

INTRODUCTION

I. Title

After “Rwanda.”

The words forming the main title of this book are painfully familiar.

They first evoke in most people’s minds *outside* of Rwanda the *mediatised accounts* of the incomprehensible human tragedy that afflicted this little African country in 1994: *footage* of militiamen branding machetes and nail-studded cudgels, *scenes* of slaughter,¹ *images* of rotting corpses, *pictures* of orphaned children and widows,² and *recordings* of survivors’ testimonies.³ As such, these two words evoke the historical event of the genocide of the Tutsi and moderate Hutu and its recording.

On a different register, they also evoke the historical period that immediately followed the genocide: i.e. the *times* after its occurrence: overcrowded refugee camps in Zaire, the outbreak of cholera, overpopulated prisons, the return of

1 For a documentary on the only few minutes of footage recorded of the genocide, see: Juan Reina and Eri Kabera’s film, *Iseta: Behind the Roadblock*, Vivid Pictures, 2008.

2 For a response to these images, see: Jonathan Torgovnik, *Intended Consequences: Rwandan Children Born of Rape* (New York: Aperture, 2009).

3 The most comprehensive archive of testimonies is at Gisozi. Some of it can be accessed online at: www.genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw (Accessed 7 November 2012).

exiled Rwandese, and the remarkable rebuilding of a nation ever since.⁴ As such, these two words evoke the chronological aftermath of the events of 1994.

Finally, on yet another register, the words *After "Rwanda"* also evoke the guilt of not acting *on* time and the need to pay some kind of moral debt. Since the end of emergency relief operations, the "how to pay this debt?" is no longer quite so evident because the moral debt is now amalgamated with other words such as "reconciliation," "justice," "development," and "progress."

The words *After "Rwanda"* (and what they evoke) are then, in most cases, either forgotten or left aside as yet another confounding issue that will have to be addressed *another time*.

After "Rwanda."

Two words obviously also recalling two other words: "After Auschwitz."⁵

Yet another familiar set of words with their distinctive set of mental images and discourses. How are we to think the words *After "Rwanda"* with "Auschwitz" as a "first" painful referent? How are we also to think these words within the specific discourse inaugurated by the first author who started such a reflection: Theodor Adorno in his book, *Negative Dialectics*?⁶ The events and the narratives collide indiscriminately, thus obscuring the radically different characteristics of the two events and leaving us with an unresolvable dilemma: the necessity to compare in order to avoid a Conradian caricature (the heart of darkness) and the necessity to avoid comparisons in order to prevent the dangerous game of stereotyping and therefore misunderstanding what happened.⁷

4 For a history of the Rwandan Genocide see amongst others: Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* (London: Picador, 2000); Linda Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide* (London: Verso, 2006); and Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2005).

5 The title obviously recalls Adorno's chapter title "After Auschwitz." Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Continuum, 1997), 367.

6 There is no space here to explore the very large bibliography on this theme. As an indication, here is one well-known reference: Dominick LaCapra, *History and memory after Auschwitz* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998).

7 This double bind is taken from Nigel Eltringham's discussions on post-genocide debates in Rwanda. See: Nigel Eltringham, *Accounting for Horror: Post-Genocide Debates in Rwanda* (London: Pluto Press, 2004). For a further analysis of the danger of comparing the Rwandan Genocide with other genocides, see: Williams F. S. Miles, "Hamites and Hebrews: Problems in 'Judaizing' the Rwandan Genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research* 2, no. 1 (2000): 107-115.

And yet, notwithstanding the fraught games of comparison and the theoretical attempts to explain the impossible, *there is still and will always be* “Rwanda” *here, in this world*. “Rwanda” took place *before* a startled world and anyone who today makes the effort to make sense of “it,” still bears witness to its “having taken place.” Time changes nothing. So the questions that immediately come to mind when thinking this upsetting recurrence are these: How are we to think of “it” *not* as a long-forgotten historical event, but as “something” as important as the latest urgency? How can we understand these two words, *After* “Rwanda,” in a way that gives justice to the events of 1994 and, at the same time, respects other historical events that also desperately call for attention? And finally, but most importantly, how are we to keep “Rwanda,” its survivors and their plight on our minds, without reducing them to cold data and a neat theoretical analysis?

Perhaps in order to begin somewhere, let me start by clarifying a little this paradoxically familiar title: *After* “Rwanda.”

Firstly, however odd this may sound, the preposition “*After*” does not refer here to a periodization; it does not imply a chronological event or the repetition of a previous event, for example, “Auschwitz.”⁸ There isn’t “Auschwitz” *and then* “Rwanda.”⁹ There is “Rwanda” and that is all.¹⁰ The preposition “*after*” therefore shows that there is, *here*, not a type of despondency¹¹ *after* a tragedy or a number of tragedies (“what am ‘I’ to do *after* Auschwitz or Rwanda,”

8 I follow here Jean-François Lyotard who writes: “‘After’ implies a periodization. Adorno counts time (but which time?) from ‘Auschwitz.’ Is this name the name of a chronological origin? What era begins with this event? The question seems ingenuous when we remember the kind of disintegration the dialectic inflicts upon the idea of beginning in the first chapter of the *Science of Logic*, and already in Kant’s *Second Antinomy*. Has Adorno forgotten this?” Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 88.

9 Zuzsa Baross writes most eloquently on this topic in three remarkable texts. However, unlike Baross, *After* “Rwanda” will not situate Rwanda *after* Auschwitz, *after* Cambodia, and *after* Bosnia. Baross’s reliance on a teleological structure is evident with the following example taken from her second text: “No longer observing/guarding the disjunction in and of time, [Bosnia] would *signal the beginning* of a ‘seriality’: the new time in which singularity as such is used up and erased, giving way to mere ‘elements’ in an *open series* of disasters *inexorably* extending into the future, with *Auschwitz* as the *first* element.” (8-9, my emphasis). Auschwitz, Cambodia, Bosnia, and Rwanda are all terrible *singular* events in history. Forcing them into a teleological meta-narrative of global proportions can only be disrespectful to those who lost their lives whether Jew, Bosnian, or Tutsi. Like all singular death, like all mass death, the breach is always already absolute and radically undeconstructible. Zuzsa Baross, “On the Ethics of Writing, *After* Auschwitz, *After* Bosnia (2): Anachronie,” *International Studies in Philosophy* 31-1 (1999): 1-21.

10 This does not mean that “Rwanda” stands alone as something self-contained: 100 neat days between April and July 1994. In a way, we should also include not only the long history of violence that began with the so-called Hutu Social Revolution of 1959 and ended, as Stephen Smith argues, with the 150,000 people killed by the RPF as reprisal between July 1994 and April 1995. See: Stephen Smith, “Rwanda in Six Scenes,” *London Review of Books* 33-6 (17 March 2011): 6.

11 On this aporetic despondency, see: Elaine Martin, “Re-reading Adorno: The ‘after Auschwitz’ Aporia,” *Forum* 2 (Spring 2006): 1-13.

for example), but an order of priority that knows no contestation: however horrific the thought, “Rwanda” effectively *is first* and we are *after* “it,” *not* in an attempt to understand it and therefore objectify it in its aftermath, but in the recognition of the fact that we are always already *after* “Rwanda,” in the always painful effort of addressing it. There is no escaping this priority even though it has lost all of its urgency. This unshakable priority is what the preposition “after” means here.

“Rwanda,” written here clearly *with* quotation marks, stands obviously not for the country as a geo-political entity known as Rwanda *without* quotation marks, but for *the events of 1994*. As such, it is a word that, *with* quotation marks, signals an event that does not have a *proper* referent: the death of one, two, three, four... nearly a million people. “Rwanda,” *with* quotation marks, is unique, a uniqueness that evades a) all forms of generalization (each death is unique, however much the gravesite is full); b) all forms of historization¹² (it does not come after Auschwitz and after Bosnia, for example) and all forms of generic memorialization (mourning is not interchangeable).¹³ The aim is therefore *not* to confuse events and/or generalise about other people’s deaths, the way they were killed, or the way they are remembered, but to retain “Rwanda” the way one retains the memory of a person one mourns, unique in death.

Understood in this way, I would like to put forward the idea that “Rwanda,” i.e. this uniqueness, points instead to a “fracture” that is simply incomprehensible: the incomprehensible “fracture” between the *interahamwe*¹⁴ and their victim, a “fracture” that does not even stand for “tragedy,” therefore for something already culturally defined, for example, with adjectives such as “serious” or “dramatic.” This “fracture” *has* to be absolute because it points to the occurrence of death *or* of a pain that is beyond words.¹⁵ *After* “Rwanda” therefore refers not to a tragic event in a lamentable series, but to *the* brutal murder of Tutsi and moderate Hutu; *an* event that *overall* can only be written, as I do here, *with* quotation marks, not only as a mark of respect for all those

12 Zsuzsa Baross, “On the Ethics of Writing, After ‘Bosnia’ (1): The Revenant,” *International Studies in Philosophy* 30, no. 1 (1998): 4.

13 Baross, “On the Ethics of Writing, After Auschwitz, After Bosnia (2): Anachronie,” 4.

14 The *Interahamwe* were a paramilitary organization backed by the Hutu-led government. Their name means “those who work together.” They were responsible for the majority of crimes committed before and during the genocide.

