to the 1994 killings. It also includes some of the warnings from the months before the killings started that a genocide was being contemplated. This background was supplemented by quotes from opposition party members and a director from Human Rights Watch: a variety and depth of sources well beyond that of many other articles. All the same, the article both starts and ends on disquieting notes: it opens “They were trained, armed and programmed to explode, a human doomsday device designed to detonate on command” and ends with the grief of an opposition party member, Joseph Nsengimana, whose family is presumed dead. In many ways, the beginning and ending counteract the thoughtful middle: the beginning, referencing the formation of the extremist militias “responsible for many of the 200,000 deaths in Rwanda”, is surely meant to draw readers in. But by referring to the people involved as a machine, “a doomsday device designed to detonate on command”, the writer takes away all sense of agency and choice for those people. There is some agency attributable to those people who “trained,” “armed,” and “detonated” the doomsday device, but those people who committed the crimes are taken far from the human experience, their own rationale for participating in the killings ignored. Instead, we again see glimmers of the essence of Rwandans – that their “centuries old hatred” and “tribal warfare” would drive them to be so easily “detonated” – inevitably so. By taking away the agency of the actors, the article not only makes the killings appear inevitable and natural, the article also underlines the us/them divide, since Americans, in particular, with myths of the “self-made man,” and “self-reliance” generally consider themselves to be agents of their own destiny.

On the other hand, the article’s end is clearly heart-wrenching as the politician interviewed has survived, but seeks his family left behind. But his position appears hopeless: he is behind the RPF lines and (as a Tutsi and a politician) cannot safely try to return to his house in Kigali. He cannot act to save or even find his family. Leaving us on this note – without even reference to what he is doing (perhaps debating politics with others in the RPF or other politicians like him? Debating policies, should the RPF triumph, discussing strategy, even helping the wounded or searching for food?), he seems set apart by his grief, his losses, leaving a feeling of inaction or passivity – all of which enforce the us/them divide we have seen before where “we” are actors not driven by

emotion, and “they” are inactive and only emotional. In a somewhat contradictory manner, another unspoken argument in this ending is that Northerner readers are also left with the same feeling of hopeless idleness, as well. If this person on the ground can’t act, how can we possibly do anything, either? But I would argue that this contradiction is actually logical because, into the void, of course, humanitarianism by the experts appears the only answer.

Although this article by Mark Fritz is uncommon in interviewing more Rwandans, the impressions of Rwandans without agency or as passive are far too common. These are further ways of entrenching an us/them divide and distancing us from them, and are visible in different ways. As I have said, whereas few Ethiopians were included in the media coverage of that famine, more Rwandans seem to have been included in the coverage of the genocide – but in ways that underline their Otherness. Melissa Wall also observes this when she writes that her “analysis revealed that ordinary people were the second most frequently quoted group of people” (266) – again a significant change from Ethiopia. However, “If we examine the coverage more closely, . . . we find that while Rwandans were given a voice, it was only within a framework that consistently presented them as pathetic and helpless victims, as insensate, animal-like creatures or as barbaric savages” (266-7). All of these terms, of course, emphasize Africa as Other.

It is important, at this point in my argument, to take one more look at the representations of the Rwandans as being passive, at the ways both the local and the international audience is rendered passive, and how these practices enable the savior narratives to proliferate

I have already showed several instances in which Rwandans are portrayed as passive – like Fritz’s article about the “doomsday device” to describe killers, or the politician who worries about his family. This trend is particularly important in relation to the savior narratives that surround Rwanda, because the assumed Rwandan passivity suggests a need for outside saving. As passive, they are thus in need of saving since they are not actors on their own. Wall’s analysis finds this reinforced as well when she breaks down the way sources are used in the articles. She notes that “of the 76 portrayals of Rwandans, 74 per cent depicted Rwandans as passive, 10 per cent as causing problems, 9 per cent as neutral and 7 per cent as solving problems,” whereas 75% of non-Rwandans

were seen as solving problems (264). Such descriptions both feed off of and reinforce notions of Africans as passive or lazy and inefficient, and thus in need of saving.

Paradoxically, the Northern audience of these news stories is often rendered passive, as well, especially in the ways that the problems are described. For instance, this passivity is enforced in other ways, as well: Wall analyzed the article headlines “to determine whether they listed a cause of the problem, a solution for the problem or neither. Most headlines (71 per cent) listed neither cause nor solutions” (264). I do not think naming a cause or a solution to Rwanda’s problems was an easy endeavor, but by neglecting a mention of either, or by blaming “tribal” violence, the killings seem inevitable: they simply happen. And this inevitability negates a nudge toward actively engaging with the problems. That is, if a cause or a solution is so difficult to capture by a writer who has access to more information (sources on the ground, etc), then a reader is further separated from causes and solutions. Journalist Anne Chaon who covered the genocide in Rwanda actually alludes to how an audience can be made inactive, too: She writes of one encounter back home in France in which her interlocutor responds, “‘Oh were you there? Well, don’t talk about it any more. We’ve had enough....But what can we do? We can’t do anything’” (165), and I think this captures an important problem. By enforcing the idea that the killings were inevitable, the media leave the impression that nothing can be done.

At the same time, savior narratives survive. Let me give some examples and I will explain the paradox. In her November 1994 article, Donatella Lorch channels the search for solutions to the psychiatric problems left in Rwanda to a specific few: “The months of massacres and civil war have left pain, sorrow and anger and a search for answers that has perplexed *Western psychiatrists*” (emphasis added). This implies that the search is carried on by Western psychiatrists for Rwandans – and that Rwandans are not similarly engaged with trying to understand their problems. Melissa Wall also finds a reliance on savior narratives when her analysis reveals that “when the magazines did portray people taking positive steps to deal with the violence in Rwanda, they were almost always Westerners, either French troops or American aid workers” (270). But these saviors – psychiatrists, soldiers, aid workers – are all specialized, and can thus be read as experts. In this way, the savior narrative remains in place, but the savior role is

reserved for experts – the general audience is left passive. This imbalance of power is hidden, however, by focusing on the benevolence of the savior in the savior narrative.

I think we see part of this paradox of savior narratives versus a passive Northern audience emerging in the Ethiopia coverage seen before, where buying became the new saving. Consumption became a stand-in for other sorts of action, for Northern audiences. This is part of a larger trend where citizens are turned into consumers. Instead, when saving is needed, ordinary people might imagine donating money or purchasing a product, and they imagine experts will fill the role of those needing to be more active, on the ground in Africa or even with relation to their own government (in terms of lobbying, for instance). As we will see in the Chapters Three and Four, some of the song writers and the two novelists have tried to imagine other, more active roles by writing about Rwanda in different ways.

Humanitarian Ads for Rwanda

In this section, I will discuss some of the shortcomings of ads run in national newspapers by different humanitarian organization asking for help for Rwanda. This is not meant to be exhaustive, but is meant to show some of the weaknesses of ads that ran in papers like the New York Times, the Washington Post, and Britain's The Guardian¹², and specifically how these ads relate to earlier tropes, and to the savior narrative that runs through earlier representations and media coverage of Rwanda, as well. The ads, like the media coverage of Rwanda, enforce an us/them divide and the idea of a savior narrative in ways that uphold the hierarchies in the face of a new world order. Most importantly, while many of the ads use familiar techniques to underline the Africa as Other theme, a great many of the ads underline the idea that savior narratives, of which humanitarianism is a part, are mostly about "us" and not "them," in reality. This lends itself to a self-congratulatory stance that can obscure the problems that humanitarianism represents and/or causes.

One of the most striking similarities in the ads that contain pictures is that nearly all of them are pictures where a child or children are the focal point, generally the exclusive focal point. This of course resembles the ads from the Ethiopian famine and echoes Malkki's point about the use of children in photos as emotional appeals. As

¹² Interestingly, I found no ads relating to Rwanda in the Wall Street Journal during 1994 and 1995.

before, this trend can also contribute to infantilizing Africa: those who need help are almost always pictured as children, leading to the potential idea that all Africans are children, or childish, or childish in their need for help – especially help from the mature North.

Important to note in all of the photos I examined is that the subject is never specifically named, nor their particular story told. Instead – as with the pictures of children in the Ethiopia ads, there is a large generalization assumed: that this person – usually a child, or sometimes group of people – represents all that is happening in Rwanda. This is made particularly evident when looking at two of CARE’s ads side-by-side – one from 20 May 1994 and one from 27 July 1994 (see Figure 5 and Figure 6) (both ads were run several in the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post*). Though the wording is different - because in May the killings were going on, while by July the RPF had control of the country - the picture is the exact same. This nameless child stands in for both the first and later wave of refugees. That she appears to be between two adults who have been cut off for the photo, adds to her anonymity, her helplessness – and again contributes to the infantilization of the problem, since the adults are cut out, implying that they can not be part of the solution for the child. Further on the infantilizing is the multiple choice below the photo, recalling as that does tests for school children. And while the choices do imply some agency – some choice to be made – by those being referred to, this choice is severely curtailed. First, it’s curtailed by the simplistic format of the multiple choice test, which implies childhood and not mature choice. And second, all of the choices are bad ones – starvation, dysentery and so on. This implies that all of the choices for Rwandans are awful: Rwanda reduced to a place where “there is no hope” - except, of course, that which comes from outside, from CARE?



After escaping death and mutilation in Rwanda, what's in store for her next?

- A.) Dysentery
- B.) Pneumonia
- C.) Malnutrition
- D.) All of the above

HELP GIVE THE PEOPLE OF RWANDA A CHANCE.

Over four hundred thousand people managed to escape the unspeakable carnage in Rwanda. Tired, hungry and terrified, they fled the country seeking refuge. Only to be faced with yet another battle. The fight against disease.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

By giving to the CARE Rwandan relief fund, you can help us stop the suffering. And bring hope to an otherwise hopeless situation.

Since CARE's inception 48 years ago, we have stood by our commitment to helping others help

themselves. And Rwanda is no exception.

CARE has already taken a leadership role in establishing safe refuge for the innocent men, women and children driven from Rwanda. Ensuring that they have food, shelter, water and sanitary living conditions to protect them from disease.

Just as importantly, CARE is currently re-entering Rwanda to continue offering much needed aid to those still suffering in their own homeland.

At this moment, vitally needed supplies are being prepared for airlift in order to deliver lifesaving assistance.

The situation for these refugees is a desperate one. But it's not too late to make a difference. So please, give what you can. And offer the people of Rwanda something we in America often take for granted. A chance.

Yes, I want to help. Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution.

\$30 \$60 \$100 \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

CARE Donor Services, 151 Ellis Street, N.E., Atlanta, GA 30303-2426

CARE

SAVE LIVES. CALL CARE TODAY: 1-800-521-CARE EXT. 100

CARE SPENDS 92% OF ITS RESOURCES TO ASSIST 30 MILLION PEOPLE IN MORE THAN 50 COUNTRIES, EVERY DAY.

©1994 CARE. Photo: Frank Fournier / Contact Press Images.

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Figure 5 – Advertisement for CARE, run 20 May 1994



After escaping death
in Rwanda, what's in
store for her next?

- A.) Starvation
- B.) Disease
- C.) Dehydration
- D.) All of the above

HELP GIVE THE PEOPLE OF RWANDA A CHANCE.

Over the past few days, more than one million refugees have flooded into the Goma area of Zaire, taxing to the limit the ability of relief agencies to respond. The largest exodus in history.

Without food, clean water, shelter, sanitation and medical supplies, many have already died. And unless immediate assistance reaches these destitute refugees, it's certain that many more will die in coming days.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

By giving to CARE's Rwandan Relief Fund, you can bring hope to an otherwise hopeless situation. CARE is there, delivering critically needed assistance – food, water, blankets, shelter, medical supplies – to prevent widespread suffering and death. More help is urgently needed. Send your life-saving gift to CARE today. Give the people of Rwanda a chance.

YES, I WANT TO HELP GIVE THE PEOPLE OF RWANDA A CHANCE.

Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution. 5100010

\$15 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$_____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Please mail this coupon with your check to:
CARE Donor Services, 151 Ellis Street, N.E., Atlanta, GA 30303-2426



SAVE LIVES. CALL CARE TODAY: 1-800-521-CARE EXT. 200

CARE SPENDS 92% OF ITS RESOURCES TO ASSIST 30 MILLION PEOPLE IN MORE THAN 50 COUNTRIES, EVERY DAY.

©1994 CARE. Photo: Frank Fourrier / Corbis Press Images.

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Figure 6 – Advertisement for CARE, run 27 July 1994

Display Ad 163 -- No Title
The Guardian (1959-2003); Jul 21, 1994;
 ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian (1821-2003) and The Observer (1791-2003)
 pg. 1

RWANDA EMERGENCY

Please
 help
 to save
 lives.

1 million Rwandan refugees have
 poured across the border into Zaire.
 There is poor sanitation, hunger and

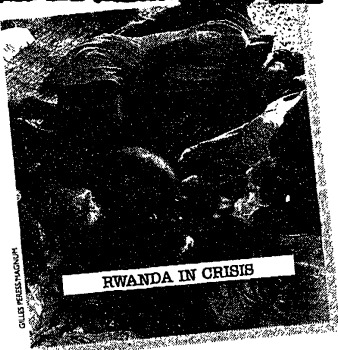
Display Ad 19 -- No Title
The Observer (1901-2003); May 15, 1994;
 ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian (1821-2003) and The Observer (1791-2003)
 pg. 14

**RWANDA
 EMERGENCY
 APPEAL.**

**TWO MILLION REFUGEES NEED
 YOUR HELP TO STAY ALIVE.**

Display Ad 73 -- No Title
The Guardian (1959-2003); May 5, 1994;
 ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian (1821-2003) and The Observer (1791-2003)
 pg. 3

HELP



NOW

Display Ad 22 -- No Title
The Guardian (1959-2003); May 7, 1994;
 ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian (1821-2003) and The Observer (1791-2003)
 pg. 22

**RWANDA
 EMERGENCY**

Today 750,000 people face genocide in
 Rwanda.
 200,000 have already been butchered to
 death.
 250,000 refugees have fled for their lives
 across the border into Tanzania – they
 are wounded, sick and are facing
 disease and starvation.
 These refugees urgently need food,
 clean water, medical supplies, shelter
 and sanitation facilities.
**CONCERN Worldwide is at the centre
 of this crisis.**
 Our volunteers are working in three
 major camps along the Tanzanian border
 with Rwanda. With your help they can
 save many thousands of lives.
 Please give what you can today. The
 need is URGENT.

Figure 7 – Four advertisements enforcing the “emergency discourse”

Again echoing the Ethiopia coverage is the strong “discourse of crisis” apparent in the humanitarian ads. In regards to the Ethiopia media coverage, Fair noted this discourse as a means of emphasizing the fact that Africa needs saving. I offer a collage of ads to make visible just how frequently “emergency” and “crisis” are used in describing Rwanda’s situation (from left to right and top to bottom: Help the Aged 23 July 1994; The Rwanda Emergency Appeal 15 May 1994; Christian Aid 5 May 1994; and Concern Worldwide 7 May 1994). [see Figure 7] Given that the ads provided little to no background on Rwanda, itself, as I will detail below, Rwanda is essentially equated with both “crisis” and “emergency.” Of course, the nature of humanitarian agencies is that they exist to deal with these situations, and these alone usually, but one of the

consequences is this reduction of Africa to a state of emergency and crisis. All else, all subtlety is swept away, and Africa is held as a distant Other.

But beyond these familiar ways of underlining the discourse of Africa as Other, many of the ads use wording that strongly suggests that the story of humanitarianism in Rwanda is really a story about the North and its generosity. In most cases, this surfaces because there is little about Rwanda. Given that these are print ads in newspapers, perhaps the advertisers take it as a given that the audience viewing the ads is current on the news of Rwanda in the newspaper. Certainly, there is some chance that, if the audience did not know, it would be able to search the newspaper for some more information. As we have just seen, the newspapers presented plenty of problems in telling the story of Rwanda, however, so humanitarian organizations missed an opportunity to expand or nuance the story.

This trend of making the story more about “us” takes various forms, but tends to rely on a formula of underlining the us/them divide and our role in saving, and filling in more details about “us.” In one 31 July 1994, ad run by The American Joint Jewish Distribution Committee and The African-American Institute, the ad, as usual, contains the picture of child in need (she or he is bandaged), a familiar way of emphasizing Africa as Other. But since the child is not named and yet the photographer is, this contributes to the idea that the story is about “us” more than “them.”¹³ Likewise, the ad comments that “*Our* history cries out to us” to help (my emphasis), but only mentions and does not elaborate on the “wanton killing and civil strife” that have caused the many deaths, disease, starvation, and refugees for which the ad is raising money. Saving is central, but the action in the ad is reserved mostly for us – even though this is, again as usual, constrained for the audience, too. The ad finishes by observing that, “the people of Rwanda cry out for help” – their big action is that “they” are practically asking to be saved. And “we” respond: “the power to snatch life from the jaws of death rests in your hands.” Again the paradox: this very powerful action is reserved for “us,” but still the audience is simply asked to donate money. Still, the ad is reminiscent of the ads for Ethiopia since it provides a long list of “Advocates for Rwandan reconstruction and

¹³ This exact dynamic is echoed in a CARE ad run in The Guardian in July: a photo with unnamed children, but with the photographer identified (rwg15.pdf).

reconciliation,” a wide array of figures including religious leaders, academics, politicians, and NGO leaders. Part of the story is clearly about these Northerners, then. Taken all together, these details leave the impression the story is mostly about “us.”

In another ad run many times in *The Guardian*, the British Red Cross (13 July 1994) also made the story about “us.” To begin with, the ad features a close-up of two young children under the words “Crisis in Rwanda,” methods already familiar for setting “them” apart from “us.” A section in bold reads “We’re in the right place to help,” with smaller text pointing out how the Red Cross is well-positioned to help in Rwanda, and the next bold text reads, “So are you,” followed by a coupon for donation, making both the savior narrative and “your” role in it clear. So while the Northern audience is placed in a position to help – playing the role of savior – it is still constrained to merely donating money. But one of the most striking features of this ad is how it also contributes to the idea that the savior narrative is about the North: in the section where the ad argues the Red Cross is in place to help Rwandans, it also notes that “Our volunteers are risking their lives to help the victims of this terrible conflict.” While it is true that humanitarian workers were not safe during the Rwandan genocide, focusing the attention on their danger – over the deaths of the tens of thousands of Rwandans who had already died – makes clear that the lives of Northerners are worth more, that the story of humanitarianism is really about the North as saviors.

An ad for Feed the Children run on 31 July 1994 in *The Guardian* follows similar trajectories. The picture of a small child with tears on his or her face remains unnamed – though the photographer is acknowledged – and this child stands in for “Pictures of utter misery in Rwanda,” according to the caption. The small helpless child is made to represent all of Rwanda, which is further reduced to a land of “utter misery.” The us/them divide is further underlined with the quote in the first lines of text, “a UN spokesperson described the human tidal wave as ‘of Biblical proportions.’” The Biblical reference distances the situation from “us,” while the phrase “the human tidal wave” increases the distance by “suggest[ing] that they were a natural occurrence in this region of the world” (Wall 268). The ad then describes some of the “misery” (“According to aid workers, thousands of people are dying of disease and starvation”), and brings home the point of the savior narrative: “Your gift could provide life-saving food, cooking-pots or

vital shelter.” But, of course, what “you” (Northern audience) can offer will be money. As the phrasing to describe the misery (“According to aid workers”) starts to make clear, the story will be about us: though many would be able to report on the situation, the aid workers on the ones to whom we listen. And the middle of the ad makes the focus clear, too, by including the peculiar detail that “harassed relief workers, lost in a sea of anguished children, have found it impossible to get to know each tiny face by name. They have had to resort to shaving each child’s head and taping on their names.” The story in this ad is peculiar: there is no doubt that there is misery in Rwanda, and children in desperate need of care, which workers from Feed the Children are also no doubt helping to provide. However, the “harassed relief workers” becomes the focal point of this anecdote, surrounded as they are by the “sea” of children, so numerous they can’t be recalled.



Photograph by Frank Fourrier/Contact Press Images

Help us provide assistance to the refugees in Zaire and Tanzania.

We cannot turn away from the terrible suffering of the Rwandan people. As Jews we too have experienced the horrors of genocide, hopelessness and exile. Our history cries out to us to do all we can to save the lives of Rwandans now struggling to survive.

Since April, as many as 500,000 men, women and children have died, and more than 2 million refugees have created an exodus of biblical proportions. Cholera and scarce sources of food, clean water and medical care have put hundreds of thousands in imminent danger.

In response, and at the request of the United Nations, the State of Israel has sent eight planes filled with medical supplies, doctors, nurses and equipment. We applaud this effort.

In addition, also at the United Nation's request, leading American Jewish organizations have joined with the Israeli humanitarian Abie Nathan to provide water purification plants, shelter, doctors, medical facilities, community/education centers and other assistance for some of the most vulnerable of these refugees in both Tanzania and Zaire.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee is coordinating the effort. The project is being carried out with the African-American Institute.



Two years ago the Jewish coalition erected this tent city to rescue Somali refugees.

With your help we have the power to reach out to tens of thousands of Rwanda's refugees.

We have done it before. We can do it again. Through a concerted effort by American Jews, we can give Rwandan refugees the gift of life.

But this vast humanitarian project cannot succeed without you. As the world watches, the people of Rwanda cry out for help. In the most literal sense, the power to snatch life from the jaws of death rests in your hands.

The statistics of horror:

- 500,000 men, women and children murdered in recent months.
- 1,000,000 Rwandans displaced inside Rwanda.
- 2,000,000 more are refugees outside Rwanda.
- Cholera and malaria epidemics as a result of unsanitary conditions and lack of clean water threaten the lives of thousands.
- Tens of thousands face starvation.

The statistics of hope:

- In the past 25 years, with the help of national Jewish organizations, Abie Nathan has successfully mounted major relief efforts throughout the world: Armenia, Cambodia, Columbia, Ethiopia, Guatemala, India, Kurdistan, Lebanon, Nicaragua, Somalia, Vietnam and more.
- The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee has responded to disasters and has carried out long-term development projects in Africa, South America, Europe and Asia.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> American Gathering/Federation of Jewish Holocaust Survivors American Jewish Committee American Jewish Congress American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee American Jewish World Service Anti-Defamation League B'nei B'rith International Central Conference of American Rabbis Council Of Jewish Federations Ez. Fund For Israeli Civil Rights And Peace Federation Of Reconstructionist Congregations Hadassah Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society International Jewish Fund For Disaster Relief Jewish Fund For Justice Jewish Labor Committee Jewish War Veterans Of The USA Kovner Institute For Black-Jewish Relations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Council Of Jewish Women Nat'l Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council New Israel Fund New York Association For New Americans Rabbinical Assembly Of America Rabbinical Council Of America Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association Shomrei Adama Synagogue Council Of America USA-Federation Of New York United Kingdom Jewish Aid Union Of American Hebrew Congregations Union Of Orthodox Jewish Congregations United Synagogue Of Conservative Judaism Women's League For Conservative Judaism Women Of Reform Judaism World Congress Of Gay And Lesbian Jews |
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כלי חסדים נפש אחי מישראל - מצילה
 עליו הכתוב באילו קיים שלום מלא.

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Figure 8 – Advertisement for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, run 29 July 1994

In some cases, there seems to be more about the humanitarian group than about Rwanda, underlining how the savior narrative, and its hero in the humanitarian organizations, is at the center of the story, displacing Rwanda. In the case of the American Joint Jewish Distribution Committee (AJJDC) ad 29 July 1994), this is particularly prevalent and again creates an ambiguous appeal. (see Figure 8) The history of Rwanda that the ad contains is essentially reduced to what it calls “The statistics of horror.” Bearing in mind Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, the use of the word “horror” here cannot help having uneasy connotations. But even beyond that, all the horror is equated with Rwanda: murders, internally displaced, refugees, cholera and diseases, starvation, imminent danger. Specifics on how and why these events have taken place are not mentioned. Indeed, by including a picture of the “tent city to rescue Somali refugees” in the ad, the ad – while probably attempting to show the competence of the organization in dealing with refugees – seems to equate Rwandan and Somalian refugees, again obliterating any of the specificity of the two situations. Instead, Africa as a continent becomes Other and a place of emergency.

And on the flip side, there is more on the history of the AJJDC, making it the center of the story. Again, the inclusion of the photo of the previous tent city alludes to the good works done by the Committee. Similarly, the “statistics of hope” that the ad includes have to do with what national Jewish organizations have accomplished. And the ad further emphasizes history – but its own – when it appeals to donors in saying “Our history cries out to us,” since “we too have experienced the horrors of genocide, hopelessness and exile.” While there is some strength to emphasizing the fact that a genocide has taken place and reminding its readers of the horror the world felt after the Holocaust against Europe’s Jews, the lack of details on Rwanda’s history is uneasy since the ad acknowledges the importance of some history.

