

‘More than Just a Genocide Country’: Recuperating Rwanda in the Writings of Scholastique Mukasonga

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In November 2012, Rwandan author Scholastique Mukasonga won the prestigious French literary prize, the Prix Renaudot, for her first novel *Notre Dame du Nil*. Previously known as a writer of testimony and short stories, Mukasonga told *Le Point* magazine that ‘le roman l’a réconciliée avec elle-même, et avec l’histoire du Rwanda’ [with the novel she came to terms with herself and with the history of Rwanda] (Cocquet, 2012). A genocide ‘survivor by destination’ (African Rights and Redress, 74), Mukasonga has a complex personal relationship with her country of birth, a relationship which, as she suggests, changed when she wrote about it in the form of a novel. This article discusses Mukasonga’s writing trajectory through what will be identified as a passage from mourning to recuperation. It examines the interaction between her latest texts (a second novel and another collection of short stories) and the series of digitized artefacts presented on her website. Combining a postcolonial framework with insights from clinical and political psychology, it shows how Mukasonga’s most recent writing encourages us to think about Rwanda differently, and suggests a new way of reading literary responses to the 1994 genocide.

Since 1994, Rwanda has been overdetermined by the Genocide against the Tutsi, fixed in the global imagination as the place where one million people were brutally massacred in just one hundred days; a dark, dangerous, uncivilized place prone to spontaneous outbreaks of interethnic conflict or so-called ‘tribal’ warfare. This overdetermination is encapsulated in Rwandan author Jean-Marie Rurangwa’s 2006 novel, *Au sortir de l’enfer*. Towards the end of the novel the protagonist Jean-Léonard, himself a genocide survivor, visits a restaurant with his new fiancée’s family in the Mauritian capital of Port-Louis. Here he is introduced to a young radio journalist, Roger-Gérard, who, when he learns that Jean-Léonard is Rwandan, asks him, ‘Tu n’as pas honte de venir du Rwanda? [...] Mais le Rwanda, c’est l’horreur!’ [Aren’t you ashamed of coming from Rwanda? But Rwanda is horrific!] (169).¹ The suggestion that a survivor of the genocide should feel shame for being Rwandan offers a powerful contrast to the narrative of returnee performance poet, Angel Uwamahoro. In her spoken-word poem, ‘Rwanda is NOT Hotel Rwanda!!!’, Uwamahoro offers a powerful, upbeat version of what Rwanda means for many young people today:

So NO-
Rwanda is not hotel Rwanda-
We will not be defined by the genocide
Rwanda is
A land of pride-
[...]
the heart beating life of Africa-
The world's example and definition of hope, reliance and ambition (Uwamahoro
2013)²

These examples from Rurangwa and Uwamahoro illustrate the two master narratives of Rwanda in the twenty-first century: on the one hand, the story of a country haunted by the legacy of 1994 and its history, still common currency in the world outside Rwanda; on the other, the presentation of a new, forward-looking nation full of ambition and hope.

Over the past twenty-three years, the Rwandan government has worked hard to restore peace, stability and unity to a country devastated and highly divided by the experience of genocide.³ One of the concepts to emerge recently in the government's programme for rebuilding Rwandan society is that of 'agaciro' ('dignity' in Kinyarwanda), which has become associated with the promotion of Rwandan cultural heritage around the world.⁴ To celebrate the first Rwanda Cultural Day, held in San Francisco on 24 September 2016, the Rwandan government released a short black and white film featuring images of traditional baskets, cloth, huts and 'Intore' dancing. Various cultural performances also took place. The slogan for the day was 'Agaciro: a heritage of Dignity' with the hashtag 'agaciro' adopted in social media (Rwanda Cultural Day 2016).⁵ 'Agaciro' links Rwandan cultural heritage with post-genocide identity, a connection highlighted in Uwamahoro's poem:

We come from a land
That has risen from the ashes of sorrow
To the rose blossom of tomorrow
A land
of agaciro-
We come from that land (Uwamahoro 2013)

As a twenty-first century signifier, 'agaciro' combines the positive transformation of Rwanda since the genocide with the recovery and revaluing of traditional Rwandan culture. The cultural heritage signified by 'agaciro' was established long before 1994, but was threatened throughout the latter half of the twentieth century by a series of attempts to denigrate and ultimately eliminate the Tutsi population, culminating in genocide.

In 2014, on the eve of the twentieth anniversary of the genocide, Scholastique Mukasonga called for us to think about Rwanda in terms of more than 1994. Like Uwamahoro, Mukasonga gestures towards a different version of Rwanda's national story: 'Ce n'est pas qu'un pays de génocide' [It's not just a genocide country] she told Julien Le Gros. 'C'est un pays magnifique, avec une autre Histoire, qui n'a pas toujours été celle de la division' [It's a magnificent country with another History, which hasn't always been one of division]. She continues:

Cette Histoire douloureuse fait partie du Rwanda. Mais d'autres parts [*sic*], les rescapés, les survivants comme moi, disent qu'on ne doit pas en être otages. Dans mes nouvelles *Ce que murmurent les collines* je parle d'un Rwanda ancien qui n'a rien à voir avec le génocide. Je vais à la recherche d'un Rwanda tel qu'il aurait dû rester. Le génocide a malheureusement représenté 34 ans de la vie des Rwandais. Les écrits sont là. Nous avons déposé ce qu'il fallait déposer. Maintenant il faut être mobilisé pour construire un pays où tous les Rwandais ont leur place. (Le Gros 2014)⁶

[That painful History is part of Rwanda. But on the other hand, survivors, those who survived like me, say that we mustn't be hostages to that History. In my short stories, *Murmurs from the Hills*, I talk about an ancient Rwanda that has nothing to do with the genocide. I go in search of a Rwanda that should have stayed that way. The genocide has unfortunately taken up 34 years of Rwandans' lives. The writings are there. We have set down what needed to be set down. Now we must get mobilised to build a country in which all Rwandans have their place.]