15 As Révérien Rurangwa writes: “Despite the various excellent studies on the Tutsi genocide, these works can never properly put into words the scale of such horrifying experiences. These pains go beyond words. I can’t manage it myself. And if history stammers, it is because its witnesses mumble when it comes to describing the terrifying power of evil in everyday life.” Révérien Rurangwa, *Genocide, My Stolen Rwanda*, trans. Anna Brown (London: Reportage Press, 2009), 117.

who have died, but also (and above all) so that the criminals, and those who support them to this day, are utterly divested of the means of contestation or negation. *Death took place and this cannot be contested.*

The consequence of this approach is this: “Rwanda” is neither a concept nor a model as Adorno intimated with regards to “Auschwitz,” and it is definitely not an “index” as Zsuzsa Baross argues.¹⁶ “Rwanda” is, following Jean-François Lyotard’s analysis of other words without *proper* referent, *an indetermination of meaning left in abeyance, a sign that always already remains to be phrased.*¹⁷ This does not mean that it is impossible to talk about “Rwanda.” On the contrary, “Rwanda” constitutes, like for anyone *else’s* death, a *prescription* to start a “linking of phrases,” a *command* to start thinking, speaking, or writing.¹⁸ However, this prescription or command cannot be part of a plurality of prescriptions and commands emanating from other “similar” events. Eulogies or tributes like narratives or historical accounts are never transferrable from one person to another, one genocide to another. The *indetermination of meaning* that is “Rwanda” thus *prescribes* or *commands* uniquely. To respect this uniqueness is the least we can do for the dead of 1994.

In this way, the title *After “Rwanda”* therefore points to this prescription or command to put “Rwanda” first: First, *before* anything (writing or art) and *before* everyone (you or I), even though the dead are no longer here *with us* to assert their priority. This unique priority puts us in a situation where we are secondary to “Rwanda,” a situation that can only *prescribe* or *command* me to start here “a linking of phrases” and present you with the following *under-signed words*—a humble starting point, *perhaps* the only one any book on “Rwanda” can begin with.¹⁹

“Rwanda” passed *before* me²⁰ as I pass on this earth; in doing so, I can only lower my head and write.

16 Baross, “On the Ethics of Writing, After Auschwitz, After Bosnia (2): Anachronie,” 1.

17 On this topic, see: Lyotard, *The Differend*, 56.

18 On this theme, see: Jean-François Lyotard, “Discussion, ou: ‘Phraser après ‘Auschwitz,’” in *Les Fins de l’homme, À partir du travail de Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Galilée, 1981), 283–315.

19 Again, as Lyotard says: “The indetermination of meanings left in abeyance [*en souffrance*], the extermination of what would allow them to be determined, the shadow of negation hollowing out reality to the point of making it dissipate, in a word, the wrong done to the victims that condemns them to silence—it is this, and not a state of mind, which calls upon unknown phrases to link onto the name of Auschwitz.” Lyotard, *The Differend*, 56.

20 In the sense developed by Levinas: “The Other passes before the Same. ‘Please, after you, sir!’” Emmanuel Levinas, *In The Time of the Nations*, trans. Michael B. Smith (London: Continuum, 2007), 86.

II. Inception

Questions, that is all we have. First, there is this question: How are we to begin speaking when so many have died without being given the chance to speak, let alone tell their story, their side of the story? What innocence or naïveté is required to have the audacity or the indignity to begin talking? Wounded on the hills, the sobs, the cries, the screams, the death rattle of hundreds of thousands of Tutsi went unheard. The hills of Rwanda are dotted with mass graves, the land still soaked with their blood and some survivors are still in a state of trauma eighteen years after the swiftest, but most brutal genocide in history. Richard A. Cohen talks of this lack of voice when referencing the silence left after the Shoah, a remark which alas can be repeated—or can it?—after “Rwanda”: “the tears and moans of their agonies found no echo in the great haunting and corrosive silence, which resounds to this day.”²¹ Of course this deafening silence was broken by the sound of a few speakers: from Lindsey Hilsum, the voice of the BBC, “reporting from Rwanda” to more recent commentaries, discussions, debates, and analysis. But the question always remains, haunting everyone who dares to think of “Rwanda,” open their mouth or put pen to paper: how are we to speak when those who should have had a chance to speak have been butchered to death?

Then, there is this other set of questions: If we have the audacity or indignity to speak, then “what is the appropriate mode of representation? What are the rules of the ‘decorum’ required... to speak without speaking falsely? What is required in order to avoid the double indecency of excess or evasiveness?”²² When the audacity has been assumed and the indignity forgotten, the issue is really that of the mode of address. Perhaps, the most merciless form of speech is the one that hides under the *pretence* of a scientific enquiry: the intrusiveness of their “modern” technologies, the harshness of their scrutinizing light casting no shadow under which to seek refuge. At the opposite end of the spectrum, there is the form of speech that *pretends* to be in touch with the emotions that arise out of “Rwanda”: the cry of the poet or the artist in front of such haunting horrors. Can there be a middle ground? Can the mode of representation remain not only truthful, but also above all, decent, neither superfluous nor self-absorbed? Here again the question will always remain, haunting anyone who has the courage or the crudeness to use a mode of representation to address “Rwanda.”

21 Richard A. Cohen, *Levinasian Meditations: Ethics, Philosophy, and Religion* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2010), 321.

22 Claudine Kahan, “La Honte du témoin,” in *Parler des camps, penser les génocides*, ed. Catherine Coquio (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999), 501, my translation.

The challenge is really that of speaking or writing without, as Audrey Small says, in an analysis of the significance and impact of nine works of fiction²³ dedicated to “Rwanda,” “trespassing on the grief survivors,”²⁴ without betraying them, without ignoring the seriousness of their trauma and their current torments? I guess, the only way of doing this is to acknowledge from the start both the necessity *and* the impossibility of the attempt: speaking or writing on a topic related to the Rwandan genocide is a gesture that, if made in all honesty, can only be made firstly, in good faith because there is an imperative to address it even if we do not know how to address it, and secondly, it can only be made at the risk of betraying the survivors because there is no guarantee that the attempt will not betray their testimonies. Such acknowledgement represents in a way a leap into the unknown made at once in the comfort of reflexivity and at the risk of not hearing and writing well.

In order to achieve such an awkward leap, it is *perhaps* here necessary to follow the work of the great African philosopher Valentin Mudimbe who puts forward a body of thought that addresses issues relating to Africa and yet can never in the process detach himself from the task of inventing at the same time his own autobiography, a unique trajectory of thought truthful to both himself and his object of study.²⁵ As Kai Kresse summarizes Mudimbe’s intellectual trajectory:

“Mudimbe is asking us to be sensitive firstly to ourselves and to our own place in society and in the academy, and also be sensitive to the place and the voices of those whose histories and cultures we study. It is only by mediating the conflicting and contradictory pulls of these two elements that we can begin to invent a discursive space that can be true to both.”²⁶

23 For a complete list see: Audrey Small, “The Duty of Memory: A Solidarity of Voices after the Rwandan Genocide,” *Paragraph* 30:1 (2007): 85-100. I only give here the works of fiction that have been translated into English: Boubacar Boris Diop, *Murambi, the Book of Bones*, trans. Fiona McLaughlin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Veronique Tadjou, *The Shadow of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda*, trans. Véronique Wakerley (Oxford: Heinemann, 2002); Tierno Monénembo, *The Oldest Orphan*, trans. Monique Fleury Nagem (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000). For a remarkable play on the Rwandan Genocide, see: J. T. Rogers, *The Overwhelming* (London: Faber, 2006).

24 Small, “The Duty of Memory,” 88. The literary project was titled *Écrire par devoir de mémoire* and was initiated by the Chadian writer Nocky Djedanoum under the auspices of the annual Fest’Africa festival held in Lille, France and published in 2000. For other analyses of fictional accounts of the Rwandan Genocide, see: Catherine Coquio, *Rwanda, Le réel et les récits* (Paris: Belin, 2004) and Jean-Pierre Karegeye and Jacques Lemaire, eds., *Rwanda: Récits du génocide, traversée de la mémoire* (Brussels: Espaces de Libertés, 2009).

25 For a more extensive discussion of Mudimbe’s approach to writing, see: Jean-Paul Martinon, “Valentin Mudimbe or the Work of Invention,” *Darkmatter*, No. 8, 2012. www.darkmatter101.org

26 Kai Kresse, “Reading Mudimbe,” *The Journal of African Cultural Studies* 17, no. 1 (June 2005): 1.

If we follow Mudimbe, then the leap mentioned earlier, this audacious task of thinking and then speaking and writing about “Rwanda” becomes barely tolerable. The aim then becomes neither a ruthless appropriation of the suffering of the survivors of the Tutsi Genocide nor a cold-hearted and detached analysis of their plight, but something in between; something that will bring me and “Rwanda” together, if this is at all possible.

But where to begin mediating the conflicting and contradictory pull between my ordinary European life and the events that took place in Rwanda in 1994? How am I to follow Mudimbe’s example?