Finally, as with the media accounts of the genocide, the ad’s reference to “an exodus of Biblical proportions” – especially as it follows the headline “This is not the first exodus the world has witnessed” which calls to mind the Biblical story of Israel’s exodus from Egypt – also obscures Rwandan history. While it does call to mind the ancient experience of exodus, it sweeps away references to the specifics of Rwanda. This

is also troublesome because, as with the media accounts of the genocide which, according to Wall, they use Biblical comparisons to explain the otherwise incomprehensible.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) ad (8 May 1994) also tells more of its own story than Rwanda's. The ad obscures Rwanda first by playing on the religious angle, as well, by use of the word "exodus," near the word "hell." The very labeling of a "hell called Rwanda" is disturbing in that it dehumanizes the attackers and victims – rendering them distant from "our" experience. Rwanda's specificity is further buried because, while the ad does tell the story of a specific small town where 5000 people attacked at an "overcrowded stadium," the ad doesn't even include the name of this small town, nor does it refer to any of the details of why the attacks were occurring, who was being attacked, etc. Instead the IRC did spend space in the ad describing its own history and credentials: its founding by Albert Einstein sixty years previously, its existence as "the world's largest private nonsectarian relief organization serving refugees," its role in helping in many other countries, and finally Money magazine's citation of the IRC as "best managed charity," due to its low overhead. The IRC's history becomes the focus over Rwanda's. By including just as much of its own history as Rwanda's – if not more – than these organizations lend themselves to the impression that the story is about the North, not about Rwanda. Again, this is a common attribute of the savior narrative.

This formula – emphasis on Africa as Other, importance of "us" saving "them," and humanitarianism (workers or organizations) as the focus – is used with enough frequency that something about it must work, at least in the sense of raising money. But I would argue that what also "works" about the formula is that it, like the Ethiopia ads before, helps to obscure. It obscures other alternatives to humanitarianism and savior narratives, especially by obscuring the causes behind the "crisis in Rwanda." Instead of being a story about Rwanda, then, the ads tell the story about the good that humanitarianism is doing – and how "you" can help by giving money. The strategy vastly fails Rwanda, and Africa more widely, by reinforcing the tropes of Africa as Other and upholding the very unequal relationship between Africa and the North. But it fails the audiences of the North, as well, since their role is only to give money: there is little space to imagine another role, let alone to contemplate a relationship with Africa that is

other than one of savior and victim.¹⁴ With the end of the Cold War only a few years earlier, 1994 was a time in history when international relationships were shifting, or at least had the potential to do so. By upholding the us/them divide and the inequality inherent in the savior narrative, the discourses of the media and humanitarianism helped to secure Africa in the hierarchy of Other, all the while disguising this imbalance behind a veneer of benevolent humanitarianism, of kind savior. But my point is that the ads and the media do very little to engage their audiences to a more active role. In the next chapter, we will see how songs written to raise money for the Ethiopian famine also balanced this problem, while Chapter Four focuses on books written about Rwanda that allow for a more engaged audience.

¹⁴ This is not to exonerate Northern audiences altogether, either: blandly accepting the stories in the ads and the media is also, in part, a choice – but this is an argument for a different project.

Chapter Three: Songs for Famine Relief: From Savior Narratives to “Tears Are Not Enough”

In 1984 and 1985, three groups of artists came together to raise funds for combating the famine in Ethiopia: Band Aid in the United Kingdom, U.S.A. for Africa in the United States, and Northern Lights in Canada. The songs written by these groups are illustrative of several aspects and variants of the savior narrative and thus are worth exploring in detail. The three songs I will discuss are “Do They Know It’s Christmas?” by Band Aid, “We Are The World” by U.S.A. for Africa, and “Tears are not Enough” by Northern Lights. In each case, the songs aimed to raise attention and money for a people at risk, uniting an impressive array of artists whose popularity was bound to attract attention. Each song reached number one status in its respective country’s charts, while “Do They Know It’s Christmas” and “We Are the World” enjoyed considerable international fame and sales, and were remade multiple times in response to later crises. Millions of dollars were raised in support of famine relief in Africa.

These details underline how popular the songs were, and in some cases still are, and the high level of influence they have on the public imagination about Africa. Rather than letting the plight of dying people be swept under the rug, the songs relentlessly drew attention to it. To varying degrees, however, each of the songs echoes the discourse of humanitarianism and savior narratives on Ethiopia and Africa that the last chapters detailed, where a strong us/them dichotomy divides the Northern audience from the Africans being saved, where both groups are disempowered, and a savior narrative takes the place of political action, especially with the help of depoliticized discourses and emotional appeals. My goal in looking at these songs is to investigate the answers that the songs contain to the question “what can be done?”, in particular how the songs relate to savior narratives. The songs’ attitudes are revealed especially by looking at how the songs address the relationship between “us” and “them” (so much a given at this time, as the last chapter has made clear), which includes noting how the songs appeal to their

audiences and how they deal with the topics of change and difference. Where “Do They Know It’s Christmas” seems more conservative, upholding the savior narrative paradigm, “We Are the World” hints at some change by working with and against savior narratives, and “Tears Are Not Enough” moves toward change by more consistently challenging the savior narrative. After seeing the problems that the media and humanitarian coverage present, analyzing these songs shows how the discourses of humanitarianism and savior narratives circulated more widely, while the changes alluded to by “We Are the World” and “Tears Are Not Enough” point the way to the challenges to humanitarianism that the novels in Chapter Four open further.

“Do They Know It’s Christmas?”

It's Christmas time
There's no need to be afraid
At Christmas time
We let in light and we banish shade
And in our world of plenty
We can spread a smile of joy
Throw your arms around the world
At Christmas time

But say a prayer
Pray for the other ones
At Christmas time it's hard
But when you're having fun
There's a world outside your window
And it's a world of dread and fear
Where the only water flowing
Is the bitter sting of tears
And the Christmas bells that ring
There are the clanging chimes of doom
Well tonight thank God it's them instead of you

Feed the world
Let them know it's Christmas time

Feed the world
Do they know it's Christmas time at all?

And there won't be snow in Africa
This Christmas time
The greatest gift they'll get this year is life
Where nothing ever grows
No rain nor rivers flow
Do they know it's Christmas time at all?

Feed the world
Let them know it's Christmas time
Feed the world
Let them know it's Christmas time again

(Here's to you) raise a glass for everyone
(Here's to them) underneath that burning sun
Do they know it's Christmas time at all?

Feed the world
Let them know it's Christmas time
(repeat & fade)

The song “Do They Know It’s Christmas?”, written by Bob Geldof and Midge Ure, was released November 29, 1984, by the group Band Aid – a collection of British and Irish musicians, including David Bowie, Paul McCartney, and members of groups such as U2, Duran Duran, and Genesis. Once released, the song went quickly to number one on the charts in the UK, and sold a million copies in the first week, going on to sell more than three million copies in the UK, and receiving an astounding amount of air time.¹⁵ Although well-intentioned, the song relies so strongly on an us/them mentality and a feeling of inevitability that it undermines its attempts to ask more difficult questions.

¹⁵ The song was released again in 1989 by Band Aid II, and then again in 2004 by Band Aid 20. Each time, the song reached number one on the charts.

On the one hand, the story behind its existence suggests it is a sincere desire to help. As the story goes, musician Bob Geldof saw Michael Buerk's October 1984 BBC report from Ethiopia and felt immediately that some response was necessary. According to the BBC, "Geldof was immediately spurred into action. He thought about writing a song with the Boomtown Rats [Geldof's band] to make money - but realised their fortunes were on the wane and knew it would not work" ("Band Aid"). With the help of others, he attracted a large and diverse group of top UK artists to sing a song that would raise money for charity for the famine victims. In a sense, Geldof gave up the chance to promote his own band in order to draw more attention to the cause by recruiting other stars. The repeating refrain "Feed the world" together with the fact that the song was explicitly created to raise money for famine victims speak to the fact that it was intended as a partial remedy to the famine crisis. Similarly, the song emphasizes the theme of Christmas, a distinct reminder of the acts of charity and fellowship that are supposed to embody Christianity and are especially emphasized at Christmastime, an emphasis that probably elicited more sales and donations.

This resonates with the tension between fame and generosity that we saw in ads for humanitarian action in Ethiopia in the previous chapters. While Geldof sacrificed fame for his own musical group by pursuing the idea of a large group of musicians to sing "Christmas," the generosity of the action is severely limited by the constraints of the song. By relying so deeply on the structures of a savior narrative, a generosity that could lead to deeper help for Ethiopia (beyond the notion of Africa as Other and Africa as a place where suffering is inherent) is not found.

Instead, the song relies emphatically on an us/them or here/there divide. The "us" portion is quickly obvious in the first stanza: "*We* let in light," "*our* world of plenty" (emphases added), and this "us" is meant to incorporate the listener as the "you" as in the line, also in the first stanza "Throw your arms around the world." Importantly, this notion of you and me, us, stands in contrast to "the other ones": the second stanza begins with the imperative "But [you] say a prayer / Pray for the other ones." These "other ones" are the vague "them": they can be understood as being "the world" in the repeating refrain "Feed the world" and, while still vague, the Otherness of "them" is underlined by the other phrase in the refrain "Let *them* know it's Christmas time" (emphasis added).

This vague notion is narrowed down a bit by the third stanza which reads “there won’t be snow in Africa / This Christmas time / The greatest gift *they’ll* get this year is life” (emphasis added), which implies the “them” is Africans. In line with so many previous and contemporary representations, “we” are understood to be separate from “them.”

The distinction is made more troubling by the further ways the two are characterized: again from the first stanza – “We let in light and we banish shade / And in our world of plenty / We can spread a smile of joy.” The picture of “us” is light without shade, plenty, and joy. The North is further characterized by the “fun” of Christmas, a theme of happiness underlined by the “Christmas bells” ringing in the background of the song. But this “our” joy stands in distinct contrast to “their” world – “a world of dread and fear / Where the only water flowing / Is the bitter sting of tears.” The other descriptions match this grim picture: rather than Christmas bells, “There are the clanging chimes of doom.” Similarly, “they” live in a place “Where nothing ever grows / No rain nor rivers flow” and their light is “that burning sun,” implying that even the light “over there” is harsh and cruel. One is left picturing all of Africa as an arid wasteland of unending desert.

Again, these harsh details underline the difference between us and them, between here and there, leaving no doubt that “we” and “here” are to be preferred. Indeed, this us/them division is made particularly clear in the album’s cover shown in Figure 9 below (Blake). A black and white photo of two hungry-looking African children dressed in rags is pasted into a collaged scene of happy old-time Christmas images, with a variety of white children and a few white adults looking on.



Figure 9 – Cover art for “Do They Know It’s Christmas?”

The specifics of the song also echo previous descriptions of Africa to a startling degree, underlining Africa as Other, where disasters are the norm. For example, the line “There won’t be snow in Africa” obscures the fact that *not* all of Africa was suffering from famine, instead applying the problems of a few countries to an entire continent. In addition, the song attributes the famine to drought (“nothing ever grows”) and doesn’t reference the wars in Ethiopia that helped to cause the problem: instead, the famine is seen as “natural,” and is thus further depoliticized. This picture of “there” is more disturbing because it seems stuck in this despair – the line “where nothing *ever* grows” (emphasis added) implies that the state of affairs - lack of food - has been and will be the same: Africa is stuck in a cycle of despair, never progressing toward “us” and our world of plenty. Indeed, the line strongly recalls the “discourse of crisis” that Jo Ellen Fair refers to, a discourse which underlines the need for a savior, and thus a savior narrative.

This reference to an unchanging state of doom for “them” is familiar, and is further underlined when we note who is active and who is passive in the world of the song. Importantly, little action is attributed to “them”: whereas “we” banish the shade and spread joy, “they” are fed and come to know that it’s Christmas time because of “us,” per the refrain; their other action is “get” life as a gift. Taken together, these imply Africans as passive in the face of an unchangingly harsh world. There is little question of agency, or even politics, when “they” do nothing, and the cause of their problems is the “burning sun” and lack of water.

It’s important to note that, like in the examples from the previous chapter, “our” action is still very constrained. Though “we” do the most active accomplishments in the song, they are vague and depoliticized: what does it even mean to “banish shade” and “spread a smile of joy”? While “feed[ing] the world” sounds more dynamic, those who need to be fed are distant (especially in the song’s logic since “they” are African), so the action of feeding is distanced, as well. In reality, “we” are only asked to listen to this song and, implicitly, to give money to provide a cure for the problems of the famine. Political action is not referred to, even among the active “us,” and certainly not for the passive “them.”

This us/them dichotomy is troubling since it separates us and them, making a point of distinguishing between the two, thus alienating the one from the other. Importantly, a closer look at action in the song reveals that the relationship between “us” and “them” is only bridged by one-way giving. The question of who does the giving is, in fact, left vague: the line “The greatest thing they’ll get this year is life” and the line “Let them know it’s Christmas time” don’t specify who will give the “gift,” or who will “let them know” (give them the knowledge), but the most obvious answer would be the “us” that is engaged in “feeding the world.” As I have pointed out, most of the action in the song is done by “us”(and for “them”), so it follows that the act of giving the gift and knowledge to “them” would be done by “us,” especially since “we” and “they” are the only actors named in the song. Importantly, however, this implies a one-way action: “we” give to “them,” keeping the action, the active giving, in our realm, not theirs, while negating any gifts “they” might have. This construction also denies the things – knowledge, wealth, products, etc – that the North has received or taken from Africa

already. This construction further denies any type of partnership between “us” and “them” beyond the hierarchical relationship of the savior narrative.

The things being given – knowledge and the gift of life – add to the us/them distance, reifying a savior narrative. For instance, the title and refrain of the song – “Do they know it’s Christmas?” – underline the importance of the knowledge that it’s Christmas. The song, it is understood, is a way of sharing that knowledge. But by making Christmas the important knowledge to be shared, the song thus assumes a homogenous and Christian Britain/North to spread the message, as well as a homogenous and Christian Ethiopia that needs to receive the message. While this can (and should) be read as an attempt to bridge the difference between “us” and “them,” finding a commonality between here and there, ignoring differences within each culture means the song merely flattens the differences out – sweeps them away. This is particularly true of Ethiopia, which is only understood, thus far, to be Other. Thus the interesting history that the ancient Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum converted to Christianity during the 4th century, one of the first empires to convert, is disregarded by the song. Further, Ethiopia’s rich history of containing a Christian, as well as a substantial Muslim and an ancient Jewish population is ignored. Instead, the song assumes that all knowledge of Christmas – and by implication, much other knowledge, too – is wiped away by suffering. What is left behind is a pure victim. This image of a victim, of course, helps build a savior narrative.

Meanwhile, many ideas spring out of the strange line from the middle of the song that reads, “the greatest gift they’ll get this year is life.” While the notion of life as a gift is widespread, and in many ways a common phrase, the context of this song and the specific way it is worded make the notion unsettling. On the one hand, as I have said, this wording reinforces the notion of “them” as being the recipients of things, passive rather than active.

Moreover, in addition to the implied passivity of the recipients, the notion of life as a gift to “get,” and thus to be given, bears further investigation. But what does it imply that life is a gift? Rather than, say, a right? Gift giving is done on a whim – there is no guarantee it will be given, nor repercussions if it is not. The value of the life being saved is thus underrated, if it can be saved purely on impulse.

In the same vein, one can think of Marcel Mauss and his concept of “the gift.” For example, Mauss argued that gift giving was reciprocal, and that failing to reciprocate would mean a loss of honor and status, or even a loss of spiritual authority. But the “gift of life” construction in this song essentially assumes a one-way giving, nearly guaranteeing a loss of status for those – Ethiopians – unable to reciprocate. While Mauss is referring to a gift economy in his writing, this notion that not reciprocating puts one in an inferior position rings true.

In a sense, the gift giving idea fits with the Christmas theme of the song, in which gift giving has become a large part of Christmas. But the Christmas theme also raises disturbing questions stemming from cultural celebrations of Christmas in the North: the notion of giving life as a gift can be disturbing because gifts are only supposed to be given to those who have been “good” throughout the year. Does this imply that those who have not been good “over there” do not merit the gift of life? That those who died weren’t good people? Or since Christmas celebrations also focus on giving gifts to children, does the theme also bolster the idea that the victims are like children, innocent and in need of the parental guidance of an “us” who will gift them with life?

The Christmas theme also brings out questions related to religion: given the context of Christmas, a celebration of Christ’s birth, there is the potential for the giver in the song is the Christian God since Christ is sometimes referred to as God’s gift to the world. But with only one other reference to God in the song – in which God is being thanked – the actions of the songs still seem to imply the “us” as the givers, in this case. But if “we” remain the givers, this creates a disturbing association between “us” and God: the song suggests a strong parallel between the “us” giving life and God as the giver of his son (understood in the Christian faith to be the way to eternal life) which implies a kind of divinity on the part of “us.” In many veins of Christian thought, Jesus – part divine and part human – is meant to bring divine and human together. But many other understandings still see a stark and hierarchical divide between divine and human, spirit and body, and the sharp us/them divide that the song exhibits argues that same divide applies – where us is equated with superior spirit and divine, and they with inferior body and human. Not only is the us/them divide maintained, it even appears to have divine origins. This makes the hierarchy appear more natural (God has ordained it to be this

way), and less changeable (it has always been this way, and God wills it to be this way). The savior narrative which relies on such divides is strengthened, while the distance between us and them is made more difficult to bridge.

Some of the consequences of these problems are visible even in the song. Toward the middle of the song comes a highly ambiguous line, one whose potential to challenge the status quo is consistently undermined by the problems in the rest of the song. At the end of the second stanza, the song reads “Well tonight thank God it’s them instead of you.” In the original 1984 version, Bono, the lead singer for the Irish rock group, U2, sang this line. According to the BBC, “Bono did not want to sing the line” (“Band Aid”). The BBC quotes him as saying ““It seemed like the most bitterly selfish line,”” but he went on ““and I think maybe it was the truth of it that unnerved me... I almost didn't want to admit to it.”” In many ways, the singer’s words capture the ambiguity of the phrase: a level of selfishness, and a level of truth. The two are intertwined: most people would have to admit to a certain selfish level of relief that such a crisis was striking someone else, not themselves and their community. The selfishness is evident: I’d prefer this happen to someone else. The truth of the line is that we generally are grateful for our good fortune. The strength of this truth is that it can, and perhaps should be uncomfortable in the respect of making the audience aware of their own good fortune (their own comfort, their own advantages). Ideally this leads to questioning why this is happening to someone else.

But the selfishness is given more power over the truth of the statement because the sentence is phrased in the imperative form: an almost implied “you should” “thank God it’s them instead of you.” Adapting the line to a question offers a different alternative: “Do you thank God it’s them instead of you?” could raise the sentiments in a way that would invite the audience to ask such a question and ponder the answer. Instead, phrased as an imperative order, the phrase runs the risk of normalizing the sentiment, implying that the selfishness is to be expected.

At the same time, since the song relies so consistently on the us/them mentality, the power of the song to raise questions about the truth in the line is further blunted. Quite simply, the harshness of the truth is difficult to confront: asking why this is happening to someone else and not us is far from easy, as the questions could prod the

audience to question their place in the world. But the song doesn't provide a structure to ask these questions: it has consistently underlined an us/them divide that seems natural. Instead of pushing for hard answers, one easy answer to the question of why should a famine happen is simply that it's because it's "them." It wouldn't happen here because we are "us." Recall, the song argues the famine is natural: "they" are in a place where "there won't be snow" and "the only water flowing / Is the bitter sting of tears." So the famine is due to the lack of rain and snow – it is outside of the control of people. By making the famine appear natural and inevitable, this cuts off questioning other causes of the famine, such as the construction of the difference between us and them. Instead, the line simply underlines our place of comfort and the naturalness of this order, this hierarchy. And since the line says, "thank God it's them instead of you," this implies a universe in which some must be "them" – some must suffer. The audience is left with little with which to imagine an alternative: a world in which the division between "us" and "them" has been replaced with a partnership, in which famines do not occur in one part of the world where excess exists simultaneously in another.

In the end, in response to the question "what can be done?", the song firmly upholds a savior narrative. Instead of encountering a hard truth about our own selfishness, the song normalizes the selfishness, obscuring it behind a feeling of generosity because we are "feeding the world." The relationship between "us" and "them" portrayed in the song is a distant one, a hierarchical one, which seems natural and even divinely ordained. In this way, "Do They Know It's Christmas?" strongly resembles the savior narratives that we saw in the previous chapters, upholding the status quo of this unequal relationship. True to its band's name, the song is at best a "band-aid" for the troubles in Ethiopia, and at worst a compilation of the problems of making Africa appear as our Other, making the famine appear natural, and putting off a more long-term solution to these problems. While we will see how "We Are the World" upholds some of the same problems, it also seeks some alternatives to these discourses, particularly by focusing on the potential for unity and community.

"We Are the World"

The American response to Band Aid's song was a group song called "We Are the World," recorded in January 1985, and released in early March 1985.

There comes a time when we heed a certain call
When the world must come together as one
There are people dying
Oh, and it's time to lend a hand to life
The greatest gift of all

We can't go on pretending day by day
That someone, somehow will soon make a change
We're all a part of God's great big family
And the truth - you know love is all we need

(CHORUS)

We are the world, we are the children
We are the ones who make a brighter day
so let's start giving
There's a choice we're making
We're saving our own lives
It's true we'll make a better day
Just you and me

Well, send' em you your heart
So they know that someone cares
And their lives will be stronger and free
As God has shown us
By turning stone to bread
And so we all must lend a helping hand

(REPEAT CHORUS)

When you're down and out
There seems no hope at all
But if you just believe
There's no way we can fall
Well, well, well, let's realize
That one change can only come
When we stand together as one

(REPEAT CHORUS AND FADE)

The song, written by Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie, was sung under the group name United Support of Artists for Africa, or U.S.A. for Africa. Along with Jackson and Richie, other popular artists who participated were Stevie Wonder, Ray Charles, Paul Simon, and Bob Dylan, with over fifty performers contributing overall. The song was vastly popular – quickly becoming number one on the Billboard charts of the US, as well as selling out 800,000 copies within three days¹⁶. The song was also released internationally and was similarly successful in Australia, New Zealand, and Europe. Although the song makes an attempt at oneness and changing the status quo, I argue that the song falters by relying on an us/them divide and other familiar savior narrative tropes.

The song makes an attempt at oneness and the title proclaims part of the message – “we are the world.” The song attempts this unifying concept, frequently using the “we” to stand in for the message, repeated in the first and last stanzas, “the world must come together as one” and “we stand together as one.” This unity stands in contrast to the pervasive us/them themes that we saw in the media coverage and humanitarian ads in Chapter One, and implies an attempt at overcoming the difference – perceived and real – between “us” and “them.” Importantly, overcoming difference would, in this context, mean breaking down the us/them divide, recognizing commonalities, and joining together for action, as I suggested with writers like Marx and Quillen in the Introduction. Boundaries and borders become meaningless: we are one, we are the world. Difference, we can infer, can be overcome in the face of bigger problems.

However, this attempt at one-ness is countered by an us/them theme in the song. Even the group’s name suggests an “us”: the group name is actually United Support of Artists for Africa, but the shortened version – U.S.A. for Africa – of course suggests the United States of America. In addition, that the name is “U.S.A. *for* Africa,” and not, for example, “with” or “in” implies that the group speaks for Africa, because “Africa” could

¹⁶ As well as being sung in Live Aid concerts, at an inauguration event for Bill Clinton in 1993, and at Michael Jackson’s funeral, “We Are the World” was released again as “We Are the World 25 for Haiti” in February 2010 as a fundraiser after the Haiti earthquake.

not carry out that role itself. The Africa as Other theme comes out in the first stanza, as well: the line “There are people dying” implies a distance between those singing (and listening), and those dying. In the third stanza, this distance is emphasized by the lines “send *‘em* your heart / So *they* know that someone cares / And *their* lives will be stronger and free” (emphasis added). The refrain, as well, with the repeated “We are the children,” lends itself to seeing Africa as Other since, as we saw in the first chapter, so many of the media accounts and humanitarian appeals relied on representing Ethiopia with pictures of starving children. This reliance on “children” to appeal to an audience infantilizes the famine, reducing the sufferers to only children, with all of the historical weight of this representation of Africa. As with Band Aid’s song, the “you” or “your” in the song is understood to be among the “us,” and different from “they” who are receiving the action. Altogether, admitting that it is someone else who needs help, and assuming “we” will be the ones to give that help undermine the work of unification. Difference was not actually overcome: the lines between “us” and “them” again play out in the role of giver and receiver.