Born in 1956 in Gikongoro province, Mukasonga is the best known and most successful author from Rwanda today. In her first autobiographical tale, *Inyenzi ou les cafards* (2006), she describes how in 1960 she, along with many thousands of other Tutsi, was forcibly displaced to Gitwe, a village near Nyamata in the Bugesera region.⁷ Bugesera is described as

an area unfit for human habitation, a dry savanna, home to wild animals and disease-carrying tsetse fly (Mukasonga 2006: 19). In 1973, Mukasonga, then a student of social work in Butare, was again forced out of her home, and fled to neighbouring Burundi.⁸ She later married a Frenchman, moved to Djibouti and in 1992 settled in France. Mukasonga's decision to write about the persecution of Rwandan Tutsi before 1994 exposes the fact that the Genocide against the Tutsi did not begin in 1994, but rather dates back to the so-called Rwandan 'Social Revolution' of 1959. Over the last ten years, Mukasonga has published six texts, one every two years, all of them with Gallimard. The first two, *Inyenzi ou les cafards* (2006) and *La Femme aux pieds nus* (2008) are autobiographical first person narratives recounted by a narrator named Scholastique. In 2010, Mukasonga turned to fiction with her first collection of short stories, *L'Iguifou: nouvelles rwandaises*, followed by her first novel, *Notre Dame du Nil*, in 2012. Most recently, she has published a second collection of short stories, *Ce que murmurent les collines* (2014) and a second novel, *Cœur tambour* (2016).

While Mukasonga's works were initially published in Gallimard's African literature series, 'Continents Noirs', her most recent novel, *Cœur tambour* appeared in the prestigious 'Collection Blanche'.⁹ This shift in Mukasonga's authorial status followed the award of the Prix Renaudot. Although the Renaudot had been preceded by numerous other awards, this was the prize that seems to have singled out Mukasonga as a successful author from Rwanda in the French publishing world. The little scholarship there is on Mukasonga tends to read her as an author of genocide testimony, identifying her as what critics of literature about Rwanda describe as an 'absent witness' to the genocide (Azarian, 2011: 424).¹⁰ This is largely because existing critical studies were published or written before the award of the Renaudot, so tend to focus on her first two autobiographical texts and the short story collection, *L'Iguifou*.¹¹

Mukasonga's two most recent works, the collection of short stories, *Ce que murmurent les collines* and her second novel, *Cœur tambour*, both take the reader on a journey back to Rwanda long before 1994. Unlike most fiction about Rwanda, including Mukasonga's earlier works, neither text presents itself as a response to the genocide.¹² Having written two autobiographical texts that function as what she herself has described as 'tombeau[x] de papier' [paper tombs] (Mukasonga 2006: 158) for the 37 family members she lost, Mukasonga's recent fiction seems to reflect a conscious decision to try to stop writing about the genocide. Over the course of her career to date, Mukasonga appears to have been

attempting to move away from what she frequently refers to as ‘cette Histoire’ [that [His]Story]. Indeed, she has spoken of her semi-autobiographical novel, *Notre Dame du Nil* as a turning point in her personal process of mourning and remembrance: ‘une sorte de remède pour éradiquer définitivement cette longue période de souffrance’ [a kind of remedy to get rid of that long period of suffering for good] (Le Gros 2014).

Since traces of the horrors of 1994 can be found in each of Mukasonga’s published works, the desire she expresses in the interview with Le Gros to write about ‘an ancient Rwanda that has nothing to do with genocide’ is particularly striking. Rediscovery of this ancient Rwanda, Mukasonga suggests, will pave the way for building a new Rwandan identity twenty years after the genocide ended. Although, her early works acknowledge the shared imperative to recount and record what happened between 1959 and 1994, Mukasonga now emphasizes the need to contribute to the reconstruction of her birth country, in her case through her writing. The present article reflects on the fictional staging of Mukasonga’s search for a precolonial Rwanda uncontaminated by genocide. It suggests that, having tackled the difficulties of mourning and remembrance in her earlier writings, Mukasonga has more recently embarked on a process of fictional excavation, which reflects a need for recuperation after the genocide. This process of recuperation, I will argue, compels us to think about 21st-century Rwanda as ‘more than just a genocide country’ and, in doing so, promotes the agency and dignity of the people of Rwanda.

Through an analysis of Mukasonga’s representations of Rwanda, I offer an alternative view of her writings as moving beyond witnessing, mourning, and memorialization towards recuperating Rwanda. I suggest that a chronological reading of her published works to date reveals an increasing shift away from 1994 back to an ancient, pre-colonial Rwanda no longer dominated by the history of the genocide. This ante-genocide Rwanda is repositioned in her latest novel within a transnational framework. Drawing on psychological theories of trauma recovery tested in Rwanda by Laurie Anne Pearlman and Ervin Staub, I show that, what begins in Mukasonga’s work as a process of memorialization develops into a recuperative narrative that helps to build a new collective memory and makes connections beyond the trauma of the genocide. I suggest that Mukasonga’s writing, particularly her fiction, provides a useful space for thinking about Rwandan cultural recuperation and, in doing so, demonstrates the role of cultural production in challenging the mystification of Rwanda as a nation of genocide victims.