III. Start

Perhaps it is here inevitable or perhaps simply necessary therefore to begin by making two separate confessions:

The first confession is that of failing to do “fieldwork.” The following pages relate an encounter in Rwanda with a Tutsi survivor who suffered the worst kind of violence imaginable. This encounter took place on the sixth of September 2006. The following pages only give hints here and there as to what happened during this encounter. The reason for such shortcoming is twofold: firstly, to insist that there are some experiences that can only remain allergic not only to representation, but also and above all, to any form of demiurgic position that would singlehandedly attempt to objectify it: the point of view of the anthropologist, or more specifically here, the philosopher. An encounter simply took place; *on reflection*, it simply suffers no post-fieldwork narration or analysis. Secondly, to insist that if there had been fieldwork, then the outcome could only amount to form a type of anthropology for which the other (here, a Tutsi survivor and her trauma) can only vanish after the fieldwork is completed. To recall a famous myth we could say that in any kind of fieldwork, the other is always already a Sphinx who poses a riddle to Oedipus (here, the anthropologist or philosopher) and, once the riddle is supposedly solved, She can only commit suicide.²⁷ There will be no Oedipus *here*. This is not an admission of defeat; this is on the contrary, an attempt *for*

27 The analogy Sphinx/Oedipus – Other/Anthropologist was originally made by Claudine Vidal: “The anthropologist’s project always reminds me of the exchange between Oedipus and the Sphinx. As is well known, anthropology is a conversation between humans weighed down by symbols and signs. Conversation perhaps, but a conversation that is always already prescribed. The saying of the other has value because they raise questions; they matter because they provoke. Enigmas never let go, but Oedipus always wins: have we ever heard of an anthropologist who admits defeat? Starting from the impenetrability of social relations and their languages, the anthropologist always ends up with lucidity and in the process always ends up winning ‘the trophy of meaning, acquired at the last minute, as in a good thriller,’ as Barthes would say.” Claudine Vidal, “Les anthropologues ne pensent pas tout seuls,” *L’Homme* 13, no. 3-4 (July-December 1978): 111, my translation.

once to *not* win the trophy of meaning, thus preserving the survivor's dignity and respecting her mourning. This failing to do fieldwork is thus my first confession, but it is also a simple offering that betrays no one.

My second confession is that I once failed to hear what someone told me. This "someone" is my aunt, France Audoul-Martinon. My aunt was a member of the French resistance. She was deported from Compiègne in France to the concentration camp of Ravensbrück sixty miles north of Berlin on 31 January 1944. She arrived at the Camp when the system was still effective, but the signs of collapse were beginning to be felt. As a consequence, she suffered humiliation, torture, starvation, and deprivation alongside the 150,000 other women who experienced the horrors of one of the few women-only Nazi camps. She was even placed in a gas chamber, but was miraculously rescued because of a technical fault. On the 9 April 1945, she escaped by covertly jumping on a Red Cross convoy as it was leaving the camp. She was prisoner No. 27,933, a number that remains engraved in my memory because it was tattooed on her arm, a tattoo that opened my eyes for the first time to what humans are capable of doing to others.²⁸ It opened my eyes, but I did *not* hear what she was telling me, which was, that this "cannot happen again." This is my second confession, one that desperately tries to regain lost time.

These personal confessions are not unique. They form together one beginning amongst others and that is all. For me, the important aspect of this beginning is that it emphasises not *only* experience (meeting a survivor, speaking to my aunt) over a theoretical premise, but *also* an attempt to transform two personal moments in my life into a *response* towards those who, in 1994, suffered the worst kinds of pain imaginable. Considering the "fracture" mentioned earlier, this response can only really be of a *necessary* kind,²⁹ that is, it can only be of the kind that allows no time for reflection or poised contemplative attitude, that is, that affords no space for betrayal of who *I* am and of how *I* see the world harming itself. This *necessary* response aims to *finally* hear *not* what "Ravensbrück" and/or "Rwanda" is/are telling us, but

28 This second starting point is not obviously unique. For example: "I had an egoistic motivation for making this trip. As the grand-son of a generation who experienced the hell of concentration camps, I naturally have in me the traumatizing memory of the Shoa." Arthur Dreyfuss, "D'une mémoire, l'Autre: Entretien croisé entre Arthur Dreyfuss et Serge Kamuhinda" in Benjamin Abtan, ed., *Rwanda, Pour un dialogue des mémoires* (Paris: Albin Michel and Union des Etudiants Juifs de France, 2007), 32.

29 This necessary writing is one that cannot aim for objectification. It can only be an attempt to reach out towards the other. As Georges Bataille says: "Above all, I want to write this: We do not have the means to reach: in truth we reach; we suddenly reach the necessary point and we spend the rest of our days remembering a moment past; but how often do we miss it, for as we look for it, we never reach it, to unite us is perhaps a way... to miss out for ever the moment when it returns." Georges Bataille, *The Impossible*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1991), 42.

what “Rwanda” *specifically* is prescribing or commanding us to think *now* in the immediacy of this writing or reading.

As such, this can only be perceived as an affront to philosophy. How can experience be put forward as the premise from which to start a work that might be seen not only to have philosophical ambitions, but also to be the first philosophical book dedicated to an event (encountering a survivor) in Rwanda?³⁰ There is indeed a great deal of resistance among philosophers generally to the idea that any individual philosophy might be rooted in a specific kind of experience, especially if it is rooted either in a past personal event or in a situation of absolute trauma. Above all, it is held to be an affront to philosophy’s haughty claim to abstract universality. But as Robert Bernasconi rightly argues with regards to the way the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas uses the experience of the persecution of Jews in his work, this affront *must be risked* because, as he says, philosophy can only “arise from non-philosophical experiences.”³¹ The idea of beginning from both an autobiographical experience *and* from the experience of encountering a survivor in Rwanda is therefore not an affront at such, but, on the contrary an invitation to continue putting into question this claim to abstract universality.³² As the following pages will strive to show, this putting into question *can only* receive here in Rwanda, over and beyond my small personal beginning, its most harsh formulation.

IV. Problem

Experience... Besides my comfortable encounter with the rapidly changing world of Rwanda, the experience in question here is one that knows no translation. The reading of all the specialist work dedicated to “Rwanda” always ends up with one simple realisation that any visit to Rwanda can only confirm: the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda in 1994 produced in an extraordinary narrow temporal and spatial context some of the most extreme forms of

30 Although it does not constitute a book as such, the first long philosophical essay dedicated to “Rwanda” is Leonhard Praeg, “The Aporia of Collective Violence,” *Law Critique* 19 (2008): 193–223.

31 “It must be risked because the debt Levinas’s thought owes to a Judaism that reflects Jewish destiny can serve other peoples as a model of how philosophy arises from non-philosophical experiences,” Robert Bernasconi, “Only the Persecuted...: Language of the Oppressor, Language of the Oppressed,” in Adriaan T. Peperzak ed., *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy, Literature, and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1995), 84.

32 The idea of never quite leaving the realm of experience is Derridean in nature. For the way Derrida writes by means of such interventions and the way these challenge the only language available (that of Western philosophy and specifically, of Metaphysics), see: Robert Bernasconi, “The Alterity of the Stranger and the Experience of the Alien,” in Jeffrey Bloechl ed., *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God, Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 75.

violence ever witnessed in the history of humanity.³³ As Frédéric Encel writes:

“The Rwandan genocide is an example of true violence because at no point between April and July 1994 was the genocide justified as part of a rational political or military scheme. While it is true that the RPF launched an attack on the 7 April, who amongst the Hutus could have justified impaling women and crushing their children as a tactical defence strategy against the invading Tutsis. How could the elderly or disseminated and unarmed women and children have been perceived as a military menace, a so-called ‘fifth column’ or a ‘Trojan horse’? The hypothesis is absurd, except if one would credit the killers with some evil primeval instinct.”³⁴

“Rwanda” therefore defies understanding. Whether it is the popularity of the genocide³⁵ without which, as all agree, such a scale would have not been achieved; whether it is the religious dimension of the killings³⁶ (think here of the role played by several churches as epicentres of massacres and of the priests who helped identify the ethnic identity of parishioners); whether it is the breaking down of families, where instead of constituting themselves as shields against murderous intentions, some constituted themselves as a source of information for the slaughter of their members; whether it is the inventive use of specific forms of cruelty, forms that still subsist today in the enforced cohabitation of victims and killers: however we look at it, everything in the Rwandan Genocide appears to be inscribed outside of all known modes of articulation.³⁷

Faced with such *aporia*, the task of speaking or writing about it therefore becomes a difficult one for it is not a question of thinking what happened from a position of safety, but of thinking about the tools necessary to think

33 Although the theme of violence and peace is central to this book, there will be no analysis of the specific *forms* of violence that took place in 1994. For an analysis of these forms of violence, see: Lee Ann Fuji, *Killing Neighbors: Webs of Violence in Rwanda* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009) and Christopher C. Taylor, *Sacrifice as Terror: The Rwandan Genocide* (Oxford: Berg, 1999). For a well-known portrayal of the perpetrators, see: Jean Hatzfeld, *A Time for Machetes: The Rwandan Genocide: The Killers Speak*, trans. Linda Coverdale (London: Serpent's Tail, 2005).

34 Encel, “De la ‘gestion’ politique d’un genocide: the cas rwandais,” in Abtan, *Rwanda, Pour un dialogue des memoires*, 115, my translation.

35 On this topic, see: Jean-Paul Kimonyo, *Rwanda: Un Genocide populaire* (Paris: Karthala, 2008).

36 On this topic, see: Timothy Longman, *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

37 For an analysis of such extreme behaviour, see: Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, “Les violences extrêmes du XXème Siècle à l’aune de l’histoire et de l’anthropologie: Le génocide des Tutsi du Rwanda,” in Abtan, *Rwanda, Pour un dialogue des memoires*, 137-52.

this “fracture.” Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau summarises the problem with one disturbingly simple question: “[This kind of violence] should not be a major obstacle for the social sciences: Its very tools should be sharp enough to be able to figure it. But are we really sure that these tools are the ones we should be using when attempting to understand the events of 1994 in Rwanda?”³⁸ The question is clear, but needs to be repeated: are we sure that what we bring with us to think “Rwanda” constitute the right tools for this quest? What tools can we use to make sense of such extreme behaviour? And more importantly, should we not show a little incredulity towards all this theoretical paraphernalia that give us the illusion of explaining the inexplicable?