This tension – between unification and relying on an us/them divide – plays itself out throughout the song. In the end, despite some real strengths in challenging the status quo, the song falls short of that goal with the use of weak platitudes and clichés. The song argues that we need to act/change to overcome difference, but, in the end, I argue that the song does not point in this direction: instead it upholds differences between us and them.

The song does challenge some passivity, urging for change and unity. Indeed, the song appears a call to action – we should “heed a call,” “lend a hand,” “make a change.” And one of the actions called for is apparently change: unlike “Do They Know It’s Christmas?”, which suggests the answer for the famine is that help for “them” will come from “us,” “We Are the World” does suggest “change” is part of the answer. The idea of change is mentioned twice: the first time, the song insists we have to stop “pretending...that someone, somehow will soon make a change” and the second time it says “change can only come when we stand together as one.” Given a general reliance on the trope of Africa as unchanging – trapped in a primeval and cyclical time – the emphasis on change at all allows room for new ideas. In more depth, the first mention suggests a kind of willful blindness or resistance to how change can come: the song

points out that we typically defer change to “someone, somehow.” Recognizing the resistance to change is a step to addressing it, as is recognizing that “we” must act for the change we want, not just expect it from others. In addition, the idea in the second reference that change comes from unification, that it comes “when we stand together as one” is a contrast to the theme of help coming from the North for the South. It plants the idea that unity will be an important element of the change needed – which suggests overcoming the differences that separate us, and especially that separate “us” from “them.” This signals a potential departure from the depoliticized savior narratives we have seen so often.

Nonetheless, this strength of emphasizing change also reveals a weakness. The change the song calls for (in confronting the famine and in overcoming difference) is difficult and would require will, dedication, and reflection. But “We Are the World” relies on appeals to the heart, and there are practically no appeals to the intellect. Where appealing to the heart could strengthen the will and dedication to work for change, without intellectual appeals there is little drive toward reflection, a lack which could also cripple the will and dedication to the work to come. The appeal to the heart is evidenced by both the use of “children” in the song, as well as the line “love is all we need.” Using children to appeal to emotions is well-established, while the line “love is all we need” implies that, in addressing the famine and effecting change, no intellectual engagement is needed: love will simply accomplish everything. Indeed, this point is emphasized by the lines that suggest sending “them” your heart will make their lives “stronger and free.” All that is needed, the song implies, is a show of emotion and lives will be saved.

I have suggested that the song asks for change, and that overcoming difference is part of what the song asks for. But the song does not engage intellectually to answer important questions: what needs to change? Or who? In the context of a famine, something obviously needed to change, but the song doesn’t give hints as to what that would be. Though the song appears a call to action, just what the action is, that is left mostly unsaid or unspecified. The song encourages “let’s start giving” – but giving what? And to whom? Without more specificity, the implication is that “we” should start giving money or food to “them,” again a reductive sort of answer that ignores some of the bigger

problems of structural inequality that allowed millions of people to be at risk of famine in the first place.

Instead, the answers the song does provide are largely clichés with little substance. For example, the song argues that “We’re all a part of God’s great big family / And the truth – you know love is all we need.” And while religion, family and love might be part of the answers to resolving the issue of difference, and the related problems of famine and war, the song gives us little else to think with or about. Indeed, the line “love is all we need” makes little sense in the context of this song and what the song is trying to accomplish in calling for change. To the victims of a famine, love is not enough: love won’t do anything, in fact. The one sense in which it could is if that love comes from somewhere else in the form of money or food, and possibly also regime change, attached. So the love that could help again comes from “us” to “them.”

Likewise, and similar to “Christmas,” the actions that “we” do are vague and passive, further reducing “our” engagement with solving the problems of famine or challenging the role of difference. We are asked twice to “lend a hand”: while this seems more active, the distance between “us” and “them” – both the real distance and especially the perceived distance with the us/them dichotomy in place – makes this action far more symbolic, and thus passive, than it could otherwise be. “Make a brighter day” and “Make a better day” are both repeated in the refrain, but what these consist of – that is not clear. The same is true for the line that says, “There’s a choice we’re making” – what is the choice? How does it bring change? While the open-ended questions could allow for a variety of answers, the problems of the us/them divide undercut more challenging answers.

The song further undermines its call to change by making some of the same mistakes “Christmas” made: referring to life as a gift and putting “us” on par with God, to the detriment of “them.” For instance, as with “Christmas,” “World” refers to life as “the greatest gift of all.” This reference recalls the same problems: a passive and inferior “them,” whose lives are saved because of our generous whim. In addition, the lines “As God has shown us / By turning stone to bread / And so we all must lend a helping hand”

are peculiar¹⁷. The lines seem to imply that “lend[ing] a helping hand” will put us on the same level as a miracle of God (turning stone to bread), which raises some of the same problems of associating “us” with divinity as “Christmas” did. Given that “they” are on the receiving end of that helping hand, these lines do echo again an unequal relationship of “us” and “them” – “us” associated with divine, and “them” as mere recipients. These lines, which strengthen the idea of Africa as Other, suggest this as a God-inspired hierarchy, and uphold savior narratives undermine the message of change to which the song aspires.

In addition, criticism of “World” at the time of its release recalls the fame versus generosity tension that we saw in some of the ads for humanitarian action, too, thus highlighting capitalism as one of the beneficiaries of this type of savior narrative. Greil Marcus points out that Pepsi’s jingle at the time was “Pepsi: the choice of a new generation,” which echoed “World’s” refrain “there’s a choice we’re making” too closely for Marcus’ comfort, especially given that many of the artists had Pepsi contracts – including writers Jackson and Richie (quoted in Garofalo 29). Marcus asserts, “‘We Are the World’ says less about Ethiopia than it does about Pepsi” – a trait we have already seen in savior narratives. Marcus goes on, “the true result will likely be less that certain Ethiopian individuals will live, or anyway live a bit longer than they otherwise would have, than that Pepsi will get the catch phrase of its advertising campaign sung for free by Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder, Bruce Springsteen, and all the rest” (29). In this case, Marcus names Pepsi, specifically, as a company that benefits from this line of savior narrative.

While author Reebee Garofalo praises “We Are the World” for being a catalyst for further action, she does note that little was required of the artists since it “was recorded in essentially one night...when all of the contributing artists were already in Los Angeles” (32-3). Garofalo’s point places the artists of USA for Africa on the spectrum of fame versus generosity that we saw in the humanitarian ads for Ethiopia in Chapter One –

¹⁷ Also, the song doesn’t specify who this “God” is – whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or something else entirely. A Christian God is an obvious guess, however, given that the writers, Lionel Richie and Michael Jackson, were both raised in Christian traditions and given the predominance of Christianity in the US. But if the God referred to is the Christian God, the reference is even more bizarre, because I can find no reference in the Old or New Testament to God turning stone to bread. After fasting for forty days in the desert, the books of Matthew and Luke have Jesus tempted by the devil to turn stone into bread, but he resists. This apparent error in the religious reference only decreases the song’s authority.

with the fame to be gained far outweighing the effort made. Garofalo further critiques the song, expressing the opinion that the line "We're saving our own lives" was a "distasteful element of self-indulgence" (29). She asserted that the artists of USA for Africa were proclaiming "their own salvation for singing about an issue they will never experience on behalf of a people most of them will never encounter" (29). Garofalo thus questions the generosity, itself, if the song implies a "salvation" for the singers in reward for this small act of generosity. From this, I argue that the savior narrative is not only about "us," but in this case *for* "us," as well – "our" salvation is what is at stake.

In the end, because "We Are the World" swings so frequently between an attempt at unity versus an us/them divide, its impact remains ambiguous. Because the song certainly contains fewer "them" references, many of the "we" references are more indistinct, and one of the consequences of this vagueness is that the words of the refrain, in particular, can be read in two very different ways. On the one hand, more optimistically, the "we" encompasses everyone - it is the world and the children – hence "we" really are the world and we are all part of "making a brighter day." But the cultural context of us/them that exists, and the fact that the song includes some of these, too, weakens this notion. So, more cynically, the "we" is read more restrictively – if the "we" is the singers and the (Northern) audience, then all that activity – of making a brighter day, giving, making a choice, saving our own lives – is reserved to us, and "they" do not participate in the activity.

Thus the song comes closer than "Do They Know It's Christmas" but still fails to depart significantly from the classic savior narrative that cripples the way we approach these crises. By employing so many of the same tropes that we saw from Chapters One and Two – emotional appeals which uphold savior narratives over other solutions, the use of "children" which infantilizes the famine, and passiveness in both audience and recipients of aid – the song undermines its attempt to move toward unity. "We" are still separate from "them," with little more than a savior narrative and a vague call for change to bridge the separation. As we will see, Northern Lights' song "Tears Are Not Enough" is able to work past many of these drawbacks and offer more substantial alternatives to these trends.

In February 1985, the group Northern Lights – again a gathering of popular musicians, this time Canadian – recorded their song, “Tears Are Not Enough” in response to the famine.

“Tears Are Not Enough”

As every day goes by, how can we close our eyes
Until we open up our hearts
We can learn to share and show how much we care
Right from the moment that we start

It seems like overnight we see a world in a different light
Somehow our innocence is lost
How can we look away 'cause every single day
We've got to help at any cost

We can bridge the distance
Only we can make the difference
Don't you know that
Tears are not enough (Chorus)

If we can pull together
We can change the world forever
Heaven knows that tears are not enough

It's up to me and you
To make the dream come true
It's time to take our message everywhere

C'est l'amour qui nous rassemble
D'ici a l'autre bout du monde
Let's show them Canada still cares
Oh, you know that we'll be there

(Chorus)

If we can pull together

We can change the world forever
Heaven knows that tears are not enough

And if we should try together, you and I
Maybe we could understand the reasons why

If we take a stand,
Every woman, child, and man
We could make it work
For God's sake, lend a hand

(Chorus)

If we can pull together
We can change the world forever
Heaven knows that tears are not enough

David Foster and Paul Vallance wrote the first draft of the lyrics, with help from Bryan Adams, Rachel Paiement, Paul Hyde and Bob Rock in the final version. Most of these also took part in the recording, as either singers or musicians, and were joined by others such as Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, and Gordon Lightfoot. While “Tears Are Not Enough” also shares some of the problems in representing the famine that “Do They Know It’s Christmas?” and “We Are the World” have, the song differs from its predecessors in important ways, allowing room for questions and challenges to the savior narrative and its way of seeing the world.

Two main themes problematize the song: first, a strain of emotional appeal echoes previous discourses. Similarly, the song has a tendency toward “us” as Canada – making the song more about “us” than about helping aid the famine. Though both of these are also challenged, they bear investigation first.

The song appears limited by emotion at the beginning as it suggests “we open up our hearts” and “show how much we care” – placing a primacy on emotions. One of the middle stanzas further demonstrates the prevalence of emotion in the song. It runs “*C’est l’amour qui nous rassemble,*” or “It’s love that brings us together” (my translation) and “Let’s show them Canada still cares.” So far, the song follows the trend of asserting that

emotion and caring will solve the problems the song wants to address, the famine in Ethiopia.

At the same time, there are a few examples that argue that the song is, at heart, about Canada. Almost every line of the song (especially outside of the refrain) has a reference to “we,” “us,” or “our.” Combined with the line “Let’s show them Canada still cares” and the general trend we have already seen in the other songs and in the coverage of Ethiopia of an us/them dichotomy, this starts suggesting that “we,” “Canada” is at the center of this song. Indeed, though a kind of strength which I will open up below, the French line quoted above can highlight a self-conscious Canadian-ness of the song, since Canada’s two languages are English and French. While expressly trying to raise aid for the Ethiopian famine, it seems the song cannot escape itself and its origins.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that some of the problematic concepts in the song fall in the same line: “Let’s show them Canada still cares.” This juxtaposition suggests that relying on emotion and making the song about us (which assumes a “them”) are linked. I will show that the song actually pushes against this by encouraging learning (in contrast to relying on emotion) and trying to wrestle with the notion of difference, of how “we” relate to “them” (in contrast to building up an “us” of Canada).

As I have said, the song does appear to work against these problems as well. In part, the song tries to overcome its Canadian-ness by addressing the issue of difference. Indeed, the very lines that are in French – while highlighting a feature of Canada’s culture – also demonstrate an attempt to incorporate some of the difference within Canada. This is a small measure, to be sure: there are only the two lines of French, amidst the other forty or so in English. Similarly, the song doesn’t incorporate any languages of the First Nations peoples, for example. It acknowledges difference within Canada, but still in a limited way. Despite these notable limitations, it is remarkable that the song does try to acknowledge and incorporate difference, rather than assuming a homogenous representation. By allowing for and even highlighting difference within Canada, “Tears Are Not Enough” implies that difference is not something to be objected to, and perhaps even embraced.

In the same vein, there are only two lines in the song that indicate an “Other,” and they fall in the same stanza: “Let’s show *them* Canada still cares / Oh, you know that

we'll be *there*" (emphases added). That first line provides a "them" in the us/them dichotomy, but it is the only line in the song that does. As I have shown, the line is already problematic in relying on emotion and making the song about "us," so the reference to "them" stands out. However, since this is the only reference, and the "them" is not made Other in more ways, the song overall escapes the problem of setting "us" against "them." The second line is softer: while "there" does seem to assume a distance, the idea that we'll *be* there, in that place as opposed to just sending food or money there, suggests that the distance between us, or more importantly, between "us" and "them" can be bridged. And where the song does refer to "distance" in the refrain, which alludes to a space between "us" and "them" or here and there, the answer is to "bridge the distance": not widen the distance or even ignore it. The suggestion is to build something that brings us together. Again, this is a far more hopeful position. Likewise, the song allows for more people to be engaged in this – "Every woman, child, and man." Not only does the song escape the infantilization so common to representations of Ethiopia, but it invites everyone to be part of the work. Where the other songs and representations present Ethiopians as passive, and even most Northerners as well, the song opens the door for further action by all. Though limited by the problems I have outlined above and the larger cultural context in which the song was written, the song does imply more action by more people than we have seen up to now.

In this way, by avoiding an explicit Other and by attempting to acknowledge and incorporate difference, the song works against its tendency to put Canada at its center. Crucially, the song also makes an attempt – albeit a faltering one – to challenge the hegemonic representation of Africa as "our" Other.

In the same way that the song works against typical representations, it also goes on to complicate a too-easy reliance on emotion to solve problems, a move which is perhaps its greatest strength as it works against typical savior narratives. Its title, "Tears Are Not Enough" is repeated in the refrain throughout the song, and this simple phrase raises the idea that emotion will not suffice to solve the problems of famine or difference. Additionally, the song doesn't simply fall back on money as the answer: though the line "We've got to help at any *cost*" does suggest money as an answer, that one reference is not repeated. Instead – and importantly, while undercutting the notion that emotion or

money will solve the problem of famine, the song does suggest another mode of help – through knowing or learning.

This emphasis on learning is very clear in the first stanzas of the song, with eyes and seeing as important symbols in the song’s argument about the importance of learning: “how can we close our *eyes*?”, the song asks, and “we *see* the world in a different light,” and “how can we *look* away?” (emphases added). The themes of looking and seeing suggest learning – taking in new information. These combine with the phrases “We can *learn* to share” and, from the refrain, “Don’t you *know* that / Tears are not enough” (emphases added) to emphasize the importance of learning and coming to know something. This strand is significant because, by appealing to the intellect, it counters the overemphasis on emotion that we have seen so often.

The song opens up the topic of knowing even further, however. What’s striking is the sense of willful ignorance that the song alludes to: in asking “how can we close our eyes?” and “how can we look away,” the song implies that “we” have done just this up to now. The song’s line “our innocence is lost” hints at some of the resistance to learning and seeing, but does not mourn the loss of the innocence, in face of more pressing matters. Instead, the song recognizes a weakness – in us, in our culture, in the way the world is structured – and recognizes that this kind of act – of learning against the grain – will take an active and conscious effort.

In this vein, the song also implies that this process of opening up one’s eyes can be learned, just as “we can learn to share,” too. Similarly, it’s significant that the title and refrain are phrased as a question: “Don’t you know that tears are not enough?” The structure implies that if you don’t know (that tears are not enough), there is a chance to learn it: the song doesn’t simply assume the knowledge. Importantly, the song doesn’t assume that our eyes are already open and that we know tears are not enough, or that having our eyes closed or not knowing is a failure beyond redemption. Rather, the song invites the very process of learning something new.

Again, this is crucial because, having seen in the previous chapters how savior narratives function as part of humanitarian discourses, “Tears Are Not Enough” is attempting something new. Whereas as the implications of depoliticization, the pervasive us/them divide, and the overuse of emotional appeals all trend toward distancing,

disempowering, and rendering passive both Northern audiences and the Africans being “saved,” Northern Lights’ song attempts to bridge some of the distance and to invite the action of learning.

In this respect, two lines toward the end of the song bring the matter of learning to new heights by emphasizing it as a joint project and as a process. The song reads “And if we should try together, you and I / Maybe we could understand the reasons why.” There are many aspects of these lines which seem significant. Perhaps most notably is the use of “you and I”: while the song continually points toward knowing and learning, this line firmly puts the learning in the hands of us. This means we both have to learn. More elaborately, this means we both have something to learn: the “I” is part of that learning, putting “I” on par with “you.” While the identity of “you” isn’t clear, the two are not separated because of a superiority of the “I,” thus avoiding the classic us/them dichotomy. In addition, by pairing the two in the act of learning, the song implies that both are a part of the learning – both are, in fact, needed for the learning: “together, you and I.” Again, this leads the song away from a sense of superiority and inferiority in defining “you and I” or “us” and “them.” It allows for difference, implying that you and I will bring different things to the table in learning, and doesn’t denigrate that difference.

The other parts of this line speak more of the process of learning. This act, the song points out, is not simple. The wording is significant – “if we should *try* together.../ *Maybe* we could understand” (emphases added) – because it doesn’t assume that the learning is guaranteed: *maybe* we will learn it, we can *try* to learn it. Even what we are learning – “the reasons why” – are plural and thus not simple. The song begs for complexity in the learning, inviting and pushing for intellectual engagement rather than just an emotional response.

From here, it’s important to note a distinct vagueness in the song: while the circumstances surrounding its writing and release make it clear that the song was written in response to the famine in Ethiopia, the song does not, itself, allude to Ethiopia, famine, Africa, dying. It remains quite vague, even on the subject of what learning or knowing we should do. This is both a weakness and a strength. It is a weakness in the sense of leaving unspoken its goals; like in “We Are the World,” the vagueness can undermine the notion of knowing that the song otherwise promotes by not alluding to that which needs

to be learned and known – for example, the history and power behind the famine in Ethiopia for which they are attempting to raise money.

On the other hand, the deliberate lack of mention is a kind of honesty that this one song cannot give an accounting of the kinds of histories and powers behind that same famine: the song does not assume it can tell us all we need to know. Furthermore, the song points to more activity outside the song – learning some truths outside about the famine, truths that could continue the work of the song in challenging savior narratives and other common ways of looking at Africa. Looked at in this way, the song recognizes it is part of the answer, but is consciously not *The Answer*: it can point the way, but it is not *The Way*. In other words, buying the album or listening to the song will not by itself solve the problems the song raises. Instead, part of what is being learned is that “tears are not enough”: the way we have been doing things does not work. This concept helps to answer the vagueness issue.

Indeed, there is a strong repetition of knowing in the song, often linked to the notion that emotion is insufficient. The linkage is most explicit in the refrain “Don’t you know that / Tears are not enough.” The lines together are significant for the simple fact of linking knowing and tears: if tears are not enough, knowing more might help fill in the breach.

In response to the question “what can be done,” then, “Tears Are Not Enough” answers “caring and learning,” with an emphasis on the learning. The learning is pictured as a process, and one that can involve difference – not just mask it or ignore it. These are significant departures from the usual savior narratives and open the door for a more engaged audience. While the song does contain some familiar passive actions (“lend a hand” and “make the difference”), these are countered by the involvement of knowing and learning, which the song admits are not easy tasks. Because the song does not set up a strong us/them divide, and because it suggests learning should involve “you and I,” the song also avoids setting up a hierarchical relationship between “us” and “them.” Given all of this, though the song still aims to raise money to help famine victims in a mostly short-term way, the song’s other goals of engaging its audience to push beyond the response of mere tears is far more attainable. “Tears Are Not Enough”

thus serves as a useful stepping-stone for looking at two books written about Rwanda which also challenge the savior narratives and propose alternatives to them.

In bringing to an end this analysis of Band Aid's "Do They Know It's Christmas?", USA for Africa's "We Are the World," and Northern Lights' "Tears Are Not Enough," it is important to recall the popularity of the songs – especially the first two, which sold millions of copies at their debut, and have been remade and replayed many times since then. Their popularity at the time of the Ethiopian famine speaks to the circulation of the savior narratives that circulated around the story of the famine that I examined in the Introduction, but also how they reinforce cultural thinking along these lines, allowing for the continuation of these tendencies toward savior narratives in future responses. The circulation of the songs also highlights how audiences were rendered passive – that buying a song or album, or even listening to it, could be considered "helping." In this sense, they build off of the trend we saw in the Introduction, in which capitalism became central to the story purportedly about Ethiopia. I argue that the songs are also evidence of the difficulty in working against this strain of depoliticized savior narratives in humanitarian discourse: to the extent that "Do They Know It's Christmas?" and "We Are the World" make use of the savior narratives – especially in using or reinforcing an us/them divide – the work of countering these discourses becomes much more challenging. By avoiding most reference to Africa as Other, for example, "Tears Are Not Enough" is able to offer a more compelling alternative to that discourse. The relationship between "us" and "them" that each song implies clearly has an influence on whether the song is able to imagine something outside of savior narratives. Particularly as "We Are the World" and "Tears Are Not Enough" use the themes of community and learning to envision different options for relating to Ethiopia, this sets the stage for Chapter Four in which I examine the novels about Rwanda by Tierno Monénembo and Boubacar Boris Diop and look for the alternatives that the books imagine.

Chapter Four: Novels About the Genocide: Countering Humanitarian Discourses and Imagining Alternatives

In 1998 the artists' organization, Fest' Africa, based out of Lille, France, decided its yearly project would be called "*Rwanda: écrire par le devoir de mémoire*," variously translated as "Writing so as not to forget" (King vii) and "The Duty of Memory Project" (Cazenave and Célérier 82). Fest' Africa's organizers, having "felt that Africans had too often been silent about the events of the genocide" (King vii), planned the project, which included inviting many African writers to visit Rwanda for two months in order to write about the genocide¹⁸. Out of Fest' Africa's project came many different works, including the two novels which I will examine in this chapter: *Murambi: The Book of Bones* (*Murambi, le livre des ossements*, in its original French) by Senegalese writer Boubacar Boris Diop, and *The Oldest Orphan* (*L'Aîné des orphelins*, in its original French) by Guinean writer Tierno Monénembo.

The novels are central to my project because they both confront many of the shortfalls of the problematic representations made in the media and humanitarian appeals for Rwanda, but they also suggest alternatives to the constraints of humanitarian thinking. Even in noting the problems in the other representations that I have shown in Chapters One and Two, such as the sparse attempt to engage the audience with the genocide or the absence of a discussion of power and history in writing about many African crises, the novels present new ways of thinking through and about genocide and related topics. After gaining a greater understanding of the problems of depoliticization in savior narratives and humanitarian discourses through Chapters One and Two, in particular, I analyze the novels to look for other, more promising ways of writing about the genocide. For instance, in addressing power, the novels shed light on the complex situation of understanding an individual's choices: often severely limited, the choices reveal how

¹⁸ For more on this fascinating Fest' Africa project, see *Contemporary Francophone African Writers and the Burden of Commitment*, by Odile Cazenave and Patricia Célérier, and *Rwanda: Le Réel et les Récits*, by Catherine Coquio.

individuals are both enmeshed in their social environment, and yet not merely driven by culture. Beyond this, Monémbo's *The Oldest Orphan* and Diop's *Murambi* give hints for new ways of looking at the world – by questioning history and power, as well as examining the role of storytelling.

As such, and crucial to the project of seeking alternatives to humanitarian discourses, the novels push their readers, not only to resee Africa, but also to resee the wider world. That is, humanitarianism might encourage us to think about changes necessary in Africa, changes that will save lives. But the novels challenge their audience to rethink this vision of Africa as needing change (especially change from the outside), and challenge readers, instead, to rethink the relationship between Africa and the rest of the world. It is not merely Africa that needs changes in order to save lives; rather, the structures of the world that put those lives at risk in the first place need changes. The implications for this are profound because readers in the North can have a vision of change for their own country, moving beyond merely donating money to victims “over there.” As we saw in Chapter Three, the relationship imagined between “us” and “them” by different works can have a deep impact: these novels demonstrate more connections far beyond those imagined in savior narratives.