Genocide

As both Viviane Azarian's and Valérie Dusailant-Fernandes' work has demonstrated, Mukasonga first turns to writing as a means of bearing witness to her personal experience of living through the many years of Tutsi persecution that culminated in the 1994 genocide. Furthermore, as they suggest, Mukasonga's two autobiographical texts, *Inyenzi ou les cafards* and *La Femme aux pieds nus*, powerfully demonstrate the difficulty of bearing witness to the genocide itself, especially for those who were absent in 1994. Although Mukasonga feels a duty to give testimony about those she lost, she can only ever be an indirect witness of what happened in 1994. In both texts, and particularly in *La Femme aux pieds nus*, the author focuses more on her childhood memories of exile in Nyamata in the 1960s and 1970s than on her adult experiences of witnessing the genocide against her fellow Tutsi from her home in France. This is not to say that the genocide is absent, but it is explicitly mentioned only once, in the final paragraph of the final chapter, in *La Femme aux pieds nus*. Here, Mukasonga writes about rape as one of the weapons of the 1994 genocide, but does so to make a point about the courage of rape survivors in present-day Rwanda. In her debut work, *Inyenzi ou les cafards*, the genocide is the focus of only one of the fourteen chapters, but is nevertheless far more present here than in *La Femme aux pieds nus*. The graphic descriptions in the chapter, entitled '1994: Le génocide, l'horreur attendue' [1994: The genocide, anticipated horror], stand out from the rest of the book and are based on the testimonies of the small number of Mukasonga's family members who managed to survive. Almost all the testimonies are incomplete, interrupted by what appear to be symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder among the survivors, such as headaches and vertigo. The most complete story is that of Mukasonga's youngest sister, Jeanne, which she presents in the third person in the historic present so that it reads almost like a news report or a brief history of the genocide. Like the other testimonies, however, this narrative also contains substantial gaps, signalled by authorial interventions in the form of questions: How long was Jeanne hiding in a bush with her youngest daughter? How was she eventually killed and by whom? Although we do learn many of the horrific details of Jeanne's murder, there are no witnesses left to supply the missing information.

Elsewhere *Inyenzi ou les cafards* stages the difficulty of giving testimony by explicitly refusing to provide details of what happened in 1994. For example, one passage describes how Scholastique and some of her Tutsi school friends would sneak out of school to visit

Gicanda, the widow of former Rwandan king, Mutara Rudahigwa. This passage concludes with a proleptic epilogue: ‘En 1994, on s’est acharné sur la vieille dame. Je ne dirai pas comment on l’a humiliée, violée, suppliciée. Je ne veux que me souvenir de celle qui nous donnait du lait, Gicanda, la reine au beau visage’ [The old lady was hounded in 1994. I won’t say how they humiliated, violated, tortured her. I want only to remember her as the one who would give us milk, Gicanda, the queen with the beautiful face] (Mukasonga 2006: 92).

Paradoxically, by emphasizing what is not said, such proleptic moments serve as powerful reminders of the horrors of the genocide, leaving the reader to imagine for herself the horrific nature of Gicanda’s death.¹³ In other places the prolepses are more explicit. For example, remembering how she and her family would seek refuge in Nyamata church when they were threatened by the emerging Hutu extremists, Scholastique’s narration leaps forward briefly to 1994 when five thousand people were massacred in that same church and then on to the present-day transformation of the church into a genocide memorial (66-7). Through her repeated descriptions of Tutsi persecution in the 1960s and 1970s, including arbitrary arrests, house raids, pillaging, sexual and physical violence, and killings, Mukasonga documents what she calls ‘le système d’apartheid ethnique’ [the system of ethnic apartheid] which generated the ideology of genocide (75). Both *Inyenzi ou les cafards* and *La Femme aux pieds nus* contain multiple examples of what Boniface Mongo-Mboussa describes in his afterword to *Inyenzi* as ‘des signes avant-coureurs de la tragédie rwandaise’ [forewarning signs of the Rwandan tragedy] (in Mukasonga 2006: 162), reinforcing the inevitability of 1994. As Viviane Azarian notes, Mukasonga ‘retravaille le récit du survivant en amont des cent jours d’extermination’ [reworks the survivor’s tale in anticipation of the hundred days of extermination] (Azarian 2011: 427). For example, narrator Scholastique recalls seeing soldiers dragging bodies, some of them still alive, into Cyohoha lake in 1967, a chilling precursor of what would happen so often between April and July 1994. Here, she comments retrospectively using the language of genocide ideology: ‘c’étaient des jeunes gens, des jeunes hommes, des serpents, des cafards, des Inyenzi, qu’il fallait éliminer de peur qu’ils ne deviennent dangereux’ [they were young people, young men, snakes, cockroaches, Inyenzi, that had to be eliminated for fear of them becoming dangerous] (Mukasonga 2006: 75). She recalls girls being raped by Parmehutu youth at night and then the narrative flashes forward to 1994: ‘Quelques pauvres filles étaient devenues leur objet comme le seront les filles et fillettes tutsi lors du génocide’ [Some poor girls had become their objects, as young Tutsi women and girls would be in the genocide] (71).

Mukasonga's first novel, *Notre Dame du Nil* is similarly retrospective, based on an earlier attempt to eradicate the Tutsi in 1973, the year in which she herself fled Rwanda for neighbouring Burundi. Indeed, in all her works of fiction, Mukasonga chooses to write around the genocide, setting the action either before or after 1994. Her first volume of short stories, *L'Iguifou*, is a rare example of a post-1994 Rwandan fictional work that does not include any description of the genocide killings. Yet, the shadow of 1994 still hangs retrospectively over all the texts in the collection, each of them set in post-genocide Rwanda (Hitchcott 2015: 91). Despite Mukasonga's stated attempts to move away from the genocide in her fictional writings, the traces - unsurprisingly - remain, often expressed as mourning or melancholia, as I demonstrate below.

Mourning

In *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning*, Sam Durrant defines postcolonial narrative as 'simultaneously an attempt to summon the dead and to lay them to rest' (Durrant 2004: 9). For Durrant, following Derrida, postcolonial mourning collapses Freud's (1917) distinction between melancholia and mourning since the postcolonial narrative emphasizes the benefits of collective mourning in postcolonial societies: 'At the level of the individual, the melancholic's refusal to recognize an end to the time of mourning seems to preclude the possibility of the future. For the collective, the commitment never to forget seems precisely to be a way of looking to the future, a way of ensuring that history does not repeat itself' (Durrant 2004: 9). While, as I demonstrate below, Mukasonga's early texts demonstrate what Durrant describes as 'inconsolable mourning' (2004: 32), her more recent works promote the possibility of a cultural return to a time long before the need for mourning began.