The following pages do not have the pretention of answering these questions directly, let alone the temerity of suggesting that philosophy above any other science or practice is better equipped to understand the events of 1994. Their only aim is really to suggest the idea of thinking the problem differently. Writing in a telegraphic and necessarily crude way and without anticipating the following pages too much, I would like here to radicalise our understanding of this extreme manifestation of violence and say that the violence committed on the Tutsi and moderate Hutus in Rwanda is *not* a mark of evil (which, incidentally is always the evil of the other³⁹). The violence perpetrated in 1994 represents instead a fracturing mode of inter-subjective relation, but an inter-subjective relation *nonetheless* and it is from this premise—a premise that allows, as we will see, no opposite—that we perhaps need to start (re)thinking both violence and peace.

Obviously the premise of thinking in this way will be developed in detail in the following pages. Suffice to say here that this premise is structured by an understanding of inter-subjectivity as locked within a double bind

38 Audoin-Rouzeau, “Les violences extrêmes du XXème Siècle à l’aune de l’histoire et de l’anthropologie: Le génocide des Tutsi du Rwanda,” in Abtan, *Rwanda, Pour un dialogue des memoires*, 137.

39 The theme of “evil” will not be addressed in this book and is only mentioned here in order to evade the kind of radicality that is usually attached to this word, for example, as the “non-synthesizable,” or what is “more heterogeneous than all heterogeneity.” (Emmanuel Levinas, “Transcendence and Evil,” trans. Alphonso Lingis, in *The Phenomenology of Man and of the Human Condition*, ed. Anna-Theresa Tymieniecka, *Analecta Husserliana* 14, 1983, 158.) For an excellent analysis on the theme of evil, see: Richard J. Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation* (London: Polity, 2002).

economy (“violence-doer”⁴⁰/“pure offering”⁴¹) from which there is no escape. This does not mean that violence can be good or that goodness can be evil. This only means that any encounter whatsoever (from the extreme forms of violence perpetrated during the Rwandan genocide to a peaceful encounter in a Memorial Centre twelve years later) can only be understood from the premise of this double-bind that is “truthful” *not so much* to who we *are*, but *above all*, to what we *do* to each other. The hope with this argument is that once this premise is recognized, once this double bind is accepted, then the task of writing *after* “*Rwanda*,” becomes a first gesture not towards everlasting peace, but more modestly, towards what could be *perceived* as fostering “lesser violent”⁴² inter-subjective relations.

V. Pre-text

Four authors dominate the following pages. Since I am following the spirit of the work of Valentin Mudimbe, then I can only begin by being *first* sensitive to my own intellectual horizon which happens to be dominated by two major authors: Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida.

The main focus in their work is the dialogue that Derrida inaugurated in 1964 with his first reading of Levinas’s work in “Violence and Metaphysics,” a dialogue that continued until Levinas’s death in 1995. There have been numerous commentaries on this dialogue, most of which misreads this

40 I can only give here the context in which Heidegger uses this notion and state that it is from this premise that *After “Rwanda”* is subsequently structured: “The human being is, in one word, *to deinotaton*, the uncanniest. ... The Greek word *deinon* and our translation call for an advance explication here. ... *deinon* means the violent in the sense of one who needs to use violence—and does not just have violence at his disposal but is violence-doing, insofar as using violence is the basic trait not just of his doing but of his *Dasein*.” Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 159–60.

41 I can only give here the context in which Levinas uses this expression and state that it is *also* from this premise that *After “Rwanda”* is subsequently structured: “Sensibility is exposedness to the other. Not the passivity of inertia, a persistence in a state of rest or of movement, the capacity to undergo the cause that would bring it out of that state. Exposure as a sensibility is more passive still; it is like an inversion of the *conatus of esse*, a *having been offered without any holding back*, a not finding any protection in any consistency or identity of a state. It is a having been offered without any holding back and not the generosity of offering oneself, which would be an act, and already presupposes the unlimited undergoing of sensibility. In the having been offered without any holding back, the past infinitive form underlines the non-present, the non-commencement, the non-initiative of the sensibility.” Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2004), 75, my emphasis.

42 I borrow here this expression from Martin Hägglund, but it will be used with a different connotation in the following pages. Martin Hägglund, “The Necessity of Discrimination: Disjoining Derrida and Levinas,” *Diacritics* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 48.

dialogue as a conflict or a game of rebuttal.⁴³ The aim here is not to add yet another analysis of the way one reads the other (usually Derrida's betrayal) or the way one responds to the other (usually Levinas's covert response to Derrida in *Otherwise than Being*). The aim here is simply to explore how the two *complement* each other in order to think *not* the overwhelming problem that "Rwanda" presents to the world, but more modestly, the ways in which violence and peace maintain themselves in inter-subjective relations after 1994. As such, these two authors are brought together not in order to show how one only "spends" his time being playful with words or how the other only "spends" his time invoking and increasing responsibility, but in order to show how a double-reading of their works help us to better understand the interplay of violence and peace after "Rwanda."

Inevitably, some will argue that the reading of these authors is excessive in a piece of writing dedicated to a world that neither of them had visited and a topic that neither of them had broached. However, I will not apologies or diminish their role for it is they, and they alone, who allowed me to make sense of one of the most difficult topics I have ever encountered. This does *not* mean that they have the right theories to address the issues of violence and peace. This only means that Levinas and Derrida provided *me* with what I perceive to be the most adequate way to approach what defies understanding: the fracturing *and* mending of inter-subjective relations. Levinas's unprecedented and uncompromising way of addressing the Other and Derrida's unsettling and stimulating challenge to this formidable address managed, to some extent, to appease my never-ending worries and helped me in the attempt to make sense of this question that "Rwanda" presents the world, even to this day: how do violence and peace manifest themselves?

However, no serious reader of Levinas can remain satisfied with this first foray into a personal intellectual horizon, especially when it comes to a world like

43 Amongst many others, see: Robert Bernasconi, "Levinas and Derrida: The Question of the Closure of Metaphysics," in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard A. Cohen (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986), 181-202; Richard A. Cohen, *Elevations: Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 305-22; Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002); Hent de Vries, *Religion and Violence: Philosophical Perspectives from Kant to Derrida* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 123-210; John Llewelyn, *Appositions of Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Robert John Sheffler Manning, "Derrida, Levinas, and the Lives of Philosophy at the Death of Philosophy: A Reading of Derrida's Misreading of Levinas in 'Violence and Metaphysics,'" *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 20-21, nos. 2-1 (1998): 387-408; Martin C. Srajek, *In the Margins of Deconstruction: Jewish Conceptions of Ethics in Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998); Chloé Taylor, "Hard, Dry Eyes and Eyes That Weep: Vision and Ethics in Levinas and Derrida," *Postmodern Culture* 16, no. 2 (January 2006), doi: 10.1353/pmc.2006.0021.

Rwanda. As Levinas never tires to repeat, the other not only requests attention, but also keeps me hostage. This leads me to the other two authors whose thought intervenes in the following pages: the Rwandese philosophers Alexis Kagame⁴⁴ and Maniragaba Balibusta.⁴⁵ Before explaining the reason for their choice and giving a hint of their scholarly achievements and their use in the following pages, it is necessary here to make a crucial remark about this choice of authors. When we are confronted with “Rwanda,” we inevitably wonder what do Rwandese actually think about it. This leads either to fieldwork or to a careful reading of books by Rwandese themselves. Since I have discarded, for good or bad, the former, I was therefore left with the latter: discovering books by Rwandese philosophers⁴⁶ that would help me make sense of the events of 1994. Inevitably, in a country that only passed from an oral tradition to a written one in the last one hundred and fifty years, the bulk of its philosophy *in its modern sense* was limited. This does not mean that it was thin or inadequate. On the contrary, this only means that there was a difficult discrepancy between the intellectual work of Levinas and Derrida and the work written and published

44 Explanations and analyses for the monumental work and formidable life of Alexis Kagame can be found in a number of bibliographies and commentaries in both French and English, presented here in alphabetical order: Léo Apostel, *African Philosophy: Myth or Reality?* (Gent: E. Stora Scientia, 1981), especially 54-84; Souleymane Bachir Diagne, “Revisiter ‘La Philosophie Bantoue’: L’idée d’une grammaire philosophique,” *Politique Africaine* 77 (March 2000): 44-53; Souleymane Bachir Diagne, “Beyond the Hyphen-Syndrome: Tasks for an African Philosopher,” *Polylog: Forum for Intercultural Philosophy* (2003) no. 4, <http://them.polylog.org/4/ads-en.htm> (Accessed February 2009); P.E.A. Elungu *Eveil philosophique africain* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1984), especially 40-7; Paulin Hountondji, “Ethnophilosophie: Le mot et la chose,” *Exchoreisis, Revue Africaine de Philosophie* 7 (November 2008): 1-9; D.A. Masolo, “Alexis Kagame and African socio-linguistics,” *Contemporary Philosophy: A New Survey* 5 (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987): 181-205; D.A. Masolo, “Philosophy and Indigenous Knowledge: An African Perspective,” *Africa Today* 50, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2003): 21-38; Simon Obanda, *Re-creation de la philosophie africaine* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), especially 90-109; Mogobe B. Ramose, “Alexis Kagame on the Bantu Philosophy of Be-ing, Aristotle’s *Categoriae*, and De interpretatione,” in *Re-Ethnicizing the Minds? Cultural Revival in Contemporary Thought*, ed. Thorsten Botz-Bornstein and Jürgen Hengelsbrock (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 53-62; A.J. Smet, “Une philosophie sans philosophes? A propos de La Philosophie bantu comparée d’Alexis Kagame,” *Cahiers des Religions Africaines* 10, no. 19 (January 1976): 125-137; and Nelson Udoka Ukwamedua, “A Critical Review of Alexis Kagame’s Four Categories of African Philosophy,” *OGIRISI: a New Journal of African Studies* 8, no. 1 (2011): 248-256.