Summaries of the Novels

In order to see the work the novels do in countering the depoliticized humanitarian discourse and imagining different options, it is useful to present – in some detail – the novels that make up the topic of my close reading in this chapter.

Following, I summarize Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi: The Book of Bones*, an admittedly complex novel. The story is told in many different parts.

Part 1, “Fear and Anger,” contains three first person narratives by the characters named that take place in early April 1994: the day of President Habyarimana's plane crash or soon thereafter. In story terms, Michel is a Tutsi, coming to realize the risk he is at. Faustin is a leader in an extremist militia, gearing up to begin the killings. Jessica is an undercover RPF cadre stationed primarily in Kigali. The novel, however, focuses primarily on Cornelius, whose story is told in the third person in Parts 2 and 4.

In part 2, Cornelius, whose father was Hutu and whose mother was Tutsi, is 37 and returning to Rwanda in 1998 after having lived in exile since the troubles of the early

1970s and after losing his family in the genocide. As it turns out, Jessica is his childhood friend: with another young man, Stanley, the three went into exile together back in 1973. In this section, Cornelius attempts to understand the genocide and his role as a returning refugee, visiting two memorial sites with Jessica. At the end of the section, Jessica reveals that Cornelius' father, Joseph, is still alive, having been evacuated to the Congo by the French in 1994. The crucial point, however, is that his father was responsible for the killing of some 40,000 people at the Murambi Polytechnic school – a massacre that included his wife and other children, Cornelius' mother and siblings.

Part 3 contains more first person narratives: Doctor Joseph Karekezi is Cornelius' father, and Colonel Etienne Perrin is a French Colonel with Operation Turquoise who helps evacuate Joseph and others. The other characters in Part 3 are not apparently related to these: Aloys is a young man actively involved in the killings in the countryside; Marina is a young Hutu woman who watches as her father is coerced into manning barricades, even while the family shelters Tutsi friends. And Rosa is an old Tutsi woman who manages to survive the killings, despite the machinations of an old Hutu woman in her neighborhood who actively seeks Rosa's death.

In Part 4, Cornelius returns to Murambi and tries to make sense of his status of having lost family members, but being the son of the man who orchestrated the Murambi massacre. He is welcomed home by his uncle, Siméon, Joseph's brother. Far from having participated in the killings, Siméon remains a pillar of his community – someone everyone seems to trust and respect. Eventually, Cornelius comes to know Gérard, as well, who is the only survivor of the massacre at the Murambi school. The section is made up primarily of conversations as Cornelius seeks to understand the genocide, the Murambi killings, especially, and also himself in relationship to these.

Tierno Monénembo's *The Oldest Orphan* is told by its fifteen-year-old protagonist, Faustin Nsenghimana. The present tense of Faustin's telling finds him in a jail in Kigali, waiting his execution. The story unfolds without chronological order – jumping from Faustin at fifteen to Faustin at nine or ten before the genocide, and the time in between. It is only near the end of the telling that we learn of the crime for which Faustin is in jail, while the massacre that set him on this road to begin with is described last of all. But told chronologically, Faustin appears to lead a normal childhood with his

parents and younger siblings in the village of Nyamata in Rwanda. In April 1994, he is in the church with his parents when soldiers massacred the Tutsis. While both of his parents died, he somehow survives and begins wandering the countryside, meeting the witchdoctor, Funga, from his village. He is later “captured” by a young RPF soldier. When the RPF takes Kigali, Faustin winds up on the streets of Kigali, eventually living with other street kids in an abandoned building they dub HQ. In Kigali, he meets a woman, Claudine, who befriends him and eventually persuades him to move to the orphanage, City of Blue Angels, run by her Irish friend, Una. At the orphanage, he finds his younger siblings: having been with a group of Brazilian nuns the day their parents were killed, the children somehow survived the massacres, but were nearly crazy – living in filth at the orphanage and no longer speaking – before Faustin calms them. But finding that he can’t stand life at the orphanage, Faustin takes his younger siblings and returns to HQ in Kigali. Offered a chance to make money by guiding a foreign journalist, Rodney, Faustin spends several months with him, as they stage tearful, yet fictional, scenes for other journalists with Faustin posing as the survivor of massacre sites all over Rwanda. Upon his return to Kigali, Faustin finds his friend Musinkôro in bed with his younger sister and shoots the friend. Faustin manages to live for a time in an abandoned mine before being caught and taken to prison. After some time in the harsh conditions there, Claudine finds him again, and visits regularly with food and extra amenities. At his trial, Faustin freely speaks his mind – an act which seems to gain no sympathy from the judges, and he is condemned to death for killing his friend, which is where Faustin is at the telling of the story: awaiting his execution. Overall, the book is a curious mix: harsh and heartrending events told in an almost blasé tone as Faustin brags of his sexual exploits and his lust for the older Claudine. Far from an easy tale, it raises many questions.

Engaging Readers: Intellect, Tropes, and Life

Both Murambi and Orphan begin challenging the discourses of humanitarianism and savior narratives by addressing how to engage with the genocide.

For instance, if, as we have seen in Chapters One and Two, older representations, the media, and humanitarianism largely rely on emotional appeals, at the cost of intellectual ones, the novels take a very different approach by engaging and appealing to

their audiences emotionally *and* intellectually. Importantly, this approach makes for more active readers: by engaging the intellect, as well, the novels invite more participation and reflection. Similarly, the other sources tend to engage the genocide as easily as possible – mostly by making Rwandans objects of pity, such that feeling pity is the extent their audiences are asked to do, feel, or think. Even while admitting that a deeper engagement with the texts and the genocide will not be easy or comfortable, *The Oldest Orphan* and *Murambi* ask for more. The books go beyond the too-easy approaches of these discourses in favor of a deeper engagement – both addressing the difficulties of the genocide, as well as the difficulties of how we, as audiences, can relate to the genocide. In essence, both novels seek to engage their readers, to appeal to them both emotionally and intellectually. From this standpoint, they address common tropes of talking about the genocide in order to go beyond them, while still recognizing the difficulties of confronting the genocide.

The small sections in *Murambi* offer such a variety of viewpoints – victims, killers, survivors, reluctant witnesses – that readers are invited in and inevitably shown some of the complexities that characterize the genocide, far from the one-dimensional characterizations used by the media and humanitarianism. *Murambi* offers readers many ways to engage with the genocide. As Diop himself has commented, “I kept the storyline simple so that the reader would have no way out” (quoted in Cazenave & Célérier 89), revealing his intent to attach readers to the story, and thus to the genocide. In the book itself, Cornelius, as a generally kind character who is forced to confront the genocide as both victim and son of a perpetrator, is emotionally engaging, and his own attitude of trying so hard to understand the genocide draws us also to relate intellectually. Further, the very form of the novel encourages active engagement: on the one hand, we’re invited to follow Cornelius’ story as it unfolds in his sections, but also through the sections of the people who relate to him: Jessica, his father, Joseph, and the French colonel who helps his father leave Rwanda. Understanding how the sections relate compels readers intellectually, as well as emotionally. The other sections are intriguing: while most of them don’t obviously relate to Cornelius and his story arc, they are mostly vague enough that they could be related – either to Cornelius’ story or to each other: another puzzle that invites readers in.

Similarly, the novel uses other characters to emphasize an intellectual relationship with the genocide, as well as an emotional one. The stories of Michel and Faustin are good examples of the kind of complex and ambiguous characters that create an intellectual appeal for the audience.

The Faustin character in Diop's novel, for example, demonstrates a compelling way of connecting intellectually to the genocide. Faustin Gasana is in charge of a group of men in an extremist militia, and he tries to placate his father who fears Faustin and his generation will not have the fortitude to see through the killings (18). But on leaving his family, Faustin stops for dinner at his favorite restaurant, owned by a Tutsi man who serves Faustin's food while Faustin tries to ignore the man's trembling and fear (22). Faustin hates the Tutsi enough to try to eliminate them entirely, but he eats the food a Tutsi man prepares and insists on paying him, afterwards (22). He is resolved to kill all Tutsi, but he tries to be polite to the solitary Tutsi man in front of him, presenting a riddle of intentions that readers are invited to untangle. It is important to note also that Faustin is clear about his motivation for killing: far from being driven to it by some inherent essence, Faustin insists, "I've studied the history of my country and I know that the Tutsis and us, we could never live together. Never. Lots of shirkers claim otherwise, but I don't believe it" (19). He has studied, he refutes opposite arguments: even if, as readers, we disagree with his conclusions, his thought-process is evident and counters the notion of the killings as natural and irrational. Because this character presents such a puzzle, readers are drawn to engage with it.

The glimpse of Michel Serumundo proves thought provoking, as well: a Tutsi, we watch as he leaves his business, reflecting only on how sales had been low. But he begins to pick up clues of problems: sirens, soldiers at the bus park, a barricade in front of the radio station. His process of piecing the clues together allows the reader to follow the same process – creating an emotional appeal as we fear for his safety and that of his family, but also an intellectual one as we follow his train of thought. He solidifies each of these appeals by addressing the problem of the essential "African": after trying to assure his wife that nothing would happen because the world was watching Rwanda, he admits to the readers: "I knew I was wrong. The World Cup was about to begin in the United States. The planet was interested in nothing else. And in any case, whatever

happened in Rwanda, it would be the same old story of blacks beating up on each other” (9), a theme of African savagery that is certainly familiar from the first chapter. He refutes this trope by admitting the news stories he’d seen about other violence “were hard to take” and by realizing “It always happened so far away, in countries on the other side of the world. But in these early days of April in 1994, the country on the other side of the world is mine” [10]. In this way, he challenges the too-easy notion that violence elsewhere is a natural, a given, when he realizes that violence is about to erupt around him, as well – again implicating his readers in this thought process and encouraging them to rethink what they take as givens.

Similarly, *Murambi* admits to the real difficulties in engaging with the genocide, instead inviting a connection beyond any easy approach as they first share familiar and stereotypical tropes, and then undermine them. At the end of his short section, the Tutsi man, Michel, is convinced that “Looting, and one or two thousand dead, ... would be the least evil” (11), demonstrating he knows that danger is imminent. With these worries in mind, Michel concludes, “This country has been mad a long time” (11). But the word “mad” implies both “unthinkable” and – with madness as an illness – “inevitable.” Each of these – unthinkable, madness, inevitable, natural, sick – of course, are among the tropes we’ve already seen used to explain the genocide unsatisfactorily. And here is a character, a Tutsi man in Kigali who is likely to be targeted himself, who falls back on it as an explanation. He thus exhibits the challenge of understanding and explaining even the potential violence that he assumes will soon arrive and demonstrating how pervasive the discourses are.

Cornelius, the main character in Diop’s novel, also struggles with an explanation, especially after visiting the church which was the site of the massacre in Nyamata. While he is at the church (now a memorial) in Nyamata, Cornelius is shocked and outraged. The text relates,

He remembered the words of a famous African American intellectual after passing through Nyamata. Completely traumatized, he [the intellectual] had declared on television: “I’ve been wrong all my life. After what I saw in Rwanda, I think that blacks are, in fact, savages. I recognize my mistake....” Cornelius

had been indignant seeing the man holding forth with such cynicism. But at present, he at least understood why he had lost his head. (73)

What this passage captures is some of the range of emotions and reactions that the aftermath of the genocide draws out.

Yet the most important aspect of the passage – as it relates back to my argument – is that this intellectual falls back on the simplified explanations we’ve seen before: Africans as savages. That is, the subject of the genocide is so difficult to handle – especially when dealt with in person, as with a visit to a memorial (even though this is well after the killings took place) – that thoughtful reactions to and engagement with the genocide can be challenging and elusive. Falling back on tropes of savagery becomes easy. Rather than seeing these two moments as weaknesses in *Murambi*, I would argue that they are a strength since they feature the use of tropes by intelligent people and characters admitting the challenge of engaging with the genocide. In this way, they invite the reader to engage with the novel and the genocide by exhibiting an awareness of the discourses available in talking about the genocide and revealing the temptation to which we can all fall prey of taking the too-easy explanations.

It is important to note that, in both instances in Diop’s *Murambi*, the one falling back on the tropes is an intelligent person: Michel, as we have seen, has worked through the dangers he sees, demonstrating his intellect. Having permitted us to follow his thought-process in recognizing the danger he faces, his weakness in falling back on an uncomfortable trope is, perhaps, comforting: not only is the trope familiar – hence comforting, if still uncomfortable – but it doesn’t cause us to stop liking Michel. We can forgive his lapse. Thus, also, readers can forgive themselves these lapses: surely a comforting notion. The same is true for Cornelius and the African American intellectual he recalls. Though clearly intelligent and rational, each falls for the explanation of Africans as savages. We don’t know if the intellectual goes on to recant his statement, but Cornelius does, just as Michel goes on to recognize the rationale the killers could use to excuse their murders, undermining the trope by exercising his intellect again. And these turning points are key, since they invite us, also, to move past the sort of too-easy explanation upon which humanitarianism relies.

By actively engaging the tropes we've seen before and yet overcoming them, *Murambi* invites readers to rethink the tropes – which is also to rethink the shape of the world which relies upon them. Michel's section spells this out when he observes that “the planet” was more interested in soccer than “the same old story of blacks beating each other up” (9). Having dismissed that line of thinking, Michel's thought process can compel readers to also examine “the planet” that can so easily dismiss the suffering we know Michel will face. But that suffering is easier to overlook, given the discourses of Africa as Other and the savior narratives which distance and obscure the problems – and this is precisely what readers can be brought to question.

Though accomplished in different ways, Monénembo's *The Oldest Orphan* also draws readers in. Because of the way Faustin's story unfolds unchronologically, readers are invited to piece the story together – an intellectual engagement that invites an emotional one as we begin to understand the young character. The portrait of Faustin that emerges, because it is so enigmatic, invites a connection as readers are drawn to try to understand him. Indeed, Faustin presents a compelling kind of tension – the picture of a child, but one difficult to pity because of his rough edges, as we shall see.

In this sense, *The Oldest Orphan*, in particular, demonstrates this rejection of a simplified emotional connection, especially since it outright challenges an emotional connection between readers and the narrator, Faustin. A quick look at the story of *The Oldest Orphan* reveals the ways in which it could appeal affectively and posit Faustin as an object of pity: at the age of ten, the narrator, Faustin, barely survives the massacre in his town's church that leaves his parents dead. Eventually he winds up in the capital, Kigali, where he survives with the help of other orphans living on the streets together. After a time, Faustin is reunited with his younger siblings – children who had been so devastated by the events that they had lost the ability to speak or even eat by themselves. However, deprived of parents or an extended adult community that could continue to teach him morals, Faustin clings to his siblings to the point where he kills his friend for sleeping with Faustin's sister. For this act of what he deems “family honor,” Faustin spends years in a hideous jail cell and is eventually sentenced to death.

In writing about the problem of how a “pure victim” is created to stand in for the complicated lives of actual refugees, Liisa Malkki writes about the pictures of refugees,

noting the prominence of pictures of women and children and arguing that such images are used “when our intent is to address the very heart of our humanity” (111), an idea which underlines how Faustin’s young age can appeal emotionally to readers. She also argues that this prominence also has to do with constructing the expectation of “helplessness,” a “helplessness [which] is vitally linked to the constitution of speechlessness among refugees” (111). While not a refugee, technically (though Faustin fits into the category of “internally displaced”), Faustin could have fit that category of speechlessness and helplessness, and thus deserving of pity: when he is first found, after the massacre, we don’t hear his voice out loud (his is still the narrative voice, but he doesn’t speak in this scene): in this instance, he is speechless. Instead the old woman who finds him is the only speaker, and she exclaims over finding a child, observing that he was found nursing at his mother’s breast – infantilizing him further and reinforcing his helplessness.

But the book does not allow for a speechless, helpless pure victim, instead complicating our relationship with Faustin, demonstrating the difficulty in engaging with the genocide. Narratively, Faustin tells the story – he is very far from speechless. As I will detail later, Faustin is also full of stories, again rejecting the role of speechlessness. And though he scrapes together a rather sorry existence, this ten-year-old child does survive on the streets, again not exhibiting signs of helplessness. His action of bringing his siblings back to HQ further underlines the idea that he is resourceful, again refuting the “helpless” label. The novel rejects the simplified view of the speechless, helpless victim, who is an object of pity, instead presenting a character whose complexity allows for a deeper connection and engagement. As with *Murambi*, by highlighting a kind of savior narrative, *The Oldest Orphan* also invites its audience to resee the structures of the world which rely so strongly on such narratives.

Furthermore, the book makes it hard to make a simple emotional connection with Faustin. The story unfolds in a non-chronological manner, so that we don’t even learn why Faustin is in jail until late in the story, and the emotionally-compelling description of the massacre that took his parents’ lives is on the very last pages of the novel. In the meantime, Faustin almost invites contempt as he casually speaks of the young girls with whom he (at the age of no more than twelve) has sex, or relates sniffing glue with other

kids. Or yet again, Faustin nonchalantly notes the passage of time: “Even in the stench of the gutters where, as the days went by, the piss of the drunkards and the whores replaced the coagulated blood and the sticky brain matter of the dead” (27). Between the tone and the subject matter, connecting with the story on an emotional level is made difficult. While, in the end, Faustin’s story is emotionally compelling, that emotional connection is delayed and frustrated. I read these strategies as ways to challenge the way that savior narratives and humanitarianism rely on emotional appeals, instead forcing us to think about Faustin, not just pity him, as we forge a connection with him and through him to the genocide which shaped him.

This is a point I will revisit in the last section of the chapter, as well, but I want to point out that both books encourage active engagement in the way they end: each ends with a focus on life. In *The Oldest Orphan*, the last section is the one where Faustin is found alive after the massacre, while in *Murambi*, the last scene finds Cornelius at the school/memorial reflecting that “the most ardent desire of the dead, was for the resurrection of the living” (181). In both cases, the life that remains is not simple – not in the midst of so much painful death – but by ending with life, the books invite us to struggle with challenges that are also not simple.

In these myriad ways, both *Murambi* and *The Oldest Orphan* allow their audiences to connect both emotionally and intellectually with the stories, as well as with the genocide. In challenging some of the premises of savior narratives and humanitarianism, the books also invite their audiences to resee, not just Rwanda and the genocide, but the world which relies on such narratives, as well.

Beyond Humanitarianism: History as Central, Yet Not Idolized

One of the reasons that history is important to look at in these novels has to do with the assumption that Africa is not “in” history – as Hegel tried to argue two hundred years ago, or as former French president Sarkozy tried to argue only six years ago in his 2007 speech in Dakar. As I have argued in Chapters One and Two, being without, or outside of, history implies a changelessness, or implies a cyclical nature to any change: a season of victims, a season of killers that is inevitable and inescapable, all of which implies the uselessness of trying to engage politically, making a humanitarian intervention appear the only option. So it is important that both of these novels pay

careful attention to history and use it to point to the changes that occurred on many levels in Rwanda. Far from a static culture or essentialized people, the novels emphasize change – changes that made the genocide possible, but changes that also make it thinkable – which depoliticization otherwise obscures. By emphasizing change, the novels also allow us to think of changes that can occur elsewhere, underlining the idea that the books ask us to resee not only Africa, but the rest of the world as well – a world where change can, and should, occur. All the same, Diop's *Murambi* and Monémbo's *The Oldest Orphan* do not idolize history: both novels question versions of history and challenge the notion that it is easily knowable, instead emphasizing the need to continue learning.

It is necessary to acknowledge that *The Oldest Orphan* does not include a lot of formal history: what references there are are often elliptical or vague. This is in keeping with the story: Faustin was ten when the genocide occurred, after which he lived on the streets or was in jail – even the brief time he was in the orphanage, he doesn't mention any additional schooling. So his formal education effectively ended when he was ten, hardly old enough to grasp much history. In some ways, this makes his references to history all the more striking: he kept the references in mind, despite the real difficulties he faced in even surviving, hence arguing their importance. In addition, the fact that much of Rwanda's history is inscribed on Faustin's family life emphasizes this history as a lived experience, not a mere academic concern.

The vagueness of *The Oldest Orphan* is in contrast to *Murambi*, which offers more concrete examples of history. Again, this is in keeping with its story, since most of the characters in *Murambi* are adults, which simply gives them the extra time to learn history, as well as the added maturity and brain development to understand it. Cornelius, for example has had more exposure to education and the chance to learn the history of Rwanda, as his friends have also had the chance to learn their own and their country's histories. In addition, many of the characters are understood to have had considerable formal education: Cornelius is a history teacher, while Stanley rose high enough in the RPF that he traveled to the US on its behalf (47). Though Siméon's occupation is not named, that his brother – Cornelius' father – was a doctor implies that Siméon, too, would have had access to higher education. Certainly, Siméon is acknowledged for his

wisdom (164). All of this is to say that the more overt references to history that Murambi makes and Orphan does not are well within the scope of their specific stories.

That said, each novel includes historical references that challenge the depoliticization and dehistoricization that shape humanitarian discourses so much. Notably, both narratives do this by referencing moments in history when power was shifting, and thus when change was occurring. For example, both novels do refer to a pre-colonial past or to the early encounters with Europeans. *Murambi*'s approach to the topic is more direct: Siméon talks with Cornelius about his youth, describing when he learned of the arrival of the first Europeans (168). It is in this conversation that Siméon tells of the mwami who counseled against changing the name of Imana (169), the scene discussed above. After a new mwami was placed on the throne, one whose faith *was* converted (169-70), Siméon concludes, "The padres [missionaries] had won" (170), which emphasizes the power relations between Europeans and Rwandans. The religious conversion of the mwami, meanwhile, makes clear that Rwandan society did change as a result of the foreign interaction, undermining the idea that a "centuries old" ethnic hatred could exist and thus drive the genocide.

The approach to the subject of the earliest European encounters in Rwanda is more obscure in *The Oldest Orphan* and accomplished through references to the Hamitic myth – the nineteenth century European idea that Tutsi were more advanced than Hutu and thus descendants of Ham and foreigners to Rwanda. Thus, in various places in *The Oldest Orphan*, the "rock of Kagera" is mentioned in ways that evoke the Hamitic myth. While I have been unable to discover a specific reference to the "rock of Kagera," the Kagera River is quite well known. Flowing in the eastern part of Rwanda toward the north and Lake Victoria, it is one of the sources of the Nile River. During the genocide, many bodies were thrown into the river, so that, according to extremist logic, "the Tutsi be returned to Ethiopia, from where they had come anyway" (Mamdani 195), a reference to the Hamitic myth of the Tutsi as foreigners. In one reference to the rock of Kagera in Orphan, right before the massacre at the church in Nyamata, Funga asks Faustin's father to be sure to "put this rock of Kagera back in its right place" (89-90) because he has seen visions of "rivers of blood" (90); in this sense, the rock of Kagera is linked quite

closely on the page to massacres such as those where bodies were thrown into the Kagera River, thus associating the rock of Kagera with massacres more closely for readers.

While the connection between the “rock of Kagera” and the Hamitic myth is perhaps ambiguous, the context in which the “rock of Kagera” is first mentioned is also revealing: meeting on the road after the massacre at Nyamata, Funga asks Faustin if he’s heard the legend. Faustin responds, ““A thousand times, Funga: no one must move the sacred rock of Kagera! The whites knew that when they deliberately moved it. That’s why they conquered us, that’s why there are catastrophes”” (9). This reference to the time when the whites “conquered us” does place the rock of Kagera at the junction of history where the early encounters between the Rwandan state and Europeans was taking place – the time when the Hamitic myth figuring the Tutsi as a foreign race was first created. Similarly, the idea that the legend connected to the rock of Kagera is well known, that the rock – like Tutsi royalty – is “sacred,” and that its removal at the hands of whites resulted in catastrophes can all also call to mind this Hamitic Hypothesis, tied as it is to legends, religion and shifts in power. Though obscure, the references do bring out the early interactions between Rwandans and “the whites,” emphasizing this as a time of shifting power, and thus, of change.

Aside from the references to early colonial history, the books also allude to further moments of change in Rwanda’s history that again undermine the notion of Rwanda as timeless and unchanging: these include the period leading up to decolonization between 1959 and 1962, when the first Hutu on Tutsi massacres took place in Rwanda as the Hutu deposed the Tutsi hold on power and when Kayibanda (a Hutu) took power. The massacres of 1972-3 which resulted in Habyariamana’s coup to overthrow Kayibanda are also mentioned as a time of change.

From the very beginning, *The Oldest Orphan* draws attention to the earlier massacres when the main character mentions his Uncle Sentama who “since the last bloodbath...lives on the other side of Laky Cyambwe, in a country called Tanzania” (50). The mention of the bloodbath is brief and without elaboration which could lead to the idea that the killings were cyclical and thus need no elaborate understanding, but the brief mention is in keeping with Faustin’s style at this point, since he has already said “They’re coming to kill me tomorrow or perhaps the day after” (5), without explaining why. As

with Faustin's imminent death, the mention of "the last bloodbath" can act as a sign that there is more of a story to be known.