'Inconsolable mourning' is conveyed in *La Femme aux pieds nus* in the opening and closing references to the Rwandan tradition of covering a dead body with a shroud; Mukasonga was never able to give her mother and other family members the burial they deserved because their bodies were never recovered. Grief in the text is combined with expressions of guilt and impotence: the only covering Mukasonga can provide for her dead is a shroud made of words. In address to her dead mother, Scholastique laments:

Maman, je n'étais pas là pour recouvrir ton corps et je n'ai plus que des mots – des mots d'une langue que tu ne comprenais pas – pour accomplir ce que tu avais

demandée. Et je suis seule avec mes pauvres mots et mes phrases, sur la page du cahier, tissent et retissent le linceul de ton corps absent. (Mukasonga 2008: 13)

[Mum, I wasn't there to cover up your corpse and I now have only words – words in a language you didn't understand – to do what you asked me to do. I am alone with my poor words and phrases, on the pages of my notebook, weaving and reweaving the shroud for your absent corpse.]

This passage is immediately preceded by one in which the narrator imagines her mother's body dismembered by machetes, then eaten by hyenas and dogs, further emphasizing the way in which the absence of a corpse compounds the sense of loss. Like so many Rwandans, the narrator has no way of knowing how her mother died, so is forever tormented by the possibilities of what horrors she might have endured. She continues:

Ses pauvres restes se sont confondus dans la pestilence de l'immense charnier du génocide et peut-être à présent, mais cela aussi je l'ignore, ne sont-ils, dans le chaos d'un ossuaire, qu'os parmi les os et crâne parmi les crânes. (Mukasonga 2008: 13)

[Her poor remains have been mixed up in the pestilence of the genocide's immense mass grave, and maybe now, but I don't know this either, they're just, in the chaos of an ossuary, bones among bones, a skull among skulls.]

Melancholia continues into Mukasonga's first work of fiction *L'Iguifou*, notably in one of her most powerful short stories, 'Le Deuil' [Mourning]. Here, the unnamed protagonist spends her time wandering into the funerals of strangers in France and mentally projecting images of her own dead relatives onto other people's coffins. Like so many Rwandans after 1994, this woman is unable to mourn her dead: all she has is an official list of names and no one can tell her where the bodies lie. The pain of not being able to bury your loved ones is also conveyed in the final dream sequence that forms the epilogue of Mukasonga's autobiographical text, *La Femme aux pieds nus*. Here, Scholastique dreams of children picking white flowers on a hill to decorate the church, but the flowers turn out to be fragments of bone: 'Les reconnais tu?' [Do you recognize them?] she is asked by Candida, her childhood friend, 'Regarde bien, ils sont là et je suis avec eux, et les tiens, et Stefania, les reconnais-tu?' [Look carefully, they are there, and I am with them, and your relatives, and Stefania, do you recognize them?] (Mukasonga 2008: 171). Such moments do confirm Durrant's conclusion that melancholia and mourning are both manifestations of the impossibility of retrieval (2004: 8), which is

acutely felt in post-genocide Rwanda where so many bodies remain unidentified. However, Mukasonga's more recent work seems to suggest that a different kind of retrieval, that of cultural recuperation, is not only possible, but can provide an effective strategy for coping with, and perhaps even recovering from what she describes in the epigraph to her first work, *Inyenzi ou les cafards*, as 'la douleur de survivre' [the pain of survival].

Mukasonga's quest to recuperate a Rwanda uncontaminated by genocide is preceded by a suggestion in her early writings that the 'real' Rwanda has somehow disappeared. Located in the Eastern Province, Bugesera is described in *Inyenzi ou les cafards* as 'un pays inconnu qui ne ressemblait pas au Rwanda' [an unknown land that didn't look like Rwanda] (Mukasonga 2006: 19). This opposition between Bugesera and Rwanda continues in *La Femme aux pieds nus* where Mukasonga includes in the text the myth of Bugesera as a place where social outcasts were taken; the assumption being that these people would never find their way back home. Both texts present members of Mukasonga's family dreaming of returning home to 'Rwanda' despite never having left. In the title story in the collection, *L'Iguifou*, Rwanda becomes even less tangible when the first-person narrator, a displaced Tutsi girl, describes being so hungry that she and her family are forced to eat 'inanka', wild roots, which she is told are a kind of wild radish, but which she and her sister find so unpalatable that they burst into tears. Her mother impresses on the girls the importance of not telling anyone they have eaten these roots: 'Surtout vous ne direz à personne que vous avez mangé des inanka. Ce n'est pas une nourriture pour les Tutsi. Au "Rwanda", jamais on n'aurait mangé des inanka' [Above all, you mustn't tell anyone you've eaten inanka roots. That's not Tutsi food. In 'Rwanda', we'd never have eaten inanka] (Mukasonga 2010: 17).¹⁴

Although the family are still geographically located within Rwandan national borders, the alienation of their experience in Nyamata means that 'Rwanda' for them has become another place, mystified through their experience of enforced displacement, its foreignness reinforced by inverted commas in the text. When, in *Inyenzi ou les cafards*, Scholastique's educational success takes her first to Kigali then to Butare, she finds 'Rwanda' to be a racist, churchy ghetto (Mukasonga 2006: 87). Then, when she later makes a clandestine journey from Burundi to visit her parents in Nyamata, she immediately has to return home again, back to Burundi. Rwanda is now a 'forbidden land' because she lacks the obligatory ethnic identity card that became so important in the genocide. When the text recounts her final visit in 1986, Scholastique travels legitimately with a French passport, accompanied by her husband and

children, but once again she cannot stay. Her mother advises them to leave because, she says, the children are not used to Rwandan food. Scholastique, however, understands that their presence makes everyone vulnerable. Reflecting on her eventual departure for Djibouti, she laments, 'La vie semblait m'écloigner du Rwanda. Il n'était plus en moi qu'une inguérissable blessure' [Life seemed to take me away from Rwanda. For me it was no longer anything more than a wound that would not heal] (Mukasonga 2006: 106).