45 It is not the aim of this book to explore the divergence of political engagements of these authors: Kagame’s attempt to emphasize the superiority of the Tutsis or Balibusta’s questioning of this supposed hamitic superiority. Their political engagements can be found in the following publications: Alexis Kagame *Un abrégé de l’ethno-histoire du Rwanda* (Butare: National University of Rwanda, 1972); *Un abrégé de l’histoire du Rwanda de 1853 à 1972* (Butare: National University of Rwanda, 1975). For Balibusta’s political engagement, see Maniragaba Balibusta, “Le mythe des fils de Gihanga ou L’histoire d’une fraternité,” in *Les relations interethniques au Rwanda à la lumière de l’agression d’octobre: Genèse, soubassements et perspectives*, ed. François-Xavier Bangamwabo (Ruhengeri: Editions Universitaires du Rwanda, 1990), 61-129.

46 The other major Rwandese philosopher of the same generation as Kagame is Aloys Bigirimwami. For Balibusta’s generation, the other major philosopher is Octave Ugirashebuja. Kagame and Balibusta were chosen over and above Bigirimwami and Ugirashebuja simply because of the breadth and depth of their respective outputs. For Rwanda’s contemporary philosophical scene, see footnote 47 of this Introduction.

not only by Rwandese themselves, but also by those—first priests and then anthropologists—who recorded Rwanda’s oral tradition.

This difficult issue can be resolved in two ways: either we assume that Rwanda means Africa and therefore any African author can step in to palliate the shortcomings of Rwandese philosophers and help make sense of “Rwanda” or we stubbornly remain with *modern and contemporary* Rwandan thought and philosophy. In what follows, the choice is clearly the latter. Although I occasionally quote neighbouring Congolese authors (such as Tshiamalenga, for example), the intellectual horizon explored remains predominantly that provided by Rwandan thought or, at least, that provided by authors from the Great Lake Region or by specialists of this region (Smith, de Lame, Vidal, etc). This focus expresses a two-fold desire: firstly, not to assume a commonality of thought across an entire continent and therefore generalise about what Africans “truly think,” and secondly to pay attention and to promote the remarkable intellectual achievements of two of Rwanda’s most prominent thinkers.⁴⁷

So how can we understand their achievements in the context of the hard topic known as “Rwanda”? Let me take one author at a time. First, Alexis Kagame. Kagame put forward in the 1950s a specific Rwandan philosophy based on a close analysis of Kinyarwanda.⁴⁸ With regards to his first *magnus opus*, the most remarkable aspects of his philosophy are without a doubt its performative dimension and its focus on linguistic matter. *La Philosophie Bantu-Rwandaise de l'être* indeed humorously exposes a Pessoa-style dialogue between two aspects of Kagame’s personality (Kama and Gama), something, which I have tried at times to replicate without imitating in the following pages. His work, including his second *magnus opus*, *La Philosophie Bantu Comparée* also makes a number of remarkable analyses of Rwandan and other languages. This focus on language has the extraordinary merit of challenging commonplace Western assumptions (on the meaning of the word “being” or on the commandment “Thou Shall Not Kill,” for example),

47 There is no space here to survey Rwanda’s contemporary philosophical scene, especially the one staged every first Thursday of every month at the “Café Philosophique de Kigali” by L’Institut français du Rwanda, Centre d’échanges culturels franco-rwandaïs (IFR-CECFR) since December 2010. See: www.latITUDEfrance.org/Cafes-philos-a-Kigali-place-a-la (Accessed June 2012). For recent work in the field of philosophy, see *L’Association Rwandaise pour la Philosophie* and especially the work of Isaïe Nzeyimana, Sylvestre Nzahabwanayo, Rev. Dr. Fabien Hagenimana, Father Dr. Védaste Kayisabe, Mrs. Rose-Marie Mukarutabana, Rev. Dr. Viateur Ndikumana, Mr. Olivier Ntibingirwa, Father Dr. Faustin Nyombayire, Rev. Dr. Alphonse Rutaganda.

48 With regards to philosophy alone, references will mainly be taken from: Alexis Kagame, *La philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l'être* (Brussels: Académie royale des Sciences coloniales, 1956) and Alexis Kagame, *La Philosophie Bantu comparée* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1976). Other sources will also be used throughout this book.

a challenge that the following pages also attempt to exploit in order to disrupt the linguistic comfort zones of my two authors of choice, Levinas and Derrida.

The second author is Maniragaba Balibusta. Balibusta wrote first in the 1980s a response to Kagame's linguistic analysis of Rwandan thought. What is interesting with this initial response is that it is neither critical nor dismissive, but attempts to simply continue in the same tradition, with a focus on linguistics and oral transcriptions. A few years after the genocide, Balibusta also wrote an investigation into the origins of violence in the Great Lake Region. This second publication, written in exile in Gabon, gives one of the most accurate and thorough explanations for the events of 1994. What is remarkable about this later work is the fact that although currently in exile, Balibusta provides one of the least antagonistic readings of this excessively conflictual situation in Africa. His work continues to this day through other texts including, for example, an analysis of the ontological structure of Bantu languages.⁴⁹

In what follows, the reading of both Kagame and Balibusta is neither contextual nor explanatory and, in case some might fear it with the mere mention of Kagame's name, it does not intend to re-awaken again the ghost of either ethno-philosophy or that of a generic Bantu or pan-African philosophy. The references to their works are made here with the full knowledge of the hordes of criticism that were levelled against their philosophy: For example, that it is not authentically Rwandan (Harries,⁵⁰ Vidal⁵¹), that it is written for the

49 References will mainly be drawn from: Maniragaba Balibusta, *Les Perspectives de la pensée philosophique Bantu-Rwandaise après Alexis Kagame* (Butare: Editions Université Nationale du Rwanda, 1985); Maniragaba Balibusta, *Le Potentiel ontologique des langues Bantu face à l'ontologie classique* (Libreville, Gabon: Editions du CICIBA, 2000); Maniragaba Balibusta, *Une archéologie de la violence en Afrique des grands lacs* (Libreville: Editions du CICIBA, 2000); Maniragaba Balibusta, "La mobilisation des ressources intellectuelles des peuples dans le règlement et la prévention des conflits identitaires," in *Le Dialogue entre les civilisations*, ed. F.W. (Russ) Russell (Paris: UNESCO, 2003), 343-54. For an analysis of Balibusta's take on the violence in the great Lake Region, see: Innocent Nsengimana, "Recension du livre du Prof. Maniragaba Balibusta, *Une archéologie de la violence en Afrique des Grands Lacs*, *Divergences* 13 (May 2008). <http://divergences.be> (Accessed May 2009).

50 "[Kagame's] concern should surely be to expound and illustrate from the Ruanda language the distinctive philosophy belonging to Ruanda thought, but the control he exercises over his material does not result in the exposition of any concepts that he said to belong exclusively to his own people." Lyndon Harries, "La Philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l'ère by l'Abbé Alexis Kagame," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 27, no. 3 (July 1957): 305.

51 "[Alexis Kagame] cannot be understood as providing an 'authentic' approach to Rwandan history and culture... Kagame only provides a particular conception of Rwandan society and history." Claudine Vidal, *Sociologie des passions: Rwanda, Côte d'Ivoire* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1991), 60-1.

other (Hountondji,⁵² Diaw⁵³), and that it is simply intuitive and unsystematic (Towa,⁵⁴ Eboussi-Boulaga⁵⁵). Against this tide, the aim here is really this: to show that both of these authors' works are an attempt to explore the linguistic aspects of Kinyarwanda as well as a number of famous Rwandan myths and that this exploration *rightly* constitutes the basis of a philosophy.⁵⁶ Kagame and Balibusta's work can perhaps be summarized as follows:

- Rwandese have a modern and contemporary philosophy.
- This philosophy is portrayed in their (everyday) language.
- The structure of this language reflects specific abstract concepts into which the experience of reality is articulated.⁵⁷

Such a focus clearly has, as Souleymane Bachir Diagne rightly remarks, "only one aim, that of extracting the specificity of this area's philosophical structures and this *without necessarily* emphasizing what belongs to ethnology."⁵⁸ The following reading of Kagame and Balibusta's works should therefore be seen in the lineage of this new approach inaugurated by Diagne: as an attempt to use a method that focuses *on* Rwanda as a specific cultural and linguistic area

52 See the chapter, "An Alienated Literature," in Paulin Hountondji, *African Philosophy, Myth and Reality*, trans. Henry Evans (Indiana University Press, 1996), 33-46.

53 "Kagame attempt(s) to search for an African metaphysics made out of the culture of the Bantu people. The aim of such an ethnophilosophical endeavour is necessarily extroverted. It indeed gives itself over as incapable of breaking up its epistemological links with the colonial context and therefore as the mark of a true "indigenous" conceptual space. The affirmation of subjectivity that comes out of this philosophy is therefore not that of a subject-in-itself, but that of an always for-the-other identity; the mark of which remains necessarily colonial." Aminata Diaw, "Hountondji: Le sens d'un combat," in *Ethiopiques* 76 (1st Semester 2006). <http://www.refer.sn/ethiopiques> (Accessed November 2009).