But, indeed, perhaps Faustin isn't capable of filling in the history of the other killings because he never learned the history well. He does recall how his mother's life was saved during the massacres in 1972 (45), but looking back, Faustin recalls:

There would be times when, tired of the necessity to forget, an adult would recall what had happened before: the bloodbaths of 1959, those of 1964, those of 1972, and so on, as Uncle Sentama would say. I didn't attach much importance to that. I just thought they were talking about some legend that would have occurred before this famous Flood so often evoked by Father Manolo and in a world other than mine. (72)

This quote contains many things. On the one hand, the "necessity to forget" implies that adults did not speak often of the massacres because of outside pressure – grief, perhaps, or even the pressures of daily living in poverty. But the well-acknowledged lack of justice in response to these earlier killings hints that they were swept under the rug and at least officially forgotten – not addressed in books or school, presumably. This bolsters the idea that Faustin would not know much about the earlier massacres that he could then share with readers. This, in turn, speaks to the idea that the "necessity to forget" should be minimized, such that children can know this history and adults can speak of it inasmuch as speaking would help them, rather than hiding the history a younger generation could learn from.

Further, Faustin's idea that the killings were a "legend" from "before this famous Flood" mocks the familiar comparison of Rwanda to a primeval land which can only be understood through comparisons to the Bible. In *The Oldest Orphan*, this excuse is a child's reasoning, an excuse for why he does not understand, so its presence ridicules the use of such excuses employed by Northern media and humanitarian organizations. While the references to the recent massacres in *The Oldest Orphan* are elliptical, they draw readers to think about the massacres, to think about the politics of knowing history, at all, and they challenge the frequent dismissal of Rwandan history done by the media and humanitarian organizations.

Again, *Murambi* is more overt in its historical references since Cornelius was born as his mother ran to escape the earlier massacres (146), and three of the main characters, Cornelius, Jessica and Stanley, became refugees because of the upheavals of 1973 (39). These small references could again raise the specter that the book only suggests the history of violence is cyclical, but in fact the book works against this tendency. When Cornelius asks Stanley if he thinks the killings could start again, Stanley responds ““That depends on each one of us. The genocide didn’t begin on the sixth of April 1994, but in 1959 through little massacres that no-one paid attention to. If there are politically motivated murders today, they need to punish the culprits straightaway” (48). The quote makes clear that – far from the killings being due to an essentialized culture, they are a choice – returning to them “depends on each one of us.” Instead, the book calls them “politically motivated murders” and points to a solution where everyone pays attention and punishes those responsible. This is a far cry from the image of a primitive, lawless Africa that cannot escape its cycle of violence.

In the same discussion, Stanley further links the earlier massacres and those of 1994 to political problems by observing, “the real problem is the mechanics of power in Africa” (48). Though the book does not elaborate further on this point, it succinctly connects all of the killings to the troubled dynamics of power, a political element which is hidden by the savior narratives and humanitarian narrative. Similarly, a comment by Jessica in her narration near the beginning of the genocide also links these historical references to the question of choice that we saw as important when examining the theme of power: “Ever since 1959, every young Rwandan...has to answer the same question: Should we just sit back and wait for the killers, or try to do something so that our country can go back to being normal” (30). In this sentence, *Murambi* recalls 1959 and the moment of the social revolution, connects it with the notion of choice that undermines an idea of essentialized differences and opens the door for a different response “to the same question,” while the verb “to go back to” stresses the notion that the country has not always existed in this state of extreme tension. While Mahmood Mamdani’s point about the problematic continuities from colonial to post-colonial Rwanda is certainly apt, these pointed references to 1959 need not obscure both those things that changed and those that did not. But they can and do underline the continuing political nature of the killings that

took place each time in Rwanda while inviting change in the future, too. In these ways, both novels bring Rwanda into history – make its history a part of the present of the story.

The Oldest Orphan and *Murambi* also refute the savior narrative and humanitarianism idea of Rwanda as having an essential nature or culture: first, by questioning what it means to be Rwandan, and thus asking, “what is Rwanda?” And second, these works refer frequently to the regional and international elements within Rwandan history, since this acknowledgement of the movement of people and ideas challenges the idea that Rwanda could have an essential and unchanging culture. As Mamdani points out, the question of what it means to be Rwandan – or Ugandan, or Congolese – has been an important one: he argues that the denial of citizenship to Rwandan refugees helped to prompt the formation of and invasion by the RPF into Rwanda, while the crisis of citizenship in the eastern Congo helped to fan the flames of war in that region, especially after the genocide. As such, the question of what a nationality means has played an important role in Rwanda’s history – but one not seen in the media coverage of humanitarian ads for Rwanda. Similarly, the vast number of international ties within Rwanda has shaped that country’s history – again obscured in the discourses we saw in the first chapter. As such, including these kinds of questions and references, the novels by Diop and Monémbo challenge those discourses.

The Oldest Orphan opens up the idea that “Rwanda” is not fixed by juxtaposing Claudine, a returning refugee, with Monsieur Van der Poot, a Belgian living in Rwanda. The first time we are introduced to Claudine in the story, at a point where Faustin is in prison, he describes her voice before breaking in:

Uganda, of course! One day she told me that she was born there. During the first bloodbath of 1959, her parents fled through the bush and took refuge there. Her pregnant mother gave birth to her at the border, two months premature. “I understand why you speak Kinyarwanda with an English accent.” She was offended that I’d say that. “An English accent! All I did was be born there. My soul is from here! In fact, very early my parents saw to it that I learn everything: the language, the dance of the *intore*, the game of *igisoro*, and what beans in rancid butter is.” (16)

Claudine takes offense at being identified as an outsider because of her accent and quickly names the things – language, dance, games, and food – which make her Rwandan.

This is contrasted with the elliptical character of a foreigner, the Belgian M. Van der Poot. Faustin relates,

M. Van der Poot was well known to everyone in the city long before this grim affair about customs and mores befell him. M. Van der Poot was not only white but Flemish and Belgian as well, which meant that he was three times more likely than others to disregard our own way of life. Yet he had been living in Rwanda long before the *advents* [the genocide]. He knew by heart the names of our hills, our intertribal passions, and the songs of our drunkards. No one could appreciate *umutsima* (our banana paste), zebra steak or spirits of sorghum like him. (48)

Like Claudine, Faustin gives us a list of things that could make Van der Poot Rwandan: his knowledge of Rwanda's geography, intricate tribal workings, songs, food and drink. Despite this kind of knowledge, Faustin laments, "Go figure why after such a long time M. Van der Poot still didn't understand anything about our customs and mores" (49). If Claudine assumes that learning about Rwanda from her parents gives her the knowledge to make her Rwandan, and M. Van der Poot's living in Rwanda for years does not give him the knowledge to avoid trouble with the "customs and mores" of Rwanda, then we can see that the basis of what it means to be Rwandan is not fixed, thus belying the notion that it could have a fixed and static culture.

Murambi takes the question of what it means to be Rwandan further as Cornelius wrestles with his early idea that death defines Rwanda: Rwanda is nothing but a place of death – an idea that is of course familiar from the media and humanitarian organizations representations of it. In that Cornelius is a returning exile, he resembles Claudine in some ways: while he does not catalog the things he knows that makes him Rwandan, it's very clear that he is searching, almost desperately, to know Rwanda. The morning after he arrives in Kigali, "Cornelius began to sort out and classify his papers: documents and books on the history of Rwanda" (42). But his interest in history is nearly an obsession with the genocide: "He had read a lot about it [the history of Rwanda] during the last few years, not so much to find out about the distant past of his country as to understand the

genocide. He had the impression that everything led him back to the killings of 1994. Even the scholarly speculations on Rwanda's geologic layers led him there, via secret and torturous paths" (42). Similarly, on his way from the airport the day before, Cornelius had "consumed the city with his gaze, trying to fathom intuitively the secret relationship between the trees standing still on the side of the road and the barbarous scenes that had stupefied the entire world during the genocide" (37). Having just returned, Cornelius seems to equate Rwanda with the genocide, as if there is no more to the country than those "barbarous scenes."

Thus when Jessica tells him of her stunted romantic relationship, he prompts her, "He was killed...?" (70). But "Jessica let out a joyful peal of laughter. 'Not at all!'" she corrects him, asking, "What's got into you, Cornelius, that you think that no one in this country is still alive?" (70). Siméon also tries to correct Cornelius, telling him, "try to think about what is yet to be born rather than what is already dead" (143). Or when Cornelius worries that he "can't find words to speak to the dead," [Cornelius] detected a fleeting expression of annoyance – or maybe of anger – on [Siméon's] face. 'There are no words to speak to the dead,' said Siméon in a tense voice" (167). Siméon and Jessica both appear to see Cornelius' fixation on the genocide and his tendency to let it define Rwanda. His tendency to equate Rwanda solely with the genocide cuts out the living, cuts out the complexity of what it means to be Rwandan.

At other times, Cornelius seems to recognize his own oversimplification of Rwanda, as when, on first learning that his father organized the massacre at Murambi that killed his mother and siblings, he reflects that he is now "the prefect Rwandan: both guilty and a victim" (78), an idea of Rwanda which captures some of its complexity. Again he seems to plumb this intricacy when he reacts with fear when Zakya challenges the histories he knows that deny any difference between Hutu and Tutsi (66). It was when he discussed this with Zakya, becoming angry, that he reflected, "After all, Rwanda is an imaginary country. If it's so difficult to talk about in a rational way, maybe it's because it doesn't really exist. Everyone has his own Rwanda in his head and it has nothing to do with the Rwanda of others" (67). Cornelius' moment of anger and unease uncovers the crucial idea that Rwanda is created by each Rwandan – challenging both the notions that Rwanda merely means death, and questioning what it means to be Rwandan.

Importantly, Cornelius' allusion to Rwanda as "imaginary" resembles Stanley's idea that "no one is born a Rwandan. You learn to become one" (48). In essence, when Cornelius reduces Rwanda to being simply the genocide, his friends and family correct him. When he worries that he doesn't truly understand its history, his fear leads him to question what Rwanda really is, seeing it as created by each person. Stanley's similar conclusion allows us to probe further some of the structures of what it means to be Rwandan. Since I have argued that the books push us beyond reseeing only Rwanda or Africa, this juncture allows us to question some of the structures of the state, more generally.

Both works point to the importance of international ties in Rwanda, as well. The novels feature and abundance of foreign characters, or characters with foreign ties, that highlight the tremendous diversity of people and ideas within Rwanda. I present the examples below to reveal the complex ties that bind Rwanda and the rest of the world together which strengthens my argument that the novels by Monénembo and Diop invite their readers to resee the world, not just Rwanda. In *The Oldest Orphan*, the young Faustin asks the equally young RPF soldier who captures him in the midst of the genocide, "Zaire, Tanzania, Uganda?" (23) because he recognizes that the soldier's "Kinyarwandan...sounds like Swahili and English" (23). Not only does this demonstrate the circulation of peoples into and out of Rwanda, but if even a ten-year old recognizes the Swahili and English accents, this implies the circulation of people and languages was common and fairly easily recognizable. And Faustin's quick rattling off of potential countries also undermines the notion that Rwanda was isolated. Finally, the fact that Faustin interrupts his description of Claudine's voice to exclaim, "Uganda, of course! One day she told me that she was born there" (16) is evidence that his familiarity with other accents, and thus the movement of peoples, was not an isolated incident.

In keeping with the idea that much of Rwanda's history was inscribed on his family life, we know from the first page of the novel that Faustin's uncle – his mother's brother – has lived in Tanzania "since the last bloodbath" (5), again underlining the idea that such histories were familiar and personal. These references are supplemented by the variety of international characters with whom Faustin interacts, like their Italian neighbor, Tonia Locatelli, as well as the nearby Brazilian nuns, Monsieur van der Poot, a

Belgian living in Kigali who runs afoul of Faustin's friends (who will be examined in more detail in the next section). Meanwhile, the Irish Una O'Flaherty who runs the City of Blue Angels but leaves for elsewhere ("India, Cambodia, or perhaps Somalia" recalls Claudine 53) surely stands in for the well-meaning but temporary help of humanitarians. And Rodney and the many foreign journalists for whom Faustin performs symbolize the foreign – Northern – media which comes and goes, but gets, and thus can tell, only part of the story. As Cazenave and Célérier observe, "aid workers and media operatives represent the current context of globalization [in African literature about violence]" (113) – a point which resonates strongly in Orphan and points, again, to the dynamics of people and ideas in and through Rwanda that undercuts the idea of Rwanda as having a static culture.

Murambi also includes references to such movements of people. The main characters of Cornelius, Jessica and Stanley are all, of course, refugees who fled Rwanda and returned years later. Indeed, the three characters can also stand in for different paths of refugees, demonstrating the further divergences available: Jessica who returned to Rwanda, politicized and part of the RPF; Stanley who, also politicized, remained abroad to work for the RPF and returned after the genocide; and Cornelius who was in exile until the start of the book in 1998. Of course, the book also has two important French characters – colonels Musoni and Perrin. Not only do these characters underline the presence of Europeans in Rwanda at the time of the genocide and reveal the darker side of that presence, but they also show some of the diversity of the French presence: Musoni as a mercenary aiding in the killings, and Perrin a current French officer, uncomfortable in helping Joseph Karekezi but fulfilling his duties, regardless.

In addition, Jessica tells of her father, Jonas, who had fought with Pierre Mulele in the Kwilu rebellion (29) – a reference to the 1964 rebellion in the Kwilu area of the Congo, a rebellion that was backed by the Chinese, and opposed militarily by the US and Belgium. Joseph mentions seeing Che Guevara while a rebel in the Congo, as well as knowing Kabila (29), referencing important international players. This small passage places Rwandans in the midst of a great deal of international activity, especially military activity, thus underscoring the point that Africa has also been militarized via international players for decades. Jessica includes the fact that her father was just a simple peasant

with weapons – certainly not an important figure in the rebellion – but this underlines how people at all levels of Rwandan society could be affected by international politics. All of these international interactions, on so many levels of society, reinforce the idea that Rwanda was far from isolated, and was thus a site of change – a far cry from the notion of a static culture with a timeless history of violence suggested in many other representations of the country.

But these works go beyond rejecting the idea of a static and unchanging Rwanda referred to in Chapter Two. Cazenave and Célérier observe that recent African writers, including Monénembo, show a “renewed interest in history,” but that these writers attempt to “confront the errors, weaknesses, and the silences of their history” (68), a point which resonates with the way that *The Oldest Orphan* and *Murambi*, while acknowledging the importance of history, do not set up history as monolithic and totally knowable, without doubts. Indeed, they often question history. If we need to address the “necessity to forget” and impunity that was foisted on so many Rwandans with regards to earlier massacres, and if we need to question the myth of Africa as timeless and without history, the books remind us that history is still political: often written by the victors and used for specific purposes. This last point, in particular, brings home the idea that the work of the novels is not only for Africans: we can all learn and relearn the lesson that history can be written from different points of view – a clear alternative to entrenched status quo of savior narratives and humanitarian discourses.

In this vein, *Murambi* and *The Oldest Orphan* challenge production and use of history in regards to Hamitic myth. I detailed above the oblique references to the Hamitic myth of Tutsi as foreigners in *The Oldest Orphan*. *Murambi* also refers to the myth as Siméon describes the early colonial encounters where “the foreigners had said to the Tutsis, ‘You are superb, your noses are long and your skin is light, you are tall and your lips are thin, you cannot be blacks, a twist of fate led you to be among these savages. You come from somewhere else’” (170). But the fact that both books refer to this myth calls attention to it, and thus to its production and uses. Notably, as we saw in the Chapter One, the Hamitic myth fit comfortably within the narrative of Africa as Other, useful for upholding colonialism, slavery and other atrocities. As my discussion of the myth earlier points out, the myth was also used to justify killings during the genocide.

Also of note, however, is that the myth can be seen in the way that the genocide was described as driven by “ethnic hatred” by the media. Which is to say, the North used the myth even in the 1990s, for similar purposes of Othering Rwanda and making any more in-depth relationship unthinkable.

Murambi goes into more depth in questioning history: in particular, Cornelius is brought to question history. The importance of this line of thinking is underscored by recalling that, in the story, Cornelius is a history teacher. In a memorable scene, Cornelius is telling Jessica about his girlfriend, Zakya, who is from Djibouti. Jessica observes that Zakya’s first impressions were probably “the same old stereotypes: two ethnic groups who’ve hated each other since time immemorial” (65), an overt reference to the type of depoliticized representation upon which humanitarianism builds. Cornelius replies, “Of course. I tried to explain it to her patiently” (65).

This launches him into a recollection:

Worried that that meant she might be taking him for a liar, he threw himself into some rather chaotic explanations. “We have the same language, the same God, Imana, the same beliefs. Nothing divides us.” --- “Yes, it does,” replied Zakya spitefully: “between you there’s this river of blood. After all, that’s not nothing. Stop making things up.” Then she added, “I’m not an idiot, and you’ve got to tackle the problems of your country in some other way if you want to solve them.” He was scared. Besides, could he tell her in all good faith that things were as simple as that? What meaning could one give to the violence of his country? Maybe it was absurd of the victims to keep proclaiming their innocence so obstinately. “Zakya caused me to doubt. I went back to studying the history of Rwanda. But I didn’t find any answers there.” (66)

What we have is a picture of Cornelius wanting to know a history of Rwanda – that Hutus and Tutsis are the same, that victims are innocent, “that things were as simple as that” (66). But Zakya makes him doubt this, and he reacts with fear: he wants an answer for the genocide, something to explain it simply. We can see this continued desire when he arrives in Kigali – his first reactions to being in Rwanda, where “He consumed the city with his gaze, trying to fathom intuitively the secret relationship between the trees standing still on the side of the road and the barbarous scenes that had

stupefied the entire world during the genocide” (37), as if there was a specific answer to be found. In fact, we go on to learn that Cornelius brought with him many papers and documents, evidence of his studies in Rwandan history (42). These actions echo his response to the fear and doubt coming out of his conversation with Zakya, where he “went back to studying the history of Rwanda” (66).

But the seeds of doubt planted by Zakya take root while he is Rwanda, even if he is slow to recognize this and sometimes works against the change coming. For example, when he arrives in Kigali, the narrator observes of Cornelius “In a certain way, his life was just beginning” (36), symbolizing the change to come. He and Jessica agree that the play he wants to write is a symptom of how he feels innocent – as a victim (78), in a simple way of viewing the genocide. At the same time, he regards the revelation of his father’s role in the Murambi massacre as a moment of great change: when he realizes he is “son of a monster” (78). He realizes his life will be different from here on, and sees himself as “perfect Rwandan: both guilty and victim” (78). This is very significant because innocent and guilty are no longer separated: the simplified history wherein victims are innocent is no longer available to him. Thus his concept of history must change. This notion is reinforced by Siméon when Siméon observes that ““Evil is in each one of us”” as he urges the people of Murambi to move past the destruction in the past (164)¹⁹. For Cornelius, there is no longer just one history of the genocide and Rwanda such as the depoliticized discourses of humanitarianism suggest, but many ways to understand these – the killings were not simply about Hutu and Tutsi, but also – as we have seen – about power and international politics, about economics (in the way that Cornelius cringes at the poverty he eventually sees in Kigali (60)), and personal vendettas (such as that in Rosa’s section (97-9)), and some kindness (both in Marina’s family which hides Tutsi children, even while her father has to go out to kill (87-9); and also in the family that hides Rosa), and sheer survival (as with Gérard’s story). Even though Cornelius might not have access to these specific stories, the structure of the book implies that he can learn them if he listens, and if he is willing to learn and be open to the variety.

Importantly, readers are drawn into this process, too, creating a stronger relationship between “us” and “them” than savior narratives permit: Cornelius’s change –

¹⁹ I will open up this intriguing quote in more detail in a later section.

in learning history, and learning the complications of history – is a slow process, accessible to others as they learn more about the genocide. And readers are also drawn to go beyond books to experience, just as Cornelius did; this does not mean readers will have to go to Rwanda and discover their father murdered thousands, because even Cornelius’s arrival in Rwanda had started this change. But, even in returning to Rwanda, Cornelius arrived in a place that was new and alarming to him; his wanderings in Kigali made him see poverty from close at hand, rather than a romanticized distance; he conversed with those, like Roger and Gérard, whose stories made him uncomfortable. These experiences helped to teach him new ways of viewing Rwanda’s history, and such experiences are surely available to most readers, in various ways.

Although *Murambi*, in particular, questions the role of history, neither book dismisses history as something to be pursued, just approached with caution, care, and questions. By arguing that the history of Rwanda is not monolithic or unquestionable, and by including in that history references to the role of other countries in Rwanda’s history, *Murambi*, in particular invites us to resee not just Rwanda, but again the world. It is not simply Rwanda’s history which is opened up for questions, but the histories of other countries, and history in general. Yet again, *Murambi*’s readers are asked to actively participate in this process. Although there is less in *The Oldest Orphan* about questioning history, per se, the novel invites reseeing the world in other ways – ways which will come up in the sections below, which can arguably be applied to the topic of history, as well.

Having countered many of the tropes upon which the discourses of humanitarianism and savior narratives rely by insisting on the importance of power and history in Rwanda’s crisis, and thus the world more widely, and by pushing readers to go beyond an easy relationship with the genocide to one more complicated, the novels demonstrate many of the shortcomings of these discourses. From here, I will look at how the novels raise the themes of the nation of and storytelling in order to suggest more ways of going beyond the depoliticized discourses which lock “Africa” and the “North” into hierarchical and essentialized relationships.

Power in the Novels: Viewing Structures and Restrictions

If humanitarian discourses consistently depoliticized the genocide, as I have shown in Chapter Two, then the novels by Monémbo and Diop further challenge humanitarianism as the answer to the question “what can be done?” by emphasizing the politics of the genocide – especially by highlighting the power and history involved.

In bringing power to the foreground, the novels continue to challenge simple readings of the genocide, for example by exploring the dynamics of state- and society-centered explanations for the genocide. In addition, however, the novels continue focusing on power in ways that make it more plainly visible – at times revealing the structures that surround the characters, at times revealing the problems of universalizing and obscuring the details of the genocide, and, finally at times revealing the problems of possibilities within the rights discourse. Very importantly, by making power visible, the complicated structuring and workings of power, the two novels aid in empowering both those in the North and those in Africa: once visible, it is more possible power to make that power accountable. In this way, *Murambi* and *The Oldest Orphan* again aim to allow their audiences to not only resee Africa, but to resee the relations in the wider world.

Looking for instances of power in *Murambi* reveals different aspects of the genocide, rather than taking for granted that the genocide was inevitable and natural. For example, Mamdani, in attempting to understand the genocide, and particularly the participation of so many Rwandans in the killings, argues that “The violence of the genocide was the result of both planning and participation...Rather than accent one or the other side of this relationship and thereby arrive at either a state-centered or a society-centered explanation, a complete picture of the genocide needs to take both sides into account” (7).

In *Murambi*, the character of Cornelius’ father, Joseph, illustrates the state-centered power. Recall, he was the one who organized the massacre at the *École technique* in *Murambi*, which included killing his wife and teenage children. Even before the massacre takes place, Joseph reflects with seeming satisfaction on the respect the Interahamwe give him (100), calling him “Papa” because he has given so much money for their cause (102). This impression of Joseph’s power and his contentment with it is underlined when Joseph recounts a meeting with a Frenchman, Colonel Musoni: not a

part of Operation Turquoise, the man appears to be a mercenary, profiting again from the massacres. Joseph takes pleasure in noting the colonel's actions that speak of Joseph's power, commenting "You measure your own power by this kind of detail" (104). And Joseph is careful to mention that, "The colonel, like so many others, I believe, already sees me at the head of the country" (104), an observation which speaks to the extent of Joseph's political power. Perhaps one of the only instances where Joseph's power is in question is in this relationship with Perrin, the French colonel who *is* part of Operation Turquoise: when the RPF victory becomes inevitable, Joseph must rely on the French soldier to usher him to safety despite Perrin's clear dislike of Joseph. But even this instance reveals Joseph's power: on the one hand, he is quick to try and even the score when he reminds Perrin of the French humiliation in Butare (156) where a French military convoy was forced to wait out an inspection by the RPF (145). By mentioning this, Joseph points out the uneasy position of the French in the country, as well as his own contacts in uncovering the information so quickly. On the other hand, Perrin nonetheless escorts Joseph out of the country because of Joseph's political and personal connections. All of these details point to the "planning" part of the genocide, the top-down influence of power that helped to drive the genocide.