Rwanda becomes ever more distant in 1994. In *Inyenzi ou les cafards*, the narrator describes her mother in their Nyamata garden growing rare pulses and vegetables, many of which she had brought with her from their former home in Gikongoro province:

Elle les cultivait [les plantes en voie de disparition] non pas pour la consommation quotidienne mais en témoignage de ce qui était menacé de disparaître et qui, effectivement, dans le cataclysme du génocide a disparu. Quand maman en faisait une cuisine, il me semblait goûter à la nourriture merveilleuse qu'on mange dans les contes. (Mukasonga 2006: 59-60)

[She used to grow them [the endangered plants] not for daily consumption but as testimony to that which was threatened with disappearance and which, in the cataclysm of the genocide, had indeed disappeared. When Mum cooked them up, I felt as though as I was tasting the kind of magical food eaten in stories.]

Here, the endangered plants function as a symbol of 'Rwanda' in Scholastique's imagination. Not only are they, like the Rwandan Tutsi, at risk of extinction, but they are also linked to the traditional tales she was told by her mother, tales that return in the form of the short stories in *Ce que murmurent les collines*. By linking the plants to the magical stories, Mukasonga also reminds us that the lost 'Rwanda' she remembers is a fictional construct: a place that no longer exists and probably never existed. When Mukasonga describes her return to Rwanda ten years after the genocide, she finds a completely different place: a beautiful country where she is no longer identified as a 'cockroach', but which is also 'le pays des larmes' [the land of tears] (2006: 131). The final chapter, '2004: Sur la piste du pays des morts' [2004: On the road to the land of the dead], portrays what, ten years after genocide, Rwanda had become. Here she laments the absence of all the people she once knew who have disappeared without trace; no one is left to mourn their passing. Geographical landmarks have also disappeared. On arriving at the site of her family home, now covered in vegetation, Scholastique feels

angry: ‘Je suis seule sur une terre étrangère où personne ne m’attend plus’ [I am alone in a foreign land where no one expects me anymore] (2006: 131). Although, as we have seen, the narrator’s relationship with Rwanda changes in the text, the one constant is that, for Scholastique, it is always out of reach. She describes herself closing her eyes and replacing the devastated, overgrown landscape of post-genocide Rwanda with warm memories from her childhood but, when she opens them again, she is confronted with both a traumatized survivor who screams at her and runs away, and a known perpetrator-neighbour who may have killed her parents.

Such attempts to retrieve an individual lost past evolve in *La Femme aux pieds nus* into what Azarian fleetingly describes as auto-ethnographical writing (Azarian 2011: 429).¹⁵ In this testimonial hymn to her dead mother, Stefania, Mukasonga uses her writing to retrieve and reconnect with her own life before genocide: ‘Je voudrais tant que ce que j’écris sur cette page soit le sentier qui me ramène à Stefania’ [I would so much like what I write on this page to be the path that leads me to Stefania] (Mukasonga 2008: 40). Azarian is right to suggest that the text is auto-ethnographical since it presents Mukasonga’s reflections on her childhood while also attempting to document various aspects of Rwandan cultural tradition, including plant-based medicine, superstitions, canons of beauty, marriage proposals, and sanitation. While I agree with Azarian that Mukasonga demonstrates here the importance of preserving and passing on a cultural heritage that, along with the Tutsi themselves, was threatened with extinction Mukasonga’s auto-ethnographical approach in *La Femme aux pieds nus* can also be read as evidence of the beginnings of a transition from mourning to recuperation. This transition, the text suggests, will be facilitated by the telling of stories. Chapter Nine, ‘Le pays des contes’ [The land of stories], describes the evenings after supper when Mukasonga’s mother would sit and tell stories to the children. Scholastique informs us that she never heard Stefania’s stories because they would send her to sleep, but that, unlike ‘Rwanda’, the land of stories is neither foreign nor strange to her (Mukasonga 2008: 131).

Recuperation

In the later texts, Mukasonga’s narratives move further away from her personal life story and further back in time to an ancient Rwanda she has never known, but has heard about in stories. It is at this point in her writing, I suggest, that she moves into a period of recuperation. The twin connotations of this term make it useful for thinking about Mukasonga’s work, since ‘recuperation’ emphasizes not only the importance of recovering

something that has been lost, in this case Rwanda before the genocide, but also highlights the link between this process of looking back and the potential restoration of a sense of well-being and reconnection with the world. Following Judith Lewis Herman's theory of trauma treatment and recovery, Mukasonga's fictional recuperation would align itself with the third stage in what she has identified as a three-stage process. Based on extensive clinical research with people who have undergone a range of traumatic experiences, Herman maps out 'the spectrum of human adaptation to traumatic events' (Herman 1992: 3). She concludes that 'because the traumatic syndromes have basic features in common, the recovery process also follows a common pathway. The fundamental stages of recovery are establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community' (3). In other words, having come to terms with their traumatic past through a period of remembrance and mourning, Herman shows that, during recovery, traumatized subjects move into a phase of making meaning of this past and connecting it to the present and the future:

From her newly created safe base she can now venture forth. She can establish an agenda. She can recover some of her aspirations from the time before the trauma, or perhaps for the first time she can discover her own ambitions (197).

Herman stresses that the recovery process is not straightforward and linear as subjects move in and out of the different stages, nor is any one survivor's recovery the same. Indeed, Mukasonga's writing trajectory reflects the non-linearity of the recovery process since although her move into writing novels would seem to coincide with a post-mourning phase of recuperation, the traces of the genocide never completely disappear. On the other hand, Herman concludes that, 'in the course of a successful recovery, it should be possible to recognize a gradual shift from unpredictable danger to reliable safety, from dissociated trauma to acknowledged memory, and from stigmatized isolation to restored social connection' (155). Pearlman and Staub confirm that, in the Rwandan context, the restoration of interpersonal connections is linked to the re-establishment of a positive sense of identity that is necessary for recovery from the trauma of genocide (Pearlman and Staub 2015: 9-10).