54 Marcien Towa, *Essai sur la problematique philosophique dans l'Afrique actuelle* (Yaoundé: Editions Clé, 1979).

55 Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, *La Crise du Muntu* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1977).

56 I cannot here defend this linguistic focus. I can only give a quotation and a lineage of thought that clearly shows the importance of focusing on language and linguistics when it comes to philosophy (and above all when it comes to African philosophy): "The analysis of how concepts are used in ordinary language is an essential methodology of analytic philosophy. Such an approach constitutes African philosophy, insofar as it may deal with the analysis of African languages (or meanings) and the eventuation of African beliefs expressed in these languages." Gbenga Fasiku, "African Philosophy and the Method of Ordinary Language Philosophy," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 2, no. 3 (March 2008): 104. On this topic, see also: Barry Hallen, "Does it Matter Whether Linguistic Philosophy Intersects Ethnophilosophy?" *American Philosophical Association Newsletter* 96, no. 1 (Fall 1996): 136-140

57 This summary is borrowed from D.A. Masolo in his text on Kagame's work and is applied to both Kagame and Balibusta for obvious reasons: Masolo, "Alexis Kagame and African socio-linguistics," 181-205. In this summary, I deliberately omitted Masolo's reductive conclusion: "-that such concepts are analogous to those found in the Aristotlico-Thomistic philosophy of similar probs." While I agree with this conclusion, Kagame's offers much more to the reader than just an African revision of the work of Aristotle or Thomas Aquinas.

58 Diagne, "Revisiter 'La Philosophie Bantoue': L'idée d'une grammaire philosophique," 48, my translation.

and, more pointedly, to take up again seriously what is at stake in their works, that is, one articulation amongst others of the way Rwandese understand themselves and the *other*. As such, their work should no longer be seen within the limited framework of ethnophilosophy, but as part of the history of philosophy in Rwanda and a key to understanding the events that led to the genocide. Kagame and Balibusta have now become by a singular twist of fate precisely what Hountondji himself requested so passionately in 1968, “texts written by Africans and described as philosophical by the authors themselves.”⁵⁹

One final crucial remark with regards to the texts explored in this book. The aim behind the reading of these four main authors is obviously *not* to compare African and European thought or to address yet again the existence or non-existence of an African philosophy in comparison to a “true” Greek or Judeo-Christian origin (here presumably exemplified by Levinas and Derrida).⁶⁰ On the contrary, the aim is to use the most *useful* tools at one’s disposal *not* in order to ruthlessly “make sense” of “Rwanda” or assume a commonality of thought, but more modestly to foster a dialogue on the limits of violence and peace in inter-subjective relations *after* “Rwanda.” The *major discrepancy* between the extensive use of my Greek/Judeo-Christian tools or texts (Levinas and Derrida) over those provided by Rwandese thinkers is due neither to the overbearing weightiness of Western thought nor to a scarcity of material coming out of the Great Lake Region of Africa, but to the way the topic itself dictates the use of sources. In a way, something unbearably difficult had to be worked out, and the method of approach can only be idiosyncratic to the problem itself: in our case, tools and texts sensitive to the issue of violence and peace *after* “Rwanda.”

VI. Stakes

The inevitable question that can already be seen to transpire in filigree in the preceding arguments is this: is this book totally coloured by Eurocentric *methodologies* and *paradigms* and therefore totally alien to Rwanda as a geo-political country of over eleven million inhabitants? An immediate response would inevitably be “yes,” because, following a Mudimbean perspective,

59 Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, 33. See also Heinz Kimmerle who says: “I prefer to say that in traditional African thought a different type of philosophy can be found, which I also want to call philosophy and which is called philosophy by the majority of our colleagues at African universities.” Heinz Kimmerle, “Respect for the Other and the Refounding of Society: Practical Aspects of Intercultural Philosophy,” in Henk Oosterling and Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, eds., *Intermedialities: Philosophy, Arts, Politics* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011), 140.

60 The present book clearly evades all attempts to think African philosophy in their purity and, as such, follows in the footpaths of the work of Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, notably in *Achieving Our Humanity: The Idea of the Post-Racial Future* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

the following arguments can only be soiled or perverted by my Eurocentric viewpoints and outlooks. However, such a quick answer fails to address the issue properly. This book is coloured by Eurocentric methodologies and paradigms only up to a point because the aim of the arguments contained herein is really to reach a stage where these methodologies and paradigms fail. For example, in each chapter, the argument always reaches an apex that suddenly is jeopardised by a radically different approach to the issue taken from a Rwandan perspective. With this approach, the aim is really that of challenging Eurocentrism through a questioning of the limits of its methodologies and paradigms.

But how does this make the following less alien to Rwanda? I would like to propose here the idea that challenging Eurocentric methodologies and paradigms through a questioning of limits already constitutes in fact, a specific Rwandan task. I borrow this idea from the philosopher Bourahima Ouattara who exposes in his work the fact that sub-Saharan Africa is effectively allergic to the methodologies and paradigms of European rationality and participates, in being so allergic, to a crucial and necessary questioning of their ever persistent and imposing limits. He writes in an extraordinarily condensed paragraph, which unfortunately cannot be commented upon here at length for lack of space:

“Philosophy is nothing other than the invention of concepts developed from an infinite hermeneutic of already existing concepts belonging to the Book. But Africa is without it; Africa is only an actor, the punch-bag for those who have it. As such, it falls upon this being-third to seek out its freedom and redemption. Without Book, that is, without an upright Concept, this other of philosophy, or more precisely, this being-third (to the world and to philosophy) will have to submit the question of conceptuality through a questioning of limits. These will inevitably expose the unbearable suffering and intolerable sensation of ‘being superfluous’ in a world drunk with its own alienation.”⁶¹

The stake here is not that Africa is without Book or concept—something obviously arguable—, but that Africa’s role is really that of challenging the alienating, constraining, and damning upright concepts that the West boasts for itself and then imposes as Universal (first through colonisation and now through development). If I bring this down to this present modest endeavour, then the following arguments are therefore at once a paradigmatic Eurocentric methodology on the issue of violence and peace

61 Bourahima Ouattara, *Penser l’Afrique*, (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001), 41, my translation.

in intersubjective relations *and* an attempt to question the limits of such methodology. The hope is therefore not to deny, denigrate, or excuse my Eurocentric methodologies or paradigms, but in unison with Ouattara's call, to challenge them as they are exposed. In doing so, the aim is to be as close as possible to the work put forward by Rwandese themselves while disturbing and disrupting their unmistakably European reading.⁶² Ultimately, the aim is to continue in the tradition of thinkers such as the South African Mogobe Ramose who calls Africans to "depart from a northbound gaze"⁶³ or the Guadeloupian writer Ama Mazama who aims to "systematically displace European ways of thinking."⁶⁴

On all accounts, the attempt in this book is modest. Concretely, it consists of small sections in chapters dedicated to ways of thinking that originate in Rwanda and that could be seen to challenge the European and/or Judeo-Christian arguments developed by two authors: Levinas and Derrida. These small sections do not make up a separate book or a separate perspective and are in no way comparable with the forays into Levinas or Derrida's works. They are simply interruptions or incursions into these thought processes. This modesty is here, for me, a prerequisite for any endeavour of this kind. I am not Rwandese and I barely speak a few words of Kinyarwanda. It would be preposterous of me to do more than this sporadic, but nonetheless careful reading of *modern* Rwandan thought. In a way, these sporadic and modest interventions are simply invitations to Rwandese themselves to further challenge the quasi-Eurocentric of this book all in the effort of continuing the task of making a better sense of the events of 1994.

The question then is this: does this approach aim to come up with a type of

62 With such methodology, the aim is also to continue the unruly task of refusing the existence of supposedly autonomous philosophical geographies: Western or African. As such, this book adheres in spirit to the remarkable work of Leonhard Praeg who clearly highlighted that any attempt at autonomy implies perpetuating the obsolete notion of an autonomous modern subject and in doing so continuing also the process of decolonization invented by and for Europeans. On this topic, see Praeg's exceptionally thorough book: Leonhard Praeg, *African Philosophy and the Quest for Autonomy* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), especially, Chapter III.

63 Mogobe B. Ramose, "African renaissance: A Northbound Gaze," in *Philosophy from Africa*, ed. Pieter Hendrik Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 600-610.

64 Ama Mazama, *The Afrocentric Paradigm* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003), 5.

inter-cultural enterprise?⁶⁵ The answer to this question will be frustratingly: yes *and* no. Yes, in as much as, philosophy is by nature inter-cultural. No philosophy is monolithic or exclusively nomadic. In a “globalized” age, philosophy is necessarily always already contaminated: streams of thought are never culturally pure, but thankfully always polluted or corrupted by other streams. To think otherwise is, as Ram Adhar Mall rightly says, politically dangerous: “Any attempt to examine cultures as closed systems is philosophically and methodologically unsound and even politically dangerous because it may lead to the ideology of ‘culturalism,’ which ascribes to certain culture absolute values and treat others as a means to an end.”⁶⁶ In this way, the approach chosen for this book acknowledges the fact that one can only do inter-cultural philosophy and this whether we live a monastic life with only one book of study, or jet-set around the world attending global conferences.