In this manner, we can read the emphasis on Joseph's power as speaking to the more "state-centered" explanation in that, as a player at the national level with pretensions even to the head of the state, he certainly participated in the planning portion of the genocide. But it appears that even Joseph recognizes the importance of "both sides" – first when he recounts traveling the region to secure the people to carry out the massacre at Murambi (100) and later when he observes that "The friendly familiarity, the camaraderie between poor and powerful, that will soon be forgotten" (103).

The "familiarity" and "camaraderie" that Joseph observes highlights the "participation" or "society-driven" explanation to which Mamdani refers. Indeed, this observation puts into context one of the short first-person stories in *Murambi*, the narrative of a young militia member, Aloys Ndasingwa, while illustrating how tenuous "the camaraderie" is. After taking part in the massacre at the church in Nyamata, Aloys observes the arrival of the young prefect with disdain: "I don't like that little guy, and at the slightest signal from our boss, I'll beat him up" (84). Not just an arbitrary decision,

the dislike seems to be founded on their differences as Aloys observes, “You take on look at his hands and you know he’s never held a machete. They come from the university and they order everyone around, those bastards. Why?” (84-5). Aloys’ disdain for the prefect underlines the idea that his participation is not forced by those with power. While Aloys’ reasons for joining in the killings are not laid bare, Faustin’s section in *Murambi*, which I have already referenced, in which he declares “the Tutsis and us, we could never live together” (19) begins to point to Mamdani’s point about the society-driven explanation, that this motive for killing was based on a fear “that the real aim of the RPF was not rights for all Rwandans, but power for the Tutsi” (191).

What remains important is that the novel points to these complex views, displaying that more than one motivation was at play. Yet again, a depoliticized view of the genocide would not – could not – allow for this interaction of perspectives made visible by looking at the theme of power, since it tends to point to a simple culture-driven explanation: Africans are violent.

Related to this, and to understand better how power plays in *The Oldest Orphan*, one of the big problems in writing about the genocide is wrestling with the fact that a great many ordinary people were involved in the killings. People point to Rwandans who submitted to being killed or submitted to killing others and argue that this is due to “a congenital, transhistorical condition – ‘a culture of fear’ or of ‘deep conformity’” engrained in Rwandans (Mamdani 200). Mamdani challenges this perception by pointing out that “Fear and obedience are like flip sides of a single coin: common to them is the claim that the person involved has ceased to think” (200). In other words, Rwandans are assumed to have been unthinkingly obedient to someone in power over them.

Wendy Brown furthers this discussion: in a portion indeed inspired by Mamdani, Brown notes that a source of depoliticization is the “culturalization of politics” (20) – in which, according to Mamdani, “every culture has a tangible essence that defines it and then explains politics as a consequence of that essence” (quoted in Brown 20). By relying on an essential culture for a people, this line of thinking also suggests that those people are compelled by that culture to act in a specific way (Brown 20): in the case of Rwanda, to blindly and unthinkingly obey. We have already seen this position challenged in *Murambi* with Aloys’ contempt for the prefect who arrives. I will argue

that, though Faustin in *The Oldest Orphan* might have had reason to fear and to obey in several instances, the novel highlights moments of his disobedience as well as his consideration of his choices, thus undercutting such essentializing stereotypes, and indeed opening up questions about power and choice.

In one scene, Faustin is confronted with someone with power and is shown to consciously reflect on their relationship. After the massacre that killed his family but while the genocide is still occurring, Faustin encounters a young RPF soldier as he wanders the countryside. In this meeting, Faustin notes that “We seemed to be the same age. Nevertheless I obeyed his orders” (21), acknowledging the other boy’s power over him. Recalling his father’s insistence that “hav[ing] his actions dictated by one of his peers” was shameful, Faustin questions his actions: “The machine gun pointed at my back did not explain everything....He was more mature than I....Life had taught him more than it had taught me. He was beardless like me, but his soul had more hair” (21). In this case, it appears that Faustin does *not* confront the person with power over him because Faustin judges him to have a kind of authority – maturity and wisdom of the soul – he deems worthy. Far from unthinking obedience, this scene foregrounds Faustin’s conscious and thoughtful decision to submit to someone with power over him.

Two more examples, one of Faustin and one of his father, Théoneste, also show the characters refuting the notion of unthinking obedience, but in addition they highlight some of the further restrictions of the discourses of humanitarianism.

In another example from early in the novel, Faustin recounts his first morning in prison, a scene which brings to the surface the topic of choice. The other inmates inform Faustin that he is expected to empty the slop pail for a week, as a sort of entrance fee, though the guards had told him it was his job just once a week. He refuses (13). Even after being beaten by the cell’s ringleader “with his bludgeon and his brass knuckles,” Faustin refuses to empty the slop pail or submit sexually (14). Faustin comments, “The others though I was conceited, but I simply thought I was right” (14), showing an awareness of his actions, as well as a reasoning for them, which of course undermines the notion that Rwandans all obey unthinkingly. In this instance, his rationale earned him a severe beating, a circumstance which, importantly, underlines the idea that his choices were limited between submitting to a beating or submitting to extra chores and rape.

In order to better understand this scene, I want to return to critiques of liberal humanism: more precisely, I refer to Carol Quillen's assertion "a self [is] embedded in human relations and social structures that both constrain and enable him/her" (100), or Wendy Brown's critique of "'Liberalism's excessive freighting of the individual subject with self-making [and] agency...tendencies [which] eliminate from view various norms and social relations...that construct and position subjects" (17). Both of these writers insist that we view humans within their social structures or relations instead of universalizing "humanity."

Applying these ideas to the scene above, we can understand how Faustin is constrained to these poor choices by his being in prison. Importantly, this notion of being "hemmed in by structures" is still different than "compelled by culture," because "compelled" argument assumes "unthinking" and Faustin chooses his path consciously. In this way, *The Oldest Orphan* allows us to go beyond the notion that Rwandans unthinkingly obeyed due to their culture, but the book also makes it clear that their choices were still constrained. Acknowledging this in Faustin's case, we can look at the genocide differently, too – to notice the structures which hemmed in Rwandans: the poverty and unemployment which affected so many, the political system which had allowed only one political party during most of the country's independence, as well as the Hutu/Tutsi divide which, though constructed, still shaped daily life.

Quite strikingly, the exchange between Faustin's father, Théoneste, and the Corporal in charge of the massacre at the church in Nyamata demonstrates this attitude of seeing and questioning power in circumstances with limited outcomes, as-well, while also probing the very definition of life. In this scene, once the church in Nyamata is filled with frightened people, believing the claim that the army would protect them, the Corporal asks all those Hutu inside to leave "with their identity cards in hand" (94). He approaches Faustin's father, telling him that as a Hutu, he can leave, to which Théoneste responds, "I'm willing to go home but with my wife and my child. That's what home is, right?" (95). When the Corporal tells him the Tutsis will stay, Théoneste replies, "Then I choose to stay here" (95), challenging the will of the colonel and claiming the action as his own. This instance of confronting authority is perhaps more striking because one cannot chalk it up to the bravado of youth, and Théoneste, in also asking the Corporal

whether they are to be killed, clearly understands the repercussions of his action of questioning authority, in a way that perhaps the younger Faustin does not. In this sense, the scene represents an informed personal choice by Théoneste, but one where his choices are limited between leaving his family to die, or dying with his wife and son.

But there is more to the scene between Théoneste and the Corporal: by defining home as wife and child in the midst of this confrontation with power, and choosing this “home” when it means his death, suggests that such a home begins to define life, itself. While this could lead to the notion that Monénembo suggests a more interiorized – or private – life, in contrast to a public and political life, I think that Théoneste’s character and his standing in his community suggest otherwise. Even the evidence that the Corporal in this final dialogue in the church knows Théoneste well enough to single him out as a Hutu in a crowded and chaotic location speaks to Théoneste’s life in the community around him. As such, it’s hard to imagine that the book would reduce Théoneste’s definition of life to merely wife and child, and not the wider community. The important point is, by highlighting the problem between overemphasizing culture – to the point of eliminating personal choice – and overemphasizing personal choice – to the point of eliminating the influence of social relations/culture – the book allows us to question definitions of life, itself. When I say they question definitions of life, what I want to say is that Orphan insists that life has to include others: one can’t define life – as humanitarianism tries to do – as “pure victim,” or abstract victim. Instead, though Théoneste could have escaped the church with his life, this was a mere physical life, and for him this was not enough: he would not allow his life to be so narrowly defined.

What these examples in *The Oldest Orphan* share is the chance to also allow audiences to consider the ways in which their own choices are limited. That is, by paying attention to the structures which limit the choices of these characters, the audience is invited to notice the structures which limit their choices – structures such as race, class, and gender, for example. My point in using these scenes of characters confronting power is to demonstrate some of the problems with universalizing “humanity” and ignoring the structures which both “constrain and enable us” (Quillen 100). Importantly, these are ideas that humanitarianism would otherwise not allow us to see.

Murambi follows along these lines, as well. Although *Murambi* makes power visible in different ways, a close look at the issue of naming demonstrates a similar attention to the tension in universalizing. One of the stories that Siméon tells Cornelius begins to reveal the power implicit in naming: Siméon speaks of the history that he learned as a child about the arrival of the Europeans. Faced with missionaries who commanded that the name of their god, Imana, be changed, according to Siméon, the mwami (Rwandan king) of the time told his subjects, “Do not change the name of Imana, the world belongs to those who give a name to God” (169). This sums up the idea that giving or changing a name has power. Similarly, a hint of the dehumanization that can go with (not) naming is visible in the short example of the father giving advice to his son on how best to carry out the massacres. The son reflects, “I have never heard him pronounce the word ‘Tutsi.’ He always calls them ‘them’ or ‘Inyenzi,’ literally cockroaches” (14).

Having established the power of names, *Murambi* features a scene with Jessica that highlights the tension between being part of a group versus being an individual, and the power implicit in rendering nameless and vague the Rwandans being “saved” by savior narratives. Jessica, a spy for the RPF, starts the section, “She sat down in front of me and said: ‘Jessica Kamanzi.’ Immediately I thought, ‘That’s it. They’ve finally got me’” (90), suggesting that the mere knowledge of her name would have the power to reveal her dangerous occupation and condemn her, again underlining the power in a name. But the question of names is then made more ambiguous when the young woman continues on to say that she slept with “the priest” (91). Jessica says, “I almost screamed: ‘What priest?’ As a matter of fact, I knew very well who it was all about. In Kigali, during those days of folly, everyone knew” (91). In this sense, a name becomes irrelevant – the man is revealed by his station and his actions, rather than his name. But the focus on names returns when, a few moments later in the conversation, Jessica notes that “She kept pronouncing my whole name, which I found disconcerting” (91), again emphasizing the power naming can have.

Here the story takes on a new dimension, I believe: the young woman is clearly set apart by her beauty – she observes, “I’m as beautiful as the sun, and like the sun there’s nowhere for me to hide” (91), to which Jessica agrees, “Yes, that young woman

had an almost supernatural beauty” (92). Nonetheless, Jessica continues about her interlocutor, “Her story. So commonplace,” as she sought refuge in a church (92). In this church, Jessica imagines “all those girls dying of fright” who slept with the priest to stay safe (92). This “story[, s]o commonplace,” the young woman one among many who tried to stay safe, stands in sharp contrast to details of her beauty, which set her apart. Even as Jessica repeats “I wanted to call her by her name” (94) and “How I wanted to know her name!” (95), as if seeking to set her apart, when Jessica asks, the woman replies “I have no name. I’m the one who’s going to die” (94), thus marking herself as one of the many. This contradiction between individuality and group is emphasized once again when the young woman tells Jessica “intimate details” (94) about herself and the night with the priest, yet leaves, as she and Jessica both know, to face a horrible death, never giving her name. Cazenave and Célérier shed light on this when they refer to Berel Lang’s “moral quandary” when “the anonymous and impersonal death of Holocaust victims is individualized through storytelling and...their collective suffering is erased” (85). By showing the tension between being an individual and being one of a group, *Murambi* again reminds us that individuals did die: they were not the nameless, vague images that we gather from media and humanitarian ads. But, as with seeing that individuals exist inside social relations, the book highlights the fact that the suffering was also collective, and thus had impacts beyond individual deaths. If this knowledge is obscured, as it too often is in humanitarian narratives, then Northern audiences are again distanced from Rwandans. Instead, by focusing on this difficult knowledge, *Murambi* allows us to imagine alternatives to the restricted humanitarian discourses.

I return to other facets of the critiques of rights in order to see the problems and possibilities revealed when power is made visible. Two important turning points in *The Oldest Orphan* provide the traction for this argument: Faustin’s stay at the orphanage and his decision to leave it, as well as the courtroom scene which ends with his death sentence. The courtroom scene is clearly in the arena of law – which links it to the legality inherent in the rights discourse – while the language surrounding Faustin’s stay at the orphanage places it also in the arena of law. Specifically, Faustin describes his decision to stay at the orphanage as if he “had just signed a contract” (38), and he continues to refer to Una as Miss Human Rights. Both in living in the orphanage and in

the courtroom, he expresses the pressure he feels to conform – in essence to behave as a victim or repentant sinner. But he has been shaped by the experiences of his short life, experiences which do not fit the expected norm. When he rebels against this norm in the courtroom, the judges exert their power over him and condemn him to death. This condemnation emphasizes the structures which cannot deal with difference. His rebellion in leaving the orphanage, however, is more successful: he is able to assert himself, taking his siblings with him to keep their family intact, and return to the community he had been a part of in HQ. This affirmation of community stands in contrast to the problems of abstraction that plague the rights discourse and – as we have seen – the humanitarian discourse, as well. Making power visible, these two examples from *The Oldest Orphan* serve as notices that different ways of viewing the world are possible outside of the depoliticized humanitarian discourses.

In each of these cases, questioning the need for abstraction and the basis of norms makes power more visible. The power, otherwise hard to see or unacknowledged, is hard to hold accountable. With visibility, however, comes the potential for accountability.

If part of the problem with rights is that abstracting promotes distance between people instead of bringing them together, another problem with rights is that they set people against each other, instead of bringing them together. One of the clearest divisions in Rwanda at the time of the genocide was the Hutu/Tutsi division. To demonstrate the drawbacks of liberal humanism and rights, each book has an example of people coming together – despite the seemingly unbridgeable difference between them. These examples also undercut the presumed “ancient hatred” of the savior narratives, as well as demonstrating how the Hutu/Tutsi difference was constructed – similar to how the us/them difference is a construction based on power. Showing all of these facets, the books also present an argument about how bridges can be built across this presumed difference, instead of assuming the difference to be natural and inevitable – in contrast to the depoliticization of humanitarian discourses.

In *The Oldest Orphan*, an example of this is the existence of HQ. From his earlier encounter with Musinkôro at the RPF camp, it’s fairly evident that Musinkôro was a Hutu (he speaks of hunting Tutsi). Nonetheless, Faustin never comments on Musinkôro or the race of the other children living at HQ. Instead of focusing on what could divide

them, they work together to scrounge a living on the streets of Kigali. Though far from ideal, Faustin describes life at HQ: “Those were happy times, among the best of my life...It was an ordinary life, fulfilled and orderly” (32). Given the limitations a group of children living on the streets would face, this still stand as an example of community, since, instead of living on their own, Faustin and the other children now had a new family with whom they could share duties and advice.

In *Murambi*, Siméon appears to do his best to promote this attitude of the importance of community, as well. Thinking of him, Cornelius observes, ““He’s a free man...”The man who has no fence around his house is a man who has no enemies”” (164-5). It’s intriguing that Cornelius should define “freedom” as freedom from enemies, a state achieved when people no longer tries to erect barriers between themselves. That Cornelius should attribute this to Siméon is understandable when he learns from Gérard why Joseph’s house remains unlooted because instead of erecting barriers, Siméon attempts to bridge the distance between people. When the townspeople wanted to destroy Joseph’s house, Gérard reports that Siméon spoke up: ““”you have suffered, but that doesn’t make you any better than those who made you suffer. They are people like you and me. Evil is in each one of us”” (164). Siméon insists that the townspeople look for this similarity to unite them, instead of destroying one house after another. The formula is strange: “*Evil* is in each one of us,” Siméon suggests, instead of perhaps the more common insistence of good being in each of us. But perhaps he is also asking the townspeople to recognize the anger and desire for revenge in themselves in order to recognize and counter it. And in place of the destructiveness of that evil, Siméon looks for a common purpose of creation²⁰ – he wants Joseph’s house to become ““”a home for all the orphans who hang about on the streets of Murambi”” (164). And he yet again acknowledges the differences that could continue to divide them when he insists ““”let not one of you try, when the moment comes, to find out if those orphans are Twa, Hutu, or Tutsi”” (164).

Because humanitarian discourses and savior narratives are depoliticized, obscuring the workings of power with regards to the situations they address, the books’ insistence on looking at power and making it visible helps to undermine these ways of

²⁰ For more on creation, see the next section on storytelling.

thinking. By making power visible in the different ways we have just seen, the books refute simple readings of the genocide, remind us of the structures – so often invisible – which shape many of our choices, and still bring our attention back to the individual and collective suffering in Rwanda which makes all of these realizations possible. Thus the books ask us to both see Rwanda in a new light, but to also see the rest of the world, too. By doing so, the books point to ways in which we can find power more accessible, and thus more accountable.

Possibilities in Storytelling: Alternatives to Humanitarian Discourses

Another important factor Monénembo's *The Oldest Orphan* and Diop's *Murambi* share is an interest in story telling, an interest that translates into a variety of alternatives to humanitarian discourses. Again, the books differ in how they broach the topic, but Faustin's role in playing the victim for different journalists and Cornelius' strong desire to write a play about the genocide both point to how important telling stories is within the novels. With this in mind, it's useful to look at Philip Gourevitch who, writing about conversations he had in Rwanda, observes, "For those who had endured, stories and questions tended to operate in a kind of call-and-response fashion – stories calling up questions, calling up more stories, calling up more questions – and nobody of any depth seemed to expect precise answers" (183).

Gourevitch's point about the cycle of stories and questions suggests one of the ways in which this interest in storytelling translates into an important alternative to humanitarianism as an answer to the question of "what can be done?". As the examples of the media and humanitarian ads from the Chapters One and Two make clear, stories from and of Rwanda were highly curtailed – were reduced and made to fit an us/them trend that supported a savior narrative. By focusing on the importance of storytelling as it surfaces in each novel, I argue that storytelling offers important options beyond the restricted stories and discourses available from the depoliticized humanitarian tendencies, including a more active and engaged audience, the possibilities for silence, and the opportunities religion can present.

Liisa Malkki and Miriam Ticktin highlight further implications to the restricted storytelling available in humanitarian discourses. Malkki, for example, argues that, for those who work with refugees, a refugee's "wounds speak louder than words," and that

wounds are judged to be “more reliable sources of knowledge than words” (107). This, along with the very title of her essay “Speechless Emissaries” points to the ways in which refugees are generally silenced in humanitarian discourses. By highlighting storytelling, the novels refute this silencing. At the same time, Ticktin stresses the different kind of listening she attempts, a listening which “reveal[s] the patients to be more than the mould they were required to inhabit in order to get help” (*Casualties* 106). Ticktin’s argument points to the important ways in which readers are also implicated – few new ways of listening are available, few questions thinkable, given the restricted stories available via the humanitarian discourses. Again, the novels attempt to surpass these restrictions by offering a multitude of possibilities for new ways of listening and learning that become available when storytelling is emphasized and broadly construed.

Instead, *The Oldest Orphan* and *Murambi* allow for new types of stories, new emphasis on stories, which allows for more kinds of readers or listeners. In this new way of storytelling, the audience is allowed and encouraged to engage more actively and interactively, to relate intellectually, as well as emotionally, is invited into a creative process and into more of a partnership, and space is opened up for more engaged citizens.

What role does storytelling play in the novels? In *Murambi*, storytelling first becomes central in the first of Cornelius’s sections, where he describes at length the play he wants to write about the genocide. The convoluted story about a French general whose cat disappeared during “the genocides” (55) frightens Cornelius’s listener (58) and, according to Jessica, was a sign of Cornelius’s innocence before learning of his father’s role in the genocide. After returning to Murambi, “Cornelius was slightly ashamed of having entertained the idea of a play” (179). Cornelius’s shame, as well as his listener’s fright, make clear that storytelling in Rwanda is not simple, that there are stakes to stories. All the same, Cornelius “wasn’t giving up his enthusiasm for words, dictated by despair, helplessness before the sheer immensity of evil, and no doubt a nagging conscience. He did not intend to resign himself to the definitive victory of the murderers through silence” (179). Part of Cornelius’s drive to tell stories surely stems from his observations of his uncle: “Without ever having written a word in his life, Siméon Habineza was, in his own way, a real novelist, that is to say, when all is said and done, a storyteller of the eternal” (179). At the same time, Cornelius insists that “Every

chronicler could at least learn – something essential to his art – to call a monster by its name” (179). These details bring together the idea that, for Cornelius, storytelling is a way “to call a monster by its name” – which is a way of making power visible. But at the same time, Cornelius recognizes that not all storytelling is done in writing, as evidenced by his uncle. Though “call[ing] a monster by its name” might be reductive, in suggesting that those who killed were monsters and not complex and conflicted individuals, this somewhat mirrors Cornelius’ earlier assumptions about the essential nature of Rwanda being its genocide, so the story leaves room for Cornelius to recognize further complexities. But, importantly, Cornelius’ interest in making power visible and allowing for many ways of doing this suggests how storytelling in *Murambi* can be an alternative to the restrictions of the discourse of humanitarianism.

The focus on storytelling in *The Oldest Orphan* is, like so many things, more obscure, but still integral. Notably, the many instances where we do not learn Faustin’s story draw attention to the act of storytelling. For example, while he is at the RPF camp during the genocide, Faustin is taken to the captain’s office and asked to recall the early days of April (26). Faustin relates, “I made a superhuman effort to go back over the famous *advents* that my memory refused to revisit. Suddenly it was all clear. My mouth opened and words spurted out” (26). The captain has Faustin tape recorded, and “My confession lasted all week,” drawing the attention of the whole camp (26). But Faustin does not tell us the story at this point: this denial of such an important story – important to Faustin and our understanding of him, but apparently important in the camp, as well – draws attention to the story, and our ignorance. Yet again, when Faustin finds his siblings at the orphanage, he relates that he fell into a stupor for a time and finally “I had to start clearing things up for myself” (41). But again, he does not reveal the whole story – just enough to observe that the little ones had gone with the Brazilian nuns and “they weren’t at the church” (45).

At the same time, however, Faustin tells plenty of other stories: at the beginning, he insists to Funga that his parents are near Byumba (8), and when he first meets Claudine he tells her that his parents live in Kigali and that he watches cars in order to earn money to go to the movies and buy toys (33). Later, of course, he makes up stories for journalists at each of the places he visits with Rodney: “In places where I had never

set foot, I'd immediately recognize the charred hovel my parents had been dragged out of; the yard filled with hibiscus where their hamstrings had been slashed; the church hall where they had been murdered" and so on, showing scars on his head, shoulders, and torso to underline his stories (66). In these ways, *The Oldest Orphan* makes clear that stories can reveal as much as they can hide: they are complicated and not to be taken lightly, without questions. Again, this points to the important role the audience plays – in asking questions in response to stories, and inviting more stories, as well. This interactive relationship is a far cry from that implied in humanitarian discourses, where the audience is disempowered time and again, their role reduced to donating money.

In the same vein of asking questions, to talk about storytelling in *The Oldest Orphan*, one cannot overlook Faustin's unreliability as a narrator because, indeed, it is difficult to overlook Faustin's unreliability. The examples above, where Faustin lies to Claudine and to the journalists, cast doubt on his entire story. But, indeed, Faustin is untroubled by this: when he notices Claudine's doubt, he admits, "I didn't care that it was hard for her to believe me because I enjoyed talking like this. So I shamelessly went on in the same vein" (33). Does Faustin's shameless lying bolster the idea that Malkki encountered, that "wounds speak louder" – and more honestly – "than words" (107)? And importantly, when Faustin so openly admits to lying, does this mean that the rest of his story is a lie, as well? Why, as a reader, am I inclined to believe the ending of the book, where Faustin reveals the details leading up to the time when his parents were killed in the church at Nyamata, and how he survived? In part, the end is believable because it does explain so many other details about the book: the details fill in how he and his siblings survived, while the horror of having survived the church massacre and being buried under his parents' bodies for three days hints at a trauma that could explain Faustin's confusion about his past and his seemingly low morals. And in part, Faustin seems somehow believable simply because he does admit when he's lying: his candor in explaining his enjoyment in "talking like this" (33) and his need to raise money for himself and his siblings by lying to the journalists – thinking of the money Rodney offered him, Faustin comments, "I would have the means to take care of HQ for several weeks. I'd finally be able to give Ambroise the ball he'd been wanting" (57). This honesty stands out.