Drawing together individual wellbeing and social reconnection, recuperation also resonates with the new Rwandan national narrative of 'agaciro', which promotes the dignity and agency of a traumatized people through the retrieval of their shared cultural heritage. Both

Cœur Tambour and *Ce que murmurent les collines* draw on traditional Rwandan oral myths and legends as well as on established national history. Five of the six short stories in *Ce que murmurent les collines* turn around a different aspect of traditional Rwandan mythology: a river, a sacred tree, the story of the king's cow and a curse. *Cœur tambour* is based on the story of Nyabingui, a warrior queen who resisted German and British colonial advances and whose spirit, legend has it, takes possession of young women. Mukasonga has explained that she had learned about Nyabingui as a girl, but had completely forgotten the story until she travelled to Guadeloupe in 2015.¹⁶ In the novel, Prisca, a young Tutsi girl, becomes Kitami, the name of another legendary queen and, in the novel, a world-famous singer and 'servant' of the drum, gifted with what are understood to be supernatural powers. Accompanied by Earth Drums, a multinational band of three drummers, Kitami tours the world until she dies under mysterious circumstances. *Cœur tambour* begins with the death of the fantastical singer, whose first-person life story is anonymously delivered to a Parisian journalist. Convinced of the authenticity of the manuscript, the journalist decides to publish it.

Drawing on what are presented as 'authentic' sources, both texts are presented as fictional archives. In *Cœur Tambour*, Mukasonga's decision to cast the young Prisca as a brilliant young pupil who works as a librarian and archivist illuminates the role of the novel as a fictional archive, containing as it does press cuttings, extracts from missionaries' diaries and a found manuscript, the latter being the narrative that forms the basis of the second part of the novel. At the end of this section, the journalist who narrates the first part of the novel intervenes to say:

Ici prend fin l'histoire de Prisca. Ici prend fin l'histoire de Nyabingui. L'histoire de Kitami, je la laisse aux journaux, aux radios, aux télévisions, je l'abandonne aux psychologues, aux psychiatres, aux psychanalystes, aux ethnologues, aux ethnopsychiatres, aux ethnomusicologues... aux écrivains. L'histoire de Kitami, c'est une autre histoire... (Mukasonga 2016: 165)

[Here ends the story of Prisca. Here ends the story of Nyabingui. As for Kitami's story, I'll leave it to the newspapers, the radio, the TV, I'll hand it over to the psychologists, the psychiatrists, the psychoanalysts, the ethnologists, the ethnopsychiatrists, the ethnomusicologists... the writers. Kitami's story is another story...]

The ironic dismissal of the various narratives that might be generated by Kitami's mysterious death suggests that there may indeed be a legitimate, 'authentic' version of Kitami's story, but it will not be found in any of the narratives listed here. Once again, Mukasonga highlights the need to look for 'another story'. Suggested routes to this other version of the story are indicated not in the text itself, but on Mukasonga's website where she has posted digitized artefacts, mostly photographs, to accompany the novel. On scholastiquemukasonga.net, Mukasonga has created a 'piste des tambours' [drum trail] to illustrate *Cœur tambour*. Here, photographs of different drums are linked to the page numbers in the novel where the same drums are described. She also includes an illustrated page about the Igongo Cultural Center in South-West Uganda where visitors will find a Madame Tussaud-style reconstruction of Queen Kitami on her throne.

Similar digitized photographic evidence is provided for *Ce que murmurent les collines* with two series of photographs posted on the website to accompany the stories: one relating to the whole collection; the other to a particular story, 'La Vache du roi Musinga' [King Musinga's Cow]. In addition to these online photographs, Mukasonga provides a commentary on the historical legitimacy of her fiction within the printed text itself, this time in the form of what are labelled 'Notes à l'attention d'un lecteur curieux' [Notes for the attention of a curious reader], which accompany four of the six stories in the collection. These endnotes provide sometimes quite extensive historical and socio-cultural information to contextualize the stories, and occasionally include full academic references. In some of the notes, Mukasonga explains her authorial decisions, for example, her choice of character names and their meaning in Kinyarwanda. At other times, she attempts to draw a clear distinction between historical fact and fiction: some characters, we are told, are completely fictitious, others based on documented historical figures. As such, Mukasonga seems to be playing with the idea of an archive, challenging the reader to separate fact from fiction and controlling her reading of Rwanda past and present.

In both *Ce que murmurent les collines* and *Cœur Tambour*, the reader is invited to understand the story and explore Rwanda on Mukasonga's terms using the fictional archives she has created. As the online documentary evidence suggests, she has recuperated various elements of her native culture and worked them into her fiction with the stated aim of helping the reader's (re-)discovery. The paratextual material posted on Mukasonga's website adds another layer of authorial control. Readers are invited to read Rwanda through Rwandan

rather than Western eyes. As such, the reader is taken on a guided tour of pre-genocide Rwanda, with the author and her website as the guides. Read together, the texts and photographs create a word and image archive, not only recuperating but also preserving cultural traditions that, having been suppressed before and during the genocide, are in danger of disappearing forever.