However, the following approach does not also paradoxically fall under the category of inter-cultural philosophy, *strictly speaking*. As the name inter-cultural philosophy implies, there is an assumption that there are cultures and that there is a space in-between where these cultures supposedly meet.⁶⁷ The problem with this assumption is that it stems from a common Western habit to divide, dualize, dichotomize and (if lucky) to combine, confuse, collude. The most cliché example in this context is the divide

65 For such an approach see the following texts in English (by date of publication): Franz M. Wimmer “Is Intercultural Philosophy a New Branch or a New Orientation in Philosophy?,” in *Interculturality of Philosophy and Religion*, ed. Gregory D’Souza (Bangalore: National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, 1996), 45-57; Henk A.F. Oosterling, and Douwe Tiemersma, *Time and Temporality in Intercultural Perspective* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996); Heinz Kimmerle and Franz M. Wimmer, eds., *Philosophy and Democracy in Intercultural Perspective* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997); Notker Schneider, Dieter Lohmar, Morteza Ghasempour, and Hermann-Josef Scheidgen, eds., *Philosophy from an Intercultural Perspective* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997); Ram Adhar Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000); Murray Hofmeyr, “The Promise and Problems of Intercultural Philosophy,” in *Phronimon* 5, no. 2 (2004): 51-76; and Fritz G. Wallner, Florian Schmidberger, and Franz Martin Wimmer, eds., *Intercultural Philosophy: New Aspects and Methods* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010). For an alternative approach, see: Richard H. Bell, *Understanding African Philosophy: A Cross-Cultural Approach to Classical and Contemporary Issues* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

66 Ram Adhar Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 2.

67 The idea that there is a space “in-between” is paramount in Heinz Kimmerle’s work. For example, in an essay on inter-cultural philosophy, he talks of a “new culture of ‘in-between.’” The premise for this thought appears to be not only an institutionalization of philosophies (understood as self-contained cultural traditions), but also, curiously, an understanding of Derrida’s *différance* as an “infinite process of forthcoming differences.” If one were to think *différance* within the context of inter-cultural philosophy, then there cannot be any infinite process between institutionalized cultural traditions. Philosophies come together precisely in the destabilization of institutional and cultural traditions, in their invention (deconstruction). In a way, the practice of inter-cultural philosophy can only be rebellious to any understanding of either culture or philosophy strictly speaking. Kimmerle, “Respect for the Other and the Refounding of Society,” in Oosterling and Ziarek, eds., *Intermedialities*, 137-151.

Greek-Other and its counterpart argument, the existence of many different “Greeces” (Ancient Egypt, for example) all more or less happily co-habiting together. If we really want to avoid this divide/combine then it is necessary to evade at all cost any *spatial* metaphor (which the word inter- necessarily implies) and rethink the task of inter-cultural philosophy from a *temporal* and hermeneutic standpoint. The aim is indeed to elevate “*the issue to be addressed*” (peace, for example) over and above any cultural differences and to direct this necessarily inter-cultural effort to the future. The outcome will then be neither a clash nor an encounter of cultures, but a gesture of promise that the issue can be addressed anew. In a way, “Greece” and “Egypt” are not in the past; they are always already to come.

In order to characterize this paradoxical approach (both inter-cultural and not inter-cultural), I would like here to suggest that the arguments contained in the following chapters attempt—and attempt only—to trace a braid of cultural philosophies in order to tackle what matters above all: *the issue* (here elevated above cultural differences) that, I feel, urgently needs to be addressed: *making sense of violence and peace after “Rwanda.”* Let me quote here the late Cameroun writer Meinrad P. Hebga to give an indication of the type of braid in question here:

“Every thought, philosophical or other, braids itself with many other pre-existing threads of thoughts; forming more or less original or intricate fabrics; never an ex-nihilo creation. Strictly speaking, human thought is never universal or singular, but particular, and consequently and paradoxically, irreducibly collective.”⁶⁸

The crucial aspect of the modest inter-cultural braid on offer in this book is that it deliberately fails to come up with a single voice. As will be explained in the next section of this introduction, this book plays with different registers and different modes of address in order to prevent at all cost the possibility of pinning down a specific origin or ancestry to what it says. As such, it aims to avoid the type of thought that attempts to merge European and African sayings “such that in it,” as Heidegger once said, “there sings something that wells up from a single source.”⁶⁹ The aim, on the contrary, is to braid

68 Meinrad P. Hebga, *Afrique de la raison, Afrique de la foi* (Paris: Karthala, 1995), 138, my translation.

69 “I do not yet see whether what I am trying to think of as the nature of language is also adequate for the nature of the Eastasian language; whether in the end—which would also be the beginning—a nature of language can reach the thinking experience, a nature which would offer the assurance that European-Western saying and Eastasian saying will enter into dialogue such that in it there sings something that wells up from a single source.” Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (London: Harper Collins, 1971), 8.

cultural discourses in order to give philosophy an off-key resonance, to make theoretical discourse a little less harmonious all in the aim of opening up a future reflection.

Inevitably, one area of contention against this inter-cultural philosophical braid would be that the following analysis still remains alien to the languages of the four authors studied (*neither* Kinyarwanda for Alexis Kagame and Maniragaba Balibusta, *nor* French for Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida), and therefore denatures not only their language, but also their thought. The problem becomes even more acute when we consider the controversy surrounding the use of languages in Rwanda today: an English-speaking government in a former French-speaking colony inhabited by mainly Kinyarwanda speakers. What are we to do then when studying an urgent problem in *one* language only (albeit with translations at hand)? Perhaps the only way to think through this problem is to acknowledge the fact that, notwithstanding the seriousness of the political problem of languages in Rwanda today, to write in English, in a language totally unconnected with the works of the authors explored in this book is to give the problems and ideas they have explored yet another angle, yet another “slant”⁷⁰ all in the hope of perhaps enriching the debate and provoking language with something totally new or unexpected. The contention here will probably not go away, but at least the effort is made to not assume a linguistic commonality and therefore a utopian universal philosophical orthodoxy.

VII. Structure

Contrary to what perhaps the title might lead the reader to believe, this book is not about the history of Rwanda,⁷¹ the socio-political situation in the

70 On this matter, I follow the work of Souleymane Bachir Diagne who writes: “To [think] a philosophical problem in one’s language (Kinyarwanda, Akan, or Wolof) is a task that makes one not only realise something of that language... but also something of the philosophical problem one is grappling with. The language that formulates a problem is what angles the problem. It angles it; it does not coerce it.” Diagne, “Revisiter ‘La Philosophie Bantoue’: L’idée d’une grammaire philosophique,” 52, my translation.

71 For a history of Rwanda see, amongst others: Jan Vansina, *Antecedents to modern Rwanda: The Nyiginya Kingdom* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004); Alison Liebhafsky Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News: Rwanda Under Musinga, 1897-1931* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2011); Catharine Newbury, *The Cohesion of Oppression: Clientship and Ethnicity in Rwanda, 1860-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); and Jean-Pierre Chrétien, *The Great Lakes of Africa: Two Thousand Years of History*, trans. Scott Straus (London: Zone Books, 2006).

region,⁷² an anthropologically chosen group of people,⁷³ the events of 1994,⁷⁴ the current political climate,⁷⁵ the trauma of survivors,⁷⁶ the extraordinary leaps in development of recent years, or the country's future.⁷⁷ As stated earlier, this book focuses exclusively on an encounter with a survivor and how this encounter reveals the way violence and peace manifest themselves in inter-subjective relations "in general." *This is the only thing this book attempts to do.* This encounter took place at Gisozi, the Rwandan Genocide Memorial Centre in Rwanda's capital, Kigali.⁷⁸ In order to evade any form of descriptive narrative (the field-work mentioned earlier), this encounter is here analysed following a two-fold structure.

Firstly, the encounter is explored through an analysis of communication developed by Jean-François Lyotard on the basis of the work of the American

72 For an analysis of the region, see: René Lermarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

73 For anthropological analyses of Rwanda, see at least these three remarkable books: Danielle de Lame, *A Hill Among a Thousand: Transformations and Ruptures in Rural Rwanda*, trans. Helen Arnold (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005); Villia Jefremovas, *Brickyards to Graveyards: From Production to Genocide in Rwanda* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002); and Jennie E. Burnet, *Genocide Lives in Us: Women, Memory, and Silence in Rwanda* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

74 For a chronology of the genocide, see, amongst others: Dominique Franche, *Rwanda: Généalogie d'un génocide* (Paris: Editions mille et une nuits, 1997).

75 For analyses of Rwanda's current political situation, see the following texts. Please note that mentioning these books in this footnote does not necessarily imply agreeing with their political views. Rony Brauman, Stephen Smith, and Claudine Vidal, "Rwanda: Politique de terreur, privilège d'impunité," *Esprit* 267 (August/September, 2000): 147-61; Danielle Beswick, "Managing Dissent in a Post-genocide Environment: The Challenge of Political Space in Rwanda," in *Development & Change* 41, no. 2 (March 2010): 225-251.

76 As such, this book focuses neither on an analysis of the *vocabulary* of trauma, as was the case with Levinas's later work *Otherwise than Being* nor on an analysis of the *characteristics* of trauma as they express themselves today in Rwanda. For the former, see: Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, especially Chapter 5, "Subjectivity and Infinity." For the latter, see amongst others: Phuong N. Pham, Harvey M. Weinstein, and Timothy Longman, "Trauma and PTSD Symptoms in Rwanda. Implications for Attitudes Toward Justice and Reconciliation," *JAMA* 292-5 (2004): 602-612 and Kerstin Hamme-Hategikimana, *In Rwanda, Tears Do Not Only Run Inside - Contextualising the Discourse on War Trauma, Resilience and Reconciliation* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2009).