At the same time, however, why include such an unreliable narrator? Partly, I argue that Faustin serves to underline the idea that these are all stories – that knowing “the truth” is more complicated than we might expect. Faustin’s unreliability can prompt readers to examine what they believe and why. This is particularly important because, in addition to being unreliable, Faustin is not always or often particularly likeable: in addition to lying, he frequently speaks of his lust for Claudine in lewd terms, of sleeping with the girls in HQ and knowing the brothels of Kigali; he lives by stealing, cheating, or lying; and, of course, he kills Musinkôro. So while readers examine what they know of Faustin, and how they know it, they are also led to confront their judgments about Faustin. But as Faustin continues to change his story, readers are challenged to dig at the details about Faustin which make them uncomfortable because of the realization they don’t really know him yet. Crucially, readers can be led to realize that *liking* Faustin might not be necessary, at all: his likeability shouldn’t be a criteria for survival. Most of the time, Faustin does not fit the mould of what a victim should look like – but maybe this is because the mould is wrong. Faustin’s unreliability and unlikeability can lead readers to listen to his story in new ways, not looking to fit the mould, but to challenge the mould – as well as the discourses, in savior narratives and humanitarianism and depoliticization, that create those moulds.

I would again point to Malkki and her observation that “There is every reason to suppose that the violence that has so shocked the world has similarly shocked those who were its Rwanda victims and witnesses....it must have forced people in the region to rethink the universe of what is possible and thinkable” (397). So, too, I think, Faustin’s audience is drawn to “rethink the universe.” This can put the audience in a kind of partnership with Rwandans. The creation of this partnership, this act of creating, sets the stage for further acts of creation – for considering Mamdani’s argument that we notice “the creative – and not just the destructive – side of politics” (*Victims* 185).

In the vein of creation, I want to emphasize how the endings of both novels reveal the importance of creating an engaged audience and the cycle of stories and questions. *Murambi* winds to an end through several pages of Cornelius’s musings after Gérard has told Cornelius about how he survived the massacre at the Polytechnic school. In these pages, Cornelius contemplates the role of writers, poets, and storytellers, Rwanda’s

genocide in relation to other tragedies, resistance, religion, and the last scene is Cornelius again at the school, “next to his dead.” When the mysterious woman returns, too, the book ends: Cornelius “wanted to say to the woman in black – as he would later to Zakya’s children – that the dead of Murambi, too, had dreams, and that their most ardent desire was for the resurrection of the living” (181). The ending, then, contains a multitude of both beginnings and endings: the living, resurrection, children, dreams, and desire all speak to beginnings, while death, the dead, and the final words on the page speak to endings. In this way, the book ends with beginnings – even if they are beginnings entwined with endings: resurrection combines life and death, while Cornelius sees the line between living and dead to be unclear and sometimes fluid. This underlines the idea that the end of the book is not an end, really, but another beginning: not only does the cycle in this echo the cycle of stories and questions that Gourevitch brings up, but it does not leave the reader at a dead end. Rather, the audience is invited to begin again – begin something – even while that beginning includes the heavy new knowledge of endings.

The same challenging juxtaposition is present in *The Oldest Orphan*’s ending, as well. Monénembo’s book winds to its close after Faustin is condemned to death in the court. In the next pages, Faustin goes back to tell of the days between Habyarimana’s plane crash, when his parents were massacred, and when he was found alive in the church. Like *Murambi*, *The Oldest Orphan*’s ending is full of beginnings and endings, as when the old lady, who found Faustin says these words to conclude the book, “three survivors, and seven days after the massacre! There’s always some life left, even when the devil has passed through!” (96). The beginnings include Faustin and the other two survivors, still alive though in drastically new circumstances. That this is a beginning for Faustin is underlined when the old woman tells Faustin, “You were gripping your mother like a newborn and you were nursing at her breasts. You’re not a man like others. You were born twice in a way: the first time you were suckling her milk, and the second time, her blood” (96). The references to a newborn and to two births emphasize this as a time of beginnings – even though Faustin’s second birth had to be nourished by his mother’s blood, her death. Similarly, the entire scene exists under the pall of Faustin’s death sentence, an ending related just pages before. While, in this sense, *The Oldest Orphan*

ends on a grimmer note than *Murambi*, the new knowledge of Faustin's history and the insistence on the relationship between beginnings and endings invites the audience to rethink and retell Faustin's story – to begin with the end again and to enter the cycle of questions and stories and questions. Like *Murambi*, *The Oldest Orphan* does not stop with a dead end, but rather a place where new, if difficult, knowledge and understanding are available.

Because the books diverge in so many ways, this similarity in their endings is remarkable. And I remark on it to emphasize that the books allow for – and encourage – a different kind of relationship, an engaged, thinking and feeling, one that has the potential for more partnership, that goes beyond “saving.” Perhaps another offshoot of this is the idea that – in writing about the genocide (as fiction writer or, more personally, as academic writer) and in reading about it, both writers and readers benefit from a sense of, a glimpse of hopefulness. Given the subject matter, the hopefulness can never be a naïve ignorance, but it's important, nonetheless. On one hand, if the subject is relentlessly hopeless, than writers and readers alike will have a hard time connecting or continuing. The potential for burnout is real. On the other hand, this relates back to Bauer's notion that if the holocaust was unthinkable, then there's no use writing about it: similarly, if Rwanda's genocide is utterly without hope, little use in writing or reading about it. This shutting down of possibilities is one of the serious implications in the ways in which the stories in the humanitarian discourses function, and one which the novels attempt to leave behind.

At the same time that I acknowledge the importance of storytelling in the two novels, I don't want to overprivilege stories at the cost of silence or to ignore the limitations of storytelling. In *Murambi*, Gérard is keenly aware of the difficulty of translating sights into words and actions. Gérard laments, “And all the beautiful words of the poets, Cornelius, can say nothing, I swear to you, of the fifty thousand ways to die like a dog, within a few hours” (175). He captures the challenge of trying to put the experience of suffering into words – a challenge that also applies to understanding that suffering, as readers. Diop seems keenly aware of the struggle to express this suffering and, as an outsider to Rwanda, he foregrounds the fact that our experience, as readers, will be second-hand, at best. In the text, Gérard recognizes this distance in Cornelius, as

well: still desiring to be believed, he chafes against the limitations of words. After describing a gruesome rape and beheading he witnessed at Murambi – and recall, Gérard was the sole survivor of that massacre, and thus the only remaining witness – he insists to Cornelius, “I saw that with my own eyes. Do you believe me, Cornelius? It’s important that you believe me. I’m not making it up, for once that’s not necessary. If you prefer to think that I imagined these horrors your mind will be at peace and that’s not good. This pain will get lost in opaque words and everything will be forgotten until the next massacre” (175-6). In this passage, Gérard stresses both the possibility that his audience will choose the more comfortable path of not believing him, but also the fact that, though he fears what will be lost in words, he nonetheless puts his experience into words for the sake of the future. Thus, while words – and storytelling is limited – *Murambi* nevertheless attempts the struggle in order that not “everything...be forgotten until the next massacre.”

But remembering does not seem enough: another limitation of stories is the potential for readers to fall for the fiction that reading is doing: while I clearly support reading, I also acknowledge it is somewhat passive. It can also be seen as an ends, instead of also a means to an ends. The books work against such passivity in the way their endings still push for new beginnings, and in the way that they push for engagement beyond consumerism and by viewing Rwanda through a political lens. As such, the books encourage their audiences to be, not just readers, but citizens who can resee the world, reimagine the world, and remake it, as well.

To understand how storytelling should not come at the cost of silence, I would argue, first of all, that there is a difference between silence and speechlessness: between a desire to stay silent (which could result from many influences) and the lack of room to speak, the lack of listeners, or listeners who are only able/willing to hear one story. This “desire to stay silent” is not without potential problems, but I think of Rosalind Shaw and the work of Sidonie Smith in this instance. Smith writes about the problems of first-person narratives in human rights contexts – where people can be retraumatized or essentialized into victim (or put under the microscope and opened to criticism) because they relate their first-person testimony, most notably in a public or legal forum. On the other hand, Shaw’s work in Sierra Leone highlighted some of the problems with its Truth

and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and potential causes for the TRC's limited successes, arguing that people felt compelled to testify, when reopening the wounds of the close community – where families and neighbors were torn apart by violence committed by those from within the community – was more of a problem than a healing or justice process.

And for all that the novels highlight storytelling, they also have important moments of silence. Throughout most of the book, Gérard chooses not to tell Cornelius his story of survival, for instance. Gérard's silence is present in the first scene where Cornelius meets Gérard, at the bar in Kigali. Gérard “announced his intention to finally reveal the truth,” but instead there was a “heavier and heavier silence” (51). In the end, Gérard says he will leave, “promising to speak another time, not having succeeded that night – for which he sincerely apologized, insisting that these gentlemen not hold it against him – in saying what was in his heart” (52). As they speak of this scene, Cornelius observes to Stanley, “I get the feeling that you don't like to talk about this business.” Stanley agrees, saying, “No, I hate it. Know that for once and for all I want to forget” (53). This echoes Smith and Shaw's point that speaking of a trauma keeps it close, when forgetting might be preferable. Gérard does finally tell his story to Cornelius, but it's at a time and place of Gérard's choosing. Most notably, it is after the day when Cornelius actually tells Gérard, “In this whole affair, everyone has secrets. Keep yours for yourself” (162). In this sense, Gérard seems more able to tell without the pressure of expectations. Instead, he shares the story of his survival at a point, perhaps, when Cornelius is more able to hear it, when Cornelius can observe, “Rather than dreaming of reproaching [Gérard], he admired Gérard's courage. He had needed it to be able to get to his confession” (176). While Cornelius further hopes that, after telling his story, Gérard will be closer to forgiving, Cornelius's transformation is the most noteworthy – from someone who wants to hear even the streets tell their stories and who sees death in every aspect of Rwanda's history, to someone who can allow another person's silence and who is beginning to see life amid the death. In many ways, this transformation is similar to what readers can go through: from expecting to hear horror stories at will, to respecting silence and looking for life, as well. This furthers the idea that the books ask us for change, not only in Africa, but at home, as well. Again, this

suggests that listeners have a role: that, as Ticktin points out, there is room to learn how to listen differently. This highlights the idea of a partnership rather than a hierarchical relationship and underlines the idea that the books push for change, not just in Africa, but the whole world.

This focus on storytelling can also resituate the novels' use of religion and point to religion as one mode of storytelling that might be useful in understanding the genocide. Christianity has a complex place in Rwanda's recent history. The population is approximately 95% Christian (with 4-5% Muslim, and about 1% "other" or "traditional"), and has been since before the genocide. However, the churches helped to establish the divide between Hutu and Tutsi during colonialism, and they were one of the vehicles for favoring Tutsi over Hutu during this time when Tutsi were allowed to be educated in churches, and Hutu were not. Again, the church also signaled the shift from supporting Tutsi to supporting Hutu in the waning days of Belgium's rule. Shifts in Belgium's politics meant new priests in Rwanda often sympathized with the Hutu as underdogs and helped to educate them, which allowed the Hutu to begin to counter the Tutsi dominance

And religion during the genocide is important, too: on the one hand, note that the killings started April 7, the Thursday right after Easter Sunday. Also, some religious figures worked to save lives, while others collaborated with killers. Part of the bitter truth is that a large percentage of people killed in Rwanda in 1994 were killed in churches. Similarly, many have criticized the Vatican, in particular, for not condemning the killings and for protecting some of the priests and nuns accused of having killed or collaborated. Meanwhile, even in the build-up to the genocide, religion was used to support hatred, as evidenced by the so-called "Hutu Ten Commandments" published earlier in the 1990s. . All this to say that religion in Rwanda, specifically Christianity, is steeped in politics: history and power. Importantly, the books acknowledge the limitations of religion in the Rwandan context – visible in the fact that the massacre that killed Faustin's parents took part in a church, while Cornelius' first visit to a memorial site in Rwanda is to a church.

With this kind of history in place, religion, and Christianity in this case, can obviously be used in many ways – to repress or to liberate, in particular. In this way, it's

useful to recall the ways in which the Hebrew and Christian scriptures which make up the Bible do allow for – even encourage? – different viewpoints. In the Old Testament, for instance, this is visible in the two different, and generally contradictory, creation stories in Genesis. Similarly, though not so contradictory, the Old Testament contains two different viewpoints to relate the stories of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel – one from the point of view of the priestly caste, one from the political point of view. Finally, of course, the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are far from identical: some details contradict each other, while others simply fill in different and somewhat complimentary themes. Important in these examples, though, is that Christianity can contain these multiple viewpoints. Furthermore, Paul Farmer – the doctor and anthropologist who advocates for health care for the poor and insists on looking at the structures of inequality that shape our world – makes use of liberation theology to explain his views. According to Farmer, liberation theology “requires an approach that implicates the observer” (144): this echoes my point that *The Oldest Orphan* and *Murambi* draw their readers into new ways of thinking – in other words, that they implicate their observers or audiences. The books do not approach religion naively, but they do allow room for it to reveal new stories, and thus new questions. Also importantly, liberation theology stresses a different kind of relationship between the powerful and the powerless – a deep change in how they relate, so by referencing Christianity, the books allow for the possibility of a new relationship between Africa and the North to emerge.

That the books allow for Christianity as a possible way of understanding the genocide, of allowing for new stories to be borne of the devastation, is visible, for instance in their endings: *Murambi* ends with Cornelius’ thought that the most ardent desire of the dead is for the resurrection of the living – where resurrection surely has a Christian overtone to it. And *The Oldest Orphan* ends in the Nyamata church several days after the massacre took place, where the old woman who rescues Faustin observes that “there’s always some life left, even after the devil’s passed through” (96). As with the stories of Jesus’ resurrection, these stories end not with death, but with life. As I hope the rest of this chapter has made clear, this is not some easy version of life – it is rife with history, with conflicting power, with death, and suffering – but this very messiness makes it richer, which can allow more connection with audiences. And this emphasis on life

also points back to how the books insist that life is complicated and enriched by the social relations that structure it: so, again, the books open the door for religion – religion that acknowledges these structures and politics and its own limitations – to make room for more stories of the genocide, and of the world which helped to shape the genocide.

In the vein of looking at storytelling in the novels by Diop and Monémbo, I want now to turn to look at how the novel of a contemporary Rwandan writer has addressed the genocide in a different kind of story. Scholastique Mukasonga was born and raised in Rwanda, but, a Tutsi, she fled into exile in Burundi in 1973 before moving to France in 1992. During the genocide, twenty-seven members of her family still in Rwanda were killed (“Scholastique Mukasonga”). The first three books she published (names) were non-fictional accounts of or reactions to the genocide. Her fourth book – and first novel – is *Notre-Dame du Nil* (or *Our Lady of the Nile*).²¹ Though *Notre-Dame du Nil* takes place in Rwanda in the 1970s, Mukasonga’s own website describes it as a “prelude to the genocide” (my translation). Pictured in this way, and based on the themes within the novel, itself, I argue that *Notre-Dame du Nil* serves as an important response to the genocide – one which shares many of the concerns of the *Murambi* and *The Oldest Orphan*, even as its differences resonate with the debates which have concerned this dissertation.

Mukasonga’s novel, as the title implies, centers around *Notre-Dame du Nil*, a fictional all-girls secondary school in the mountains of Rwanda, which derives its name from the shrine for the Virgin Mary which was placed next to a spring known to be one of the sources of the Nile – hence *Our Lady of the Nile*. The story recounts some of the details of the consecration of the statue of this black Madonna at the river source in the 1950s, as well as the founding of the school, but the novel’s main focus is on a class of girls that was to have graduated from the school in 1973. Set during the waning days of Kayibanda’s rule as Rwanda’s first president, the book follows Virginia and – to a lesser degree – Veronica, the two Tutsi girls who fill the 10% quota of Tutsi for their class, as well as their Hutu classmates Gloriosa, Immaculée, Frida, Goretti, Modesta, and Godelive. Though Virginia and Veronica are from modest backgrounds, the others

²¹ Mukasonga’s book is written in French. The English translations I use are my own. An English translation will apparently be forthcoming in September 2014.

represent the “feminine elite” of the country for whom the school was founded: daughters of powerful politicians, bankers, military officers, and businessmen. The daughters of the powerful Hutu know that advantageous and political marriages await them when they graduate.

The book looks at day-to-day details in the lives of the girls – their relationships with the nuns, priests, and professors at the school, their courses, their preferences for foods (especially the differences between European and Rwandan food). We also get snippets of intriguing activities – such as Veronica and Immaculée who went in search of a spell to ensure the faithfulness of Immaculée’s boyfriend, of Goretti and Immaculée who went to visit the gorillas, and of the visit of the Belgian queen, Fabiola, to the school. We learn more in-depth about Veronica’s visits with a nearby Belgian, Fontenaille. The old man, regarded as crazy by many, is obsessed with the Hamitic myth and the “true” origins of the Tutsi in Rwanda. He becomes persuaded that the Tutsi came from Egypt, originally, and is further convinced that Veronica resembles the goddess Isis and Virginia the queen Candace. He convinces Veronica to come to his house often to dress up as Isis for his drawings and photographs – a role she plays along with, in the hopes that it will give her an entry into Europe as Fontenaille circulates his art. Virginia is more skeptical, but during her encounter with Fontenaille, he admits that he found the bones of a Rwandan queen (Tutsi, as all royalty were) on his property, which he dug up and buried under a pyramid – to fulfill his assumption that the Tutsi came from Egypt. Learning this leads Virginia to seek advice on how to put this queen’s spirit to rest, properly. Her search leads her to Rubanga, a sorcerer whose family was charged with guarding the secrets of the royal family, but who tells Virginia enough of a secret that she should be able to appease the queen’s restless spirit.

Eventually the many stories come together when, Gloriosa – whose anti-Tutsi sentiments have been evident throughout – decides she must fix the “Tutsi nose” on the statue of Notre Dame du Nil. She maneuvers Modesta into helping her because Modesta, whose mother is a Tutsi, feels the need to prove her worthiness to the influential Gloriosa. The two girls get wet and scraped up as they investigate the statue; based on this, Gloriosa invents a tale of being cornered by Tutsi guerillas (she refers to them as Ineynzi, or Cockroaches), but escaping a dire fate of rape and death. She embellishes the

story to become the heroine who saved the entire school from that destiny – which prompts the authorities in the area to search the homes of local Tutsi, take one into custody, and otherwise stir up fears of Tutsi power. Even after this, Gloriosa pursues her goal of fixing the statue’s nose, but ends up destroying the statue’s head, instead. As before, Gloriosa blames the Inyenzi and stirs up anti-Tutsi sentiment to the point where a group of young militants comes to the school: the younger Tutsi girls are chased from the school, but Gloriosa particularly wants Virginia and Veronica to die. Immaculée manages to secret Virginia away, but Veronica flees to Fontenaille’s in hopes of safety. When Gloriosa learns of Veronica’s hiding place, she sends some of the militants to Fontenaille’s where they kill him, then rape and kill Veronica, according to Immaculée who heard it from the militants. In the end, the furor is quieted by the news of Habyarimana’s coup to oust Kayibanda as president: Gloriosa flees this change of power (though Immaculée is convinced she’ll be a political force in the future), Immaculée – frightened by this power and hate she sees in the men around her – determines to live with “the white lady” with the gorillas, and Virginia decides to leave the country.

The ways in which Mukasonga’s novel echoes the rejections to depoliticized humanitarianism that we saw in the novels by Diop and Monénembo are clear: this novel also foregrounds and complicates the categories history, power, politics, and storytelling. But *Notre-Dame du Nil* also includes many details of daily life in Rwanda and takes place in the 1970s – differences which nonetheless underline it as an important addition to the debates on depoliticization and humanitarianism.

Given that Mukasonga’s reaction to the genocide comes in the form of a story that takes place in 1972-3, she clearly finds history relevant to understanding the genocide. But the novel does not leave history unquestioned: one of the few Rwandan nuns who teaches at the school is Sister Lydwine, who teaches history-geography. However, as the novel points out, “she distinguished cleanly between the two subjects: according to her, history, that was for Europe, geography for Africa....For Africa, there wasn’t history seeing as Africans didn’t know how to read nor write before the missionaries opened their schools” (42). Instead, “it was the Europeans who discovered Africa and made it enter into history” (42). Including this narrow and biased definition of history, *Notre-Dame du Nil* makes it clear that the very definition of history is open to question. Indeed,

this definition stands in contrast to Fontenaille's obsession with discovering what he considers the real history of the Tutsi, since it would have been far further in the past than the European "discovery" of Africa. But Fontenaille's fascination with the Egypt/Tutsi connection he surmises is also distinctly narrow. In addition, it speaks to the strength and persuasiveness of the Hamitic myth of Tutsi as superior. In these ways, Mukasonga's novel does not rest on an easy definition or understanding of history.

Finally, the novel points to the constructedness of history as we hear the many versions of Hutu power, which comes in part by downplaying, obscuring, or denigrating the role of the Tutsi in Rwanda's history. In the early pages of the book, hiding history becomes evident in a subtle scene with the photos of the consecration of the Notre Dame du Nil statue. The novel relates that these photos had been displayed in a corridor of the school for quite some time, but only one remained now – of the Monseigneur blessing the statue (14). But Gloriosa, Modesta, and Veronica discovered the other photos in the library – photos of Tutsi chiefs and wives, of traditional dancers, and other important figures, presumably Tutsi, and most of them with the glass broken or red ink splashed over the faces (14). Gloriosa laughs, saying the photos, too, were subjected to the "social revolution" which saw the rise of Hutu over Tutsi power (14-5). The graffitied and tossed aside photos serve as a clear reminder of the power that shifted with the revolution – a power which was solidified by discarding evidence of those in power previously.

In opening up the category of power, *Notre-Dame du Nil* shows both characters abdicating power and those defying it. To begin with, power in the school does seem rather rigid and hierarchical: the mother superior, for example, allows the oldest girls to decorate their rooms (155), but then takes down the photos – of movie and rock stars – she deems unacceptable (158). Her power has been in doubt before – as when Frida's fiancé, the Zairean ambassador, commandeers a school bungalow for a night with Frida or has her driven to Kigali for weekends – but she has managed to weather these, claiming the chance to avoid scandal (115) or to sacrifice for a greater good (114). However, she appears to cede most of her power to Gloriosa near the end of the novel – she has closed herself in her office "in order to not see anything" (206), as Veronica puts it. In addition, others with power in the school absent themselves: the Belgian professors continue their classes as before, the French professors heed the words of their

ambassador: “no interference, no interference!” (206), and the nuns who usually presided over meals leave their places empty (207). Instead, Gloriosa works with Father Herménégilde (whose anti-Tutsi position has also been made very clear), taking over the library for their committee (201), forcing the Tutsi students to eat after the Hutu students instead of with them (207), traveling to Kigali and Butare and inviting young militants to come to the school (202), and even walking into classrooms at her whim, addressing the students in Kinyarwanda – the language of Rwanda that had, up till then, been essentially banned in the school (201). Gloriosa’s seizure of these powers demonstrate that power is not purely fixed, but quite moveable – especially as she is a student of only seventeen or so, though the child of a powerful politician. At the same time, that the adults in the school ceded this power to Gloriosa seems remarkable: apparently an abdication of responsibility. It’s all the more striking when we see some defiance from other classmates.

Four students appear to defy Gloriosa’s power: Gorette, Immaculée, Virginia and Veronica. Gorette does so more readily because her father is from the north and part of the military – thus, implicitly, close to Habyarimana as he seeks to take power in the country, at large. Immaculée explains her defiance by saying “I like defiances [or challenges]” (in French, “j’aime les défis”) (222) – liking her boyfriend’s large motorcycle more than liking her boyfriend, going to visit the gorillas simply because Gloriosa mocked it, and wanting to save Virginia and Veronica because everyone else wanted to kill them (222). Though her original “defiances” seem small, her last one saves Virginia’s life. In addition, when she emerges from the turmoil at the end of the novel mistrusting all men, her previous visit to the gorillas sets her on the path to find a new type of life among them: her acts of insubordination open to her a direction she might otherwise be prepared to take, at a moment when she feels otherwise vulnerable. In this way, the novel both undermines the notion of blindly obedient Rwandans, but also demonstrate the complexities that confronting power can allow for.

But the attempts at escape that both Veronica and Virginia attempt also stand for confronting power – trying to take their own initiative, rather than submitting to Gloriosa’s power, subverting the assumption that all Rwandans were submissive. Importantly, however, each girl had to rely on someone else for help – Veronica

depending on Fontenaille, and Virginia depending on Immaculée. This, like in the examples of power in *The Oldest Orphan* and *Murambi*, reveals that they are individuals with limited choices, and individuals deeply enmeshed in their society. Further, it's interesting to note that hiding with Fontenaille does not save Veronica: both he and she are killed. Showing his vulnerability in fact chips away at the savior narrative that pictures Northerners as powerful protectors. The tragedy is that the narrative must be weakened at the cost of both of their lives.