Given Mukasonga's emphasis on recuperating Rwanda, it is perhaps surprising that she continues to write in French and not Kinyarwanda, particularly as there are moments in her writing which convey the inability of the colonial language to represent Rwandan culture accurately. For example, in *La Femme aux pieds nus*, the author justifies her choice of the Kinyarwanda word, 'I'inzu' to describe her mother, Stefania's house, with an authorial aside, '(et je lui garderai son nom kinyarwanda, car je n'ai en français que des noms de mépris pour la désigner: hutte, cahute, paillote...)' [(and I'll keep its name in Kinyarwanda as I've only got contemptuous words to describe it in French: hut, shack, straw hut...)] (Mukasonga 2008: 40). Dusailant-Fernandes offers two interpretations of Mukasonga's scattered use of her mother tongue. Firstly, she suggests that Mukasonga takes a political decision to disrupt the language of a country that chose to ignore the genocide in 1994 (2013: 112). While it is certainly true that France took the decision to look the other way during the Genocide Against the Tutsi, there is little evidence in Mukasonga's writings to support this view.¹⁷ On the contrary, Mukasonga's own response to the question of her choice of language is framed in practical rather than political terms. When asked if she would consider writing in Kinyarwanda, Mukasonga replied, 'Of course, I'd love to write in Kinyarwanda. But who would publish me? In Rwanda, even though English is now the official language, my readers are still mainly French speakers' (Ceulan Hughes, 2013). The language of memory is a complex issue in Rwanda, but for Mukasonga it is primarily a question of readership. While a small number of her readers will be francophone Rwandans living in Rwanda, the lack of book culture in Rwanda means that the majority will be based elsewhere (Hitchcott 2015: 29-38). For the time being at least, the restoration of Mukasonga's cultural heritage is largely for the benefit of readers living outside Rwanda, a challenge to those who continue to associate her country only with the 1994 genocide.¹⁸

In her second, rather different but more convincing point, Dusailant-Fernandes identifies Kinyarwanda as 'un lien scriptural' [a writing link] between Rwanda and France: the former the location of Mukasonga's traumatic past; the latter the space of her psychological

reconstruction (2013: 112). Regrettably, Dusallant-Fernandes does not expand on this last point, which comes at the very end of her study of Mukasonga's early works, but it raises an interesting question for twenty-first century francophone postcolonial studies, suggesting that France and francophone literature can offer an enabling space for exiles to reflect on and work through a trauma that is both personal and national. Such is a suggestion is, of course, not without its problems, given the well-documented role of France in the Genocide against the Tutsi and the French government's repeated failure to bring exiled génocidaires to trial after 1994. However, the link between the national and the personal is useful for the discussion of cultural and psychological recuperation I have presented here. Although Mukasonga's choice of the French language might suggest that her recuperation of Rwanda is an outward-facing process aimed at readers located largely in the West (particularly France and Belgium), such a reading would overlook the very personal nature of her authorial trajectory. Just as the separation between writer and narrator is never clear in Mukasonga's work, so the recuperation she promotes in her texts is both personal and national. Through constructing fictional narratives, Mukasonga reconnects her own identity with her Rwandan ancestry, represented in the early autobiographical writings by the figure of her mother, Stefania. At the same time, her writings begin to reconnect contemporary Rwanda with the rich cultural traditions that had long been in place before the divisionism and conflicts that characterized the country in the twentieth-century. Indeed, the reverse chronology of *Cœur Tambour*, combined with the drummers' journey to Rwanda where they first discover Kitami and the drum, emphasize the importance of rediscovering and recuperating 'une autre Histoire' [another [His]Story].

Cœur Tambour also attempts to relocate Rwanda on a global map: not only does the text refer back to the pre-colonial, oral history of the African Great Lakes, but also it reconnects Rwanda, with other places and other histories, including slavery, Rastafarianism, Uganda and Haiti. Black heroic figures from history are evoked such as Haile Selassie I alias Ras Tafari; the legendary Guadeloupean slave heroine, Solitude; and Haitian revolutionary leader, Toussaint Louverture. These transhistorical, transnational reconnections are further emphasized through the meeting of the three drummers in New York: Jamaican Leonard Marcus Livingstone, Baptiste Magloire from Guadeloupe, and Ugandan-Rwandan James Rwangabo. Global connections are also created in Kitami's unique song, described as a blend of a multitude of different languages from all over the world:

D'où venaient-ils, ces mots ? du kinyarwanda, la langue maternelle de la chanteuse, d'un anglais dans sa version rasta-jamaïcaine, du yoruba-cubain, d'un français quelque peu créolisé, certains prétendaient y reconnaître les sonorités de l'amharique, du swahili, du sango, du wolof, du ruhima, du lingala, du copte, du dinka, du sanskrit, de l'araméen... de langues inconnues disparues depuis des millénaires ou encore à naître, des onomatopées d'une glossolalie mystique ? (Mukasonga 2016: 13-14)

[Where did those words come from? From Kinyarwanda, the singer's mother tongue, from a Rasta-Jamaican version of English, from Cuban-Yoruba, from a slightly creolised French, some claimed to hear echoes of Amharic, Swahili, Sango, Wolof, Ruhima, Lingala, Coptic, Dinka, Sanskrit, Aramaic... unknown languages that disappeared thousands of years ago or yet to be born, onomatopoeia from a mystical glossolalia?]

In referring to languages that have disappeared or are not yet born, the text echoes the therapeutic trajectory of going backwards to move forwards that, I suggest, characterizes Mukasonga's oeuvre. Writing allows Mukasonga to recuperate Rwanda while at the same time move forward from the trauma of the genocide. Whereas in the early texts, Rwanda is presented as forever out of reach, lost through repeated acts of discrimination and violence, in her more recent works, a different version of Rwanda becomes tangible once more.

The Rwanda Mukasonga recovers is 'le Rwanda de Stefania' [Stefania's Rwanda], linked to the memory of the mother she lost in the genocide. In *La Femme aux pieds nus*, Scholastique recounts how her mother would teach her about 'ce qu'elle avait conservé du Rwanda d'autrefois' [what she had conserved of the Rwanda of bygone days] and laments that she has not managed to hold on to all these secrets (Mukasonga 2008: 54). This 'Rwanda of bygone days' is what the author's later works begin to recuperate. As Dusaillant-Fernandes acknowledges, Mukasonga sees herself as 'l'héritière des traditions ancestrales et des souvenirs familiaux pour que demeure à jamais présente la mémoire des disparus' [the heiress of ancestral traditions and family memories so that the memory of those who died remains ever present] (2013: 107), but I have proposed that she is also beginning to write about Rwanda in a different way. From mourning and memorialization, Mukasonga's more recent writing suggests a shift towards making meaning of the past, present and future through a process of recuperation. Mukasonga explains that, in writing *Ce que murmurent les collines*, she wanted to 'retrouver l'identité qui est la [sienne]' [rediscover the identity that is

her own] (Séry 2014). Of course, recuperation is not an easy process and, just as she herself has worked hard to recuperate from the trauma of surviving the genocide at a distance, so Mukasonga challenges her readers to work hard at recuperating Rwanda. The hills, after all, are only murmuring their stories.