Virginia's survival, on the other hand, opens up many ideas related to the storytelling themes in *Murambi* and *The Oldest Orphan*. Notably, she decides to trust Immaculée after having a dream of the spirit of the Rwandan queen thanking Virginia for her help and giving her, as a reward, a white heifer named "Gatare" (209). Immaculée offers to help Virginia, signing her name "Immaculée Mukagatare" – a coincidence that Virginia decides implies that Immaculée is to be trusted (211). With Immaculée's help, Virginia hides with Nyamirongi, the rain maker who helped Immaculée with her boyfriend. Nyamirongi assures Virginia that she helps her because Nyamirongi has seen the white heifer named Gatare, "and She who gave it to you" (214). In this way, Virginia survives because the spirit of the Rwandan queen guides her to trust Immaculée, and then because Nyamirongi welcomes her for having helped the queen, as well. In this way, *Notre-Dame du Nil* – as with the novels by Monénembo and Diop – allows for the importance of a religion or spirituality, but Mukasonga's novel points to important beliefs beyond Christianity, as well: beliefs that might even be able to save lives. In a similar vein, when Virginia explains to Immaculée her reasons for deciding to leave Rwanda, her explanation blends religious ideas with her lived experiences: "You remember what they told us in catechism: all during the day, God wanders the earth but, each evening, he returns to his home in Rwanda. Well, while God was traveling, Death took his place; when he returned, she slammed the door in his face. Death established her reign in our poor Rwanda" (223). Virginia will return, she says, "when the sun of life shines anew on our Rwanda" (223). In this way, Virginia empowers herself by creating an explanation for the world she has seen so far. In doing so, Virginia blends together Christianity, the spirit beliefs of Rwanda, the tales of God that Rwanda has fostered, and her own experiences to open up new stories and new ways of living and looking at the world.

Again, Virginia's view is not naively optimistic, but her survival and act of creation point to new ways of understanding the world outside of the narrow confines of depoliticized humanitarian discourses.

In these many ways – of using and complicating history, power, and storytelling, Mukasonga's *Notre-Dame du Nil* does resemble the novels by Monénembo and Diop. But her novel also contains many differences. Among them, an attention to the intimacies of life in Rwanda and the fact that the book takes place in the 1970s are important. These two categories, however, still resonate strongly with the themes of finding alternatives to depoliticized humanitarianism.

On the one hand, *Notre-Dame du Nil* reveals a great many details about life in Rwanda in the 1970s. Some of these draw readers closer to the world of the book, while others reveal the ways in which playing up the Hutu/Tutsi difference impacted lives. Some of the details in the book are simple and speak to the everyday life of the girls at the school. For example, after returning to the school from a break, the girls would pool the foods their mothers sent with them, in order to share the comforting food of home – so different from the more European food they received at the school (50). This shared clandestine meal launches them into competing recipes for “real bananas” – cooked with tomatoes, or peanuts, or grilled in the ground (51-3). As with when the girls compete for pictures of movie and rock stars, or trade ideas on perfume, makeup, and hair styling, these details paint a picture of daily life which is mundane, humorous, and fairly typical for teenage girls. Not only does this open a way for readers to relate to the characters, the world of the characters is revealed as complex and varied – far from the reduced world of mere victimhood or subservience that we have seen in the depoliticized portrayals.

At the same time, other details reveal the ways in which dividing Hutu from Tutsi impacted lives on many levels. For instance, Virginia and Veronica discuss the point of getting a diploma – despairing that, though hard-workers and now well-educated, they will continue to be restricted by the quota imposed on Tutsis (146). These divisions also served to break family relations, as well: Rubanga is the sorcerer whose family is charged with guarding the secrets of the royal family, but his own sons are ashamed of him and don't follow in his footsteps (139). Meanwhile, Modesta worries about having children: while she tells Virginia that she wants children, she doesn't want them to be Hutu or

Tutsi – “I want them to be my children, that’s all” (93). This concerns her enough she contemplates becoming a nun (93). Mostly, she doesn’t want to be like her mother – a Tutsi married to a Hutu husband, a husband who, along with her sons, holds her in contempt (93). Modesta is torn: she doesn’t think of her mother as Hutu or Tutsi, just as her mother (94), but she has to hide her friendship with Virginia in favor of seeking Gloriosa’s friendship to secure her otherwise precarious – because half-Tutsi – position. These intimate details of life do demonstrate some of the groundwork that made the killings, then in the 1970s and later in 1994, more possible.

Interestingly, for all of the important details about Rwanda that the novel contains, those I’ve mentioned above and the many more in the novel, *Notre-Dame du Nil* still resolutely does not isolate Rwanda. Instead, Rwanda is always seen as part of the larger world – from the foreign nuns and professors with whom the girls interact daily, to their interest in foreign stars, to the visit by the Belgian royal couple, and the travels abroad for the richer girls or family in exile for the Tutsi. For all that the novel reveals interesting facets of life in Rwanda, that life is never cut off from the outside world.

One of the other obvious differences between the novel by Mukasonga and those by Diop and Monémbo is that Mukasonga’s takes place in the 1970s. Arguably, this could make Mukasonga’s novel *not* about the genocide. However, in addition to the fact that her own website and the back of the book label the book a “prelude” to the genocide, so many of the themes in the novel resound with those in the two *Fest’Africa* novels, marking it more convincingly as a book that works to understand the genocide. Perhaps the fact that the book takes place earlier speaks to the difficulty Rwandans can face in trying to write the genocide into fiction, or perhaps it speaks to the importance of the past in understanding both the genocide and how Rwandans (at least Rwandans of a certain generation) react to the genocide. But what’s more, by using this earlier time period to raise important questions that resonate with representing the genocide, Mukasonga’s novel underlines the idea that talking about Rwanda’s genocide is not only about the genocide. Just as I have argued that *The Oldest Orphan* and *Murambi* ask their audiences to resee, not just Africa, but the entire world, so, too, *Notre-Dame du Nil* places the questions and concerns from this period of Rwanda’s history into the discussion about the genocide, and thus, more widely, into discussions for the world. In emphasizing

questions of history and power, storytelling and location, *Notre-Dame du Nil* places itself at the crossroads of the many vital debates over depoliticization, humanitarianism, savior narratives, and alternatives that this dissertation has raised.

Conclusion: Empowering and Looking Ahead

In concluding this project, I will retrace my argument as it has developed throughout. In the Introduction, I argue that despite its stated goals, humanitarianism is burdened with significant problems. Ranging from the on-the-ground problems of inadvertently prolonging Ethiopia's wars in 1984 and 1985, to aiding militarized camps just outside of Rwanda's borders after the 1994 genocide, to the ways in which the discourses of humanitarianism, using pervasive us/them stereotypes, build on savior narratives – all the while disempowering the Africans being “helped,” as well as the Northern audiences who support humanitarian action. Acknowledging the important strands of depoliticization, savior narratives, and power, I pointed to the problems with humanitarianism that are visible in its histories in Ethiopia and Rwanda, as I just mentioned. I also noted some of the other problems with humanitarianism, varying from a reliance on experts at the cost of local people and knowledge, to an emphasis on short-term goals over long-term goals, to the issues with abstraction that the discourse shares with the rights discourse.

With this groundwork in place, in Chapter One I examined the media coverage of and humanitarian ads for Ethiopia. My research revealed a strong tendency to rely on a theme of Africa as Other – with Africa portrayed as exotic, child-like, and passive – while using an overabundance of emotional appeals. I supplemented this media research with historical research which shed light on the use of us/them divides and savior narratives: some of these were used by both pro- and anti-slavery activists, while different variations were also used to justify colonialism during many years. The longevity of these discourses points to their constructedness, but also the power that they both wield and obscure. This knowledge situated my use of Jo Ellen Fair's argument – bolstered by my own research – that the story of Ethiopia's famine became, in the media, a story about capitalism as savior. The storyline was strongly upheld in looking at the humanitarian ads for Ethiopia, as well. They displayed the continued use of us/them

stereotypes and emotional appeals, and pointed to the various ways in which people, organizations, and companies stood to gain in calling for help for Ethiopia.

Building on the work in Chapter One, Chapter Two contained a similar analysis of the media coverage of and humanitarian ads for Rwanda. Following the trends revealed in my research on Ethiopia of Africa as Other and the importance of savior narratives, this chapter built on the arguments to examine how the coverage of Rwanda continued to distance its Northern audience from the Rwandans being “saved” and disempowered both groups, leaving humanitarianism as the savior. In a post-Cold War world, this tendency helped to preserve the status quo of the hierarchical relationship between the North and Africa, I argued, while disguising this behind the benevolent veneer of humanitarianism. The humanitarian ads for Rwanda continued this – using again the same us/them tropes and savior narratives. These ads revealed just how much the savior narrative was about those helping – again adding to my argument that the unequal status quo benefitted from the savior narrative of humanitarian discourses.

Returning to the 1984/5 Ethiopian famine, Chapter Three examined three songs that were written to raise money for the famine: “Do They Know It’s Christmas?” by Band Aid, “We Are the World” by USA for Africa, and “Tears Are Not Enough” by Northern Lights. My examination of these songs builds off of the knowledge about savior narratives and humanitarian discourses revealed in Chapters One and Two. I found that “Do They Know It’s Christmas?”, in particular, relied on an us/them divide which kept its savior narrative intact. An attempt to question a sense of selfishness was thus undermined by the song’s insistence on the distance between “us” and “them.” While my reading of “We Are the World” suggested some amount of change from the status quo – by calling for unity and change – it also used a theme of Africa as Other to its detriment. I argued that the Northern Lights song “Tears Are Not Enough” fared better in attempting to find alternatives to the depoliticized humanitarian discourses. In particular, the song – as its title suggests – did not rely on emotional tropes, but suggested learning as an important option. In addition, the song more convincingly demonstrated a unity between “here” and “there,” thus supporting its suggestion for paths that different from those seen in humanitarian discourses.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I looked at two novels about the Rwandan genocide – Boubacar Boris Diop’s *Murambi: The Book of Bones* and Tierno Monénembo’s *The Oldest Orphan*. In this chapter, I argued that the novels countered the discourses of humanitarianism and savior narratives in a variety of ways and, in particular, they offered alternative ways of looking at the world. Crucial to this chapter is my argument that, by engaging their audience beyond the easy tropes previously seen, in looking at the dynamics of history and power, and by featuring storytelling as an alternative, the two novels imply that it is not only Africa that needs to be seen in a new light, but the entire world.

Having looked at the course of my argument in this project, I wish to conclude it by turning briefly once again to the histories of Ethiopia and Rwanda, before noting two more books which reveal developments in this field since the time of the crises in Ethiopia and Rwanda. In this sense, I aim to finish this project in the same vein as the novels by Monénembo and Diop: by ending with more beginnings in mind. Just as the two novels end by beginning a new cycle, so, too, I wish to acknowledge that, even as I end it, my project is part of a larger field and discussion.

To this end, I observe developments in Ethiopia and Rwanda after the famine and genocide, respectively, especially with regards to how these changes have influenced power. Much of my work in the preceding chapters has touched on the disempowering effects of the depoliticized savior narratives used by humanitarianism, so this Conclusion offers a chance to look at the recent history in each country in light of this. Furthermore, I will examine two recent books, by Lisa Ann Richey and Stefano Ponte, and by Mahmood Mamdani, that speak to the continuation of some of the problematic discourses used by humanitarianism. This allows me to wrap up with some observations of, building off of Mamdani’s work, of avenues for future promise and future work.

Recent Developments in Ethiopia

The years after the famine of 1984/5 saw plenty of changes in power in Ethiopia. As the famine waned, the government was still engaged with the wars with the TPLF and the EPLF. These wars consumed much government money, while the conscription of boys and men into the government army and militia and poor agricultural policies led to more food shortages and famine in the late 1980s (Woodward 100). Unlike the one a few

years earlier, however, these shortages were quickly taken care of, without the large loss of life.

As Woodward notes, the TPLF did not share the EPLF's goal of secession: its objective was to overthrow the current government (96). This goal became more likely as the Ethiopian army was thrown into disarray: in 1988, the EPLF won a decisive victory against the Ethiopian army at the city of Afabet. The EPLF was able to secure many weapons due to this victory, while the Ethiopian army was seriously demoralized – a demoralization furthered by punishments against the officers' corps meted out by Mengitsu (Woodward 97). With a decrease in support from the USSR in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Mengitsu's government was scrambling. Its strategy of changing policies appeared a further retreat (Woodward 98), while the TPLF joined with several other groups outside of Tigre to form the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1989, strengthening its cause further (Woodward 97). The reversal in fortunes was strong enough that, in May 1991, Mengitsu fled to exile in Zimbabwe. Surprisingly, the TPLF and EPLF had led movements which defeated what was the continent's largest army (Woodward 99).

The new government set up under TPLF leader Meles Zenawi moved toward a form of "ethnic federalism," according to Woodward (101). While this new government opened up power to new groups, especially after years of essentially dictatorship, opposition groups boycotted elections in 1992 and 1995, both of which were contested on grounds of fraud, though they kept Meles in power (Woodward 101-2). This movement toward ethnic federalism raised questions over how to keep the country together, especially after the new government recognized Eritrea's secession and right to independence (Woodward 102). While an unexpected war between Ethiopia and Eritrea between 1998-9 did strengthen the government by increasing a sense of nationalism, strains continued (Woodward 102). As Woodward notes, without Eritrea, Ethiopia became the "largest landlocked state in the world" (103), which could provide tensions of its own. Allegations of problems with elections have continued to arise, while some critique the government's attitude toward dissent, both of which point to less power for the larger population. Meles Zenawi died in August 2012, leaving Hailemariam Desalegn as current Prime Minister, signaling yet another shift in power – one which is

still being played out. Importantly, though Mengitsu continues to live in exile in Zimbabwe, he and allies were tried *in absentia* for crimes under their rule (Woodward 103; “Mengitsu Found Guilty of Genocide”), pointing to ways in which history is being reexamined, especially in regards to the abuses of power by Mengitsu and his allies. While the trial was made easier by the fact that a new government was in power, it nevertheless symbolized a chance to examine the role of power in Ethiopia’s history.

Recent Developments in Rwanda

In many ways, Rwanda had to reshape itself after the genocide: for the most part, those in the government of Habyarimana had either been killed or participated in the genocide, and thus had fled when the war was going against them, thus opening the door to shifts in power. The incoming RPF had to create a new government – in some ways, a new Rwanda – even while many elements of the old lived right across the border in then-Zaire, in armed refugee camps, especially as the new government had many reasons to break with the past. In addition, Rwanda faced unique challenges. Mamdani points out that whereas South Africa had few perpetrators, but many beneficiaries, Rwanda had many perpetrators and few beneficiaries. As Jessica in *Murambi* observes near the end of the genocide, the insistence that “every Hutu must kill” led to “a second genocide, through the destruction of souls this time” (112). While the UN created the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) to try top-level perpetrators, the genocide had left hundreds of thousands dead, and hundreds of thousands accused of participating in the genocide. Eventually, the government instituted a system of gacaca courts because, with approximately 120,000 people in prison in the year 2000, the formal justice system could not keep up. These gacaca courts are based on a traditional form of justice meant to settle small disputes in a community and promote reconciliation and justice in the community. Their older use was extrapolated and put to use to try accused people within their own communities, with an emphasis on reconciliation. As Human Rights Watch advisor Alison des Forges observed, the system was seriously problematic because the accused did not have lawyers (Vasagar, 17 March 2005). But des Forges also concedes that, “the problem of delivering justice after the genocide is an overwhelming problem. Gacaca may not be ideal but there is at this point no alternative” (Vasagar). The courts represent

both a dispersal of power – by placing the courts all around the country in the hands of many citizens – and also a danger, if the accused had few resources.

In addition to trying to find new methods for finding justice and reconciliation in the gacaca courts, Rwanda has tried to reshape itself in other ways. On the one hand, the reference to Hutu, Tutsi or Twa has been eliminated from identification cards in Rwanda, and instead the government emphasizes unity. This push for new unity is, indeed, made visible and audible in Rwanda's new flag and anthem, adopted in 2001 (Vesperini). Meanwhile, even when I visited in 2008, signs along the road were clearly visible that promoted unity over the ideology of genocide. The government has also moved strongly to curb corruption and become more business friendly in order to increase income (Economist). Similarly, higher education has become more widespread: before the genocide, there was only one university in the country, in the city of Butare. More recently, nearly two dozen institutes – both public and private – exist. All of these factors – attempts move past differences, to decrease poverty, and to increase education – represent ways of increasing the power of more citizens.

For all the challenges to the state that I've mentioned, and for all of the dangers the state exemplifies by its role in leading the genocide, the state is what we are left with. In that vein, it is instructive to look at how the state can be useful and made to serve a greater good. I have already alluded to Arendt's view that the state provides an important location for voices to be heard. In addition, we can think of de Waal: in citing the significant lack of famines in India, he argues that "At the centre of this continuing success is the anti-famine political contract" (15). Such a contract comes about when "governments have recognized that maintaining their legitimacy rests on respecting certain democratic rights," with another layer of activists (de Waal mentions "journalists, lawyers, elected representatives") who can resort to "popular mobilization" (11). In other words, an acknowledgement of accountability between the state and the population has helped to avert famines. While de Waal recognizes that the specific contract that he examines in India is "narrow" – it does not address the larger problem of poverty related to famines – nonetheless famines are diverted. On a related note, the state as a familiar means of governance means that its forms of power are more familiar – thus more visible

and more easily held accountable, with the right conditions (democracy, independent press, active citizenry, for instance).²²

It's also important to note that de Waal also sees the success of the anti-famine political contract depending on "robust public debate," informed by an independent press which tackles the issue of famine with "determined investigation and critical analysis" (15). The issue of debate and media in Rwanda is of course fraught, considering the role the Rwandan media played in fueling the genocide. Nonetheless, there was criticism of the government's "clampdown on independent media" before the 2010 presidential election in Rwanda (HRW). The HRW also voiced concern over the use of a law against "genocide ideology," since an offense under the law could be construed in many ways – though they also note that the law was under review. These instances make clear that the balance of power in Rwanda is still being played out.

Branching Out, Reaching Forward

The recent book *Brand Aid: Shopping Well to Save the World* by Lisa Ann Richey and Stefano Ponte points to how the problem of consumerism as humanitarianism has picked up steam with the RED campaign. The Product RED initiative, started by U2 lead singer Bono, pledges to donate "a percentage of profits from RED lines" to the Global Fund to help provide women and children in Africa with AIDS the antiretroviral medicine that keeps the virus in check (Richey and Ponte 1). Companies involved include American Express, Apple, Armani, Microsoft, and Starbucks (1). The writers note that "The complex scripts of race, gender, and global economic inequality are ignored," while "'global politics' is reduced to style" (xii). AIDS is treated as an emergency (xii) which is treated only with pills – thus ignoring the causes of the problem in favor of treating a specific symptom (9). As with my critique of the humanitarian discourse which depends on savior narratives, Richey and Ponte find that RED "depoliciz[es] both trade and AIDS in Africa" since it doesn't look at causes and, that "RED is a poignant example of the global appropriation of suffering and our power to ameliorate it" (9). Altogether, as Richey and Ponte describe it, RED represents a

²² I do want to temper this endorsement of a push for democracy by acknowledging that the push for democracy in the early 1990s is part of what, many have argued, caused a fear for loss of power among the ruling elite that was part of their drive for genocide. Which is to say, given the lure of power and the specifics of history, a push for multi-party democracy is not without potential problems.

continuation of disempowering both those in Africa (those with AIDS only need to be saved, ignoring the social and political dynamics of the disease, as well as the ways in which “Africans with AIDS are saving each other and saving themselves” (Richey and Ponte xiii), and those in the North: “instead of mobilizing in response to economic crisis or engaging in some other form of citizen participation, consumers may continue to try to change the world through shopping” (17).

While their book points to earlier forms of this kind of “Brand Aid” (MAC lipsticks and Mercedes, for example (15)), the trends visible in representing Ethiopia, particularly the humanitarian ads for the famine, point to still earlier moments where celebrities and depoliticization combined with consumerism to “save Africans,” while conserving the status quo. While capitalism did not play such an overt role in the representations of Rwanda, certainly the trend of reducing the Northern audience to people who could donate to other experts follows the same tendency toward disempowering the audience by reducing their involvement and engagement. Interestingly, Wilson and Brown note a similar complexity of conflicting agendas when they write of abolitionists who, in the 1840s and 1850s, purchased slaves: the purchase freed the individual slave of his or her suffering, but “tacitly recognized a legitimacy for slavery that abolitionists simultaneously repudiated” (11). The important connection between these examples is that this form of humanitarianism has, at heart, conflicting agendas: to save lives – but only in the present, and often, then, at the cost of long-term change that could save more lives by preventing slavery, famine, war and genocide, disease.

In his book *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror*, Mahmood Mamdani examines both the history of Darfur and the Sudan, and the ways in which “saving Darfur” came to hold such sway in the US in the 2000s. His examination of the campaign to “save Darfur,” and especially the Save Darfur Coalition (SDC), concludes that the campaign consistently depoliticized Darfur (57, 60). The push for military intervention came at a time when deaths had been consistently falling, and came at the cost of political solutions, leading Mamdani to argue that the coalition’s “raison d’être is to be sought in the War on Terror” (47). That is, just as representing Ethiopia as depoliticized fed into capitalism’s story of a moral victory, and representing Rwanda as

depoliticized helped to conserve the status quo after the Cold War, representing Darfur as depoliticized complemented the War on Terror's discourse of good and evil, and particularly of Arabs on the side of evil (62-5).

In addition to being an even more contemporary example of a savior narrative at work, Mamdani's book points to some signs of hope, albeit ones that need to be bolstered to have real success. So, for instance, Mamdani argues that the African Union's intervention in Darfur was on the path to success because it "fused moral fervor with a political vision" (38). By helping to "find an inclusive political solution" (Thabo Mbeki, quoted in Mamdani 38-9), the AU mission "established a political basis for negotiating peace" between the Sudanese government and the insurgent factions (39). The AU's mission met with problems when the rebel factions splintered into more than twenty groups (39), but pledges of financial support from the US and European countries that never materialized points to "a coordinated effort...to discredit the African Union's presence" (40). So while the AU's mission points to a potential avenue of success in future crises, Mamdani argues that political interest in sustaining a savior narrative undermined the mission in Darfur – which is certainly an argument in favor of understanding the power behind such narratives.

Mamdani's work highlights another important prospect for the future when he enters into the discussion of the tension between peace and justice. Indeed, Mamdani argues that "If peace and justice are to be complementary, rather than conflicting, objectives, we need to distinguish victor's justice from survivor's justice," and he points to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission as an example of survivor's justice (285). "The search for justice," argues Mamdani, "must be two-pronged: Prioritize peace over punishment, and explore forms of justice – not criminal but political and social – that will make reconciliation durable" (286). I would argue that the movement toward storytelling in Diop and Monémbo's books in my last chapter represents an attempt at exploring other forms of justice: an attempt to find stories that can, in ways outside of courts, bring types of justice and types of reconciliation that are otherwise not visible if reductive and depoliticized savior narratives prevail. Because the books are written by non-Rwandans and not just for Rwandans, they simply (and not so simply) expand the scope of who is included in the project of justice and reconciliation:

yet another lesson for larger audiences to learn from the Rwandan example. In this way, Mamdani's argument for a durable survivor's justice highlights a path for potential alternatives to the savior narratives used by humanitarianism.

While books like *Brand Aid* and *Saviors and Survivors* illuminate more recent examples of similar problems in the use of savior narratives in humanitarianism, the very existence of such books is a hopeful sign, as more become aware of the limitations of these problems. Together with the works of those like Alex de Waal, Miriam Ticktin, Carol Quillen, Liisa Malkki, Joseph Slaughter, and Melissa Wall, this growing body of knowledge can, ideally, influence those who – as Redfield and Bornstein point out – wish to “do something” (27), but wish to do a better job, diminishing or avoiding the pitfalls in our past and present. The work is far from over, as we need to imagine further and more concrete alternatives, and to form stronger alliances. My hope remains that “A Puzzle Viewed From Within”: Problems With and Alternatives to Humanitarian Discourses and Savior Narratives can contribute to that larger effort, by adding to the fields of post-colonial studies, humanitarian and development studies, peace, justice, and reconciliation studies, as well as speaking to those who also wish to “do something,” and are dissatisfied with narrow options presented within the humanitarian discourses to the question “what can be done?”

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