Recuperation serves a triple function in Mukasonga's works: it preserves the memory of the author's lost loved ones; it signifies a shift from the retrospective stasis of mourning and remembrance towards a dynamic forward-looking process of reconnection and understanding; and it restores the dignity of the Rwandan people through the promotion of a rich cultural heritage. In doing so, it makes a contribution to a shared collective memory, which Rwandan leaders view as essential for reconciliation (Staub 2006: 882). Through her fictional archives, Mukasonga's recuperation promotes a Rwandan-centred approach to thinking about Rwanda, which provides an effective counterpoint to the 'Hotel Rwanda' mythology that has been the dominant narrative since 1994, and reminds us of the creativity and subjectivity of its people. This turn to recuperation helps to restore agency and dignity, 'agaciro', to a people - and a nation - overdetermined by the mythology of genocide. Moreover, by pointing to affiliations beyond Rwanda in her most recent writing, Mukasonga identifies another stage in the psychological recuperation process, that of making links beyond one's immediate community to forge a more globalised sense of self. In doing so, she emphasizes the transnational, transhistorical connections that are increasingly a feature of francophone postcolonial studies in the twenty-first century.

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¹ All translations are my own.

² Angel Uwamahoro was born in 1990 and fled the pre-genocide violence in Rwanda to Uganda as a baby with her mother. Like Mukasonga, Uwamahoro is a survivor by destination; in French, a 'survivante' rather than a 'rescapée'. (See Hitchcott 2015: 121-122 for discussion of Gallimard's presentation of Mukasonga as a 'rescapée' on the back cover of *Notre Dame du Nil*). Uwamahoro returned in 2001 and is currently studying at Fordham University in New York with the support of a Rwandan Presidential Scholarship. She performed her poetry at the United Nations on the twentieth anniversary of the Genocide against the Tutsi. The poem refers to Terry George's 2004 film about the genocide, *Hotel Rwanda*.

³ For a range of responses to the rebuilding of Rwanda in the twenty-first century, see the essays in the following collections: Clark and Kaufman (2008); Straus and Waldorf (2011); Campioni and Noack (2012).

⁴ Thanks to Amdani Juma for his help with translation from Kinyarwanda to English.

⁵ Rwanda Cultural Day follows on from the established Rwanda Day, that has been celebrated for many years in Europe and the US.

⁶ Thirty-four years marks the period from the so-called Social Revolution of November 1959 to April 1994 when the genocide began. The ‘Social Revolution’ or ‘muyaga’ (strong but variable wind in Kinyarwanda) (Prunier 1995: 41) began in November 1959 when members of the Hutu emancipation party, Parmehutu, launched attacks on Tutsi villages in response to an attack on Hutu activist and future interim President, Dominique Mbonyumutwa (Prunier 1995: 48).

⁷ By 1960, 22,000 Tutsi had been moved to camps, 7,000 of them to Bugesera (Prunier 1995: 51).

⁸ 1973, the year of the coup d’état in which Juvénal Habyarimana seized power, was a time of renewed persecution. Many Tutsi were driven out of universities (Berry and Berry 1999: xvi).

⁹ For an engaging analysis of the implications of moving from ‘Continents noirs’ to ‘Collection Blanche’, see Waters (2008) (although it should be noted that the paratextual packaging of the ‘Continents noirs’ series has substantially altered since Waters’ article was published).

¹⁰ Azarian borrows this term from Coquio (2004).

¹¹ Dusallant-Fernandes’s (2013) essay does include some discussion of the short stories in *L’Iguifou*, but reads them from an autobiographical perspective. Similarly, Azarian (2011) emphasizes the testimonial aspect of Mukasonga’s earlier writings.

¹² For a comprehensive study of fictional responses to the genocide, see Hitchcott (2015).

¹³ Rosalie Gicanda’s death is documented in the Human Rights Watch report, *Leave None to Tell the Story*. It is alleged that Gicanda was taken by soldiers and shot behind the National Museum. No other details are provided (Des Forges 1999).

¹⁴ In Kinyarwanda, ‘Igifu’ refers to the insatiable appetite of those who are starving.

¹⁵ As Azarian also notes, Mukasonga’s autobiographical texts are concerned with continuing the oral tradition of storytelling while at the same time showing how that same oral tradition had become subverted and corrupted by genocide ideology.

¹⁶ In an RFI interview with Grégoire Sauvage (2016), Mukasonga recounts how a group of Guadeloupian drummers talked to her about Nyabingui.

¹⁷ Elsewhere French allows the narrator to address traditionally taboo subjects such as female sexuality: ‘J’écris des mots qu’une Rwandaise ne doit ni prononcer ni écrire. Mais après tout, ce sont des mots français et sur eux ne pèse pas d’interdit’ [I write words that a Rwandan woman should neither speak nor write. But after all, these are French words and don’t have taboos hanging over them] (Mukasonga 2008: 153).

¹⁸ This is confirmed in narrative explanations of Kinyarwanda terms such as ‘umupila’ in *La Femme aux pieds nus*: ‘umupila’ in this instance is a ‘poire de lavement’ (a pumice stone), but the word is used more generally to describe objects that have no fixed shape of their own (Mukasonga 2008: 79). Elsewhere in the same text, Mukasonga converts Rwandan currency into euros (95).

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