77 Although methodologically incredibly problematic (only one Rwandese contributor and a general assumption that the Western scientific tools of analysis are universal), the most comprehensive analyses of Rwanda's potential future is Maddalena Campioni and Patrick Noack, eds., *Rwanda Fast Forward: Social, Economic, Military and Reconciliation Prospects* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

78 www.kigalimemorialcentre.org (Accessed, June 2012).

semilogist Harold Laswell.⁷⁹ This analysis asks seven (modified⁸⁰) questions with regards to the way violence and peace manifest themselves in inter-subjective relations:

Who speaks? – With what? – Where? – When? – Saying What? – How? – To Whom?

To each of these question Lyotard puts forward a corresponding word that finds its etymological root in the syllable *mat-* (again modified):

Maternity – Matrix – Material – Maturity – Matrimony – Matter – Materiel

The root “*mat-*” has two origins: the *immaterial* Latin *mater*, something from which something develops or takes form and the *material* Sanskrit: *mât*, to make by hand, to build. By focusing on the double meaning of the root syllable *mat-*, the aim is to emphasize the ambivalent nature of the encounter that took place in September 2006: at once an *im-mat-erial* event that is difficult to pin down and a *mat-erial* (or bodily) manifestation that, on all accounts, offers itself to (mis)translation.

Secondly, and in order to pervert this seemingly straightforward structure of communication and to give it another “slant,” I have linked this structure with the way the Rwandese philosophers Alexis Kagame and Maniragaba Balibusta understand inter-subjectivity, an understanding that is based on the Kinyarwanda root syllable *-ntu* (again slightly modified):

79 The context in which Jean-François Lyotard develops this topic (the exhibition *Les Immatériaux*, Pompidou Centre, Paris, 1985) explored the immateriality of new modes of communication in our postmodern world. Jean-François Lyotard, “*Les Immatériaux*,” in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, (London: Routledge, 1997), 159-73. On this topic, see also: Jean-François Lyotard, “Interview with Bernard Blistène,” in *Art and Philosophy*, ed. Giancarlo Politi (Milan: Flash Art Books, 1991), 65-84; John Rajchman, “Jean-François Lyotard’s Underground Aesthetics,” *October* 86 (Fall 1998): 3-18; Johannes Birringer, “Overexposure: *Les Immatériaux*,” *Performing Arts Journal* 10, no. 2 (1986): 6-11; Paul Crowther, “*Les Immatériaux* and the Postmodern Sublime,” in Andrew Benjamin, ed., *Judging Lyotard* (London: Routledge, 1992), 192-205; and Antony Hudek, “From Over- to Sub-Exposure: The Anamnesis of *Les Immatériaux*,” *Tate Papers Online* (Autumn 2009). <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/09autumn/> (Accessed January 2010).

80 Following Harold Laswell, Jean-François Lyotard only identifies five components to communication: (1) the origin of the message (*maternité*); (2) the medium of support (*matériau*); (3) the code in which it is inscribed (*matrice*); (4) what is referred to (*matière*); and (5) the destination of the message (*materiel*). My ruthless additions are not intended to betray or distort the cohesion of Lyotard/Laswell original intentions, but following Lyotard, to expose *further* what one understands by communication. In the post-modern situation that Lyotard exposes in his work, there can be no rest: the five components of communication he developed in *Les Immatériaux* in 1985 can only criss-cross or overlap others, some forgotten, some yet to come.

Ubuntu – Akantu – Ahantu – Ahantu – Ubumuntu – Ukuntu – Ikintu

Each of these words stands for an aspect of inter-subjectivity that is at once immaterial and material:

Generosity – Substance – Spacing – Temporizing – Modification –
Manifestation – Destination

Hence the double title given to each chapter: Maternity – Ubuntu, Matrix – Akantu, etc. A more detailed explanation for these double-titles is given at the start of each chapter.

The fact of using this structure in order to make sense of a Kigalian encounter is not an attempt to explore Kagame's supposedly "original"⁸¹ Bantu-Rwandan categories of Being or the way these were later expanded by Balibusta in the 1980s, but, by joining them to Lyotard's questions, to destabilise the possibility of categorization in one language or another, and thus to question the paradigmatic methodologies mentioned earlier. The following chapter headings therefore do not pretend in any way to follow or categorize further a set of supposedly Aristotelian/Thomist and/or Rwandan metaphysical conceptions of Being. On the contrary, coupled with Lyotard's root syllable *mat*-, the aim is to put forward the idea that these categories are not (pre)determinations of being, but simply indeterminations that displace both the fields of metaphysics and linguistic, speech and writing, European and Rwandan cultures.

81 The use and transformation (from 4 to 7) of Kagame's categories does not aim to replicate some universal truth originating in Aristotle and Rwanda or in the hope of identifying other types of human genera, but to attempt something altogether different. By juxtaposing it with Lyotard's words based on the root syllable *-mat*, the idea is to expand instead Kagame's careful linguistic analysis and to endow it with a completely different resonance. In this way, the idea is not to find out whether Kagame is truly Aristotelian or a faithful Bantu, but to think of Kagame's thought outside of all rigid categorization and pure philosophical lineage. For example, as we will see, the word *ikintu* no longer refers to inanimate objects or living organisms, but to either "the finite taking up of space" or the fact of being "a finite body in space." For the very first critical evaluation of Kagame's existential categories, see: Louis Vincent Thomas, "La Philosophie Bantou Comparée par Alexis Kagame," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 43 (1977): 266-7.

A word on the root *-ntu*. There is no question here that the origin of the root *-ntu* is difficult to determine with any precision.⁸² However, as the Dutch-African scholar Wim van Binsbergen argues with regards to the term Ubuntu, the root syllable *-ntu* (which structures this book alongside Lyotard's root syllable *mat-*), should never be seen as epistemologically pure.⁸³ The use of *-ntu* (as with *mat-*) is therefore made here not with a desire to return to an originary root, a cross-idiomatic ur-word of pan-African significance, but with the full knowledge of the impossibility of an idiomatic purity; an impossibility that, as van Binsbergen says in relation to our globalised world, makes increasingly less sense. This is not an attempt to evade the problem of the colonial heritage, but to give words—i.e. here syllables—different resonances in order to continue a conversation that was brutally interrupted by the events of the early 90s. Thus understood, what does *-ntu* actually mean?

The root syllable *-ntu* represents above all a mode of address to the other. As Balibusta says: "Taken on its own, the root syllable *-ntu* appears in daily speech only when one addresses another person: "*niko ntu?* (hey, you)" Or simply "*ntu?*" These are used when one is not using someone's name."⁸⁴ However, *-ntu* is not just a mode of interpellation; it also stands for a supplement, that is, for what can only be perceived *a posteriori* as what cannot be determined.⁸⁵ As such, the root syllable *-ntu* is *at once* an interpellation *and* what could be "seen" but not determined. The crucial aspect of *-ntu* is that it can never be understood as an essence. *-Ntu* is simply a conjunction

82 As Maniragaba Balibusta says: "The African populations that are now grouped under the name of Bantu did not originally coin this name, whether within a nationalist or ethnic perspective. The word appears as an external eponymy imposed by foreigners. The linguists that coined it drew their conclusion on the basis that the root syllable *-ntu* can be found in a large number of languages within a specific geographical area. These languages were called Bantu languages from which the ethnic concept also derives." Balibusta, *Les Perspectives de la pensée philosophique Bantu-Rwandaise*, 291, my translation. The most important article on this topic is: Jean-Pierre Chrétien, "Les Bantous, de la philologie Allemande à l'authenticité Africaine: Un mythe racial contemporain," *Vingtième Siècle* 8, no. 1 (1985): 43-66.

83 "Since [*ubuntu*] is to be used exhortatively in Southern African situations that are largely globalised, it does not really matter whether [its] ethnographic and linguistic underpinnings... are empirically and epistemological impeccable in the way they should be if *ubuntu* were primarily locutionary (an etic restatement of emic concepts of agency), instead of an exhortative instrument at the service of modern urban society at large." Wim van Binsbergen, *African and Anthropological Lessons: A Philosophy of Inter-Culturality* (Berlin: Lit, 2003), 448.

84 He further adds: "When the syllable *-za* is added to *ntu*, which gives *ntuza*, one has a kind of universal substitute for all conceivable beings. In other words, *ntuza* or *-ntuza* can be used in lieu of proper and common names. Conceptually, *ntuza* is empty of all referent, of all reality, hence the fact that it can be used in place of other concepts or things within our conceptual domain." Balibusta, *Les Perspectives de la pensée philosophique Bantu-Rwandaise*, 293, my translation.

85 As Balibusta says: "*-ntu* is the intuition of being in its absolute indetermination." Balibusta, *Les Perspectives de la pensée philosophique Bantu-Rwandaise*, 296, my translation.

between two or more syllables or prefixes used in order to form signifying abstract words: Ubu-ntu, Aka-ntu, Aha-ntu, etc. As Balibusta says: “-ntu has no specific signification. It only signifies something when it is attached to another linguistic unit.”⁸⁶ Such a scope prevents understanding this root as a synthesis of an *a priori* constitution of Being and/or the way this *a priori* relates to the other. -Ntu is, at once, address and supplement, hence the unnerving and troubling closeness to Lyotard’s syllable mat-.

VIII. Mode

Each section of the following chapters begins with a proverb. These are mainly taken from a large volume of Rwandan proverbs compiled by Pierre Crepeau and Simon Bizimana in 1979. Except for a couple of instances, these proverbs are deliberately left unexplored. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, because these proverbs have already been extensively analysed.⁸⁷ Any further explanation would only repeat what has already been said about them. Secondly, because a proverb only really acquires signification when the occasion arises. For example: “this proverb is used in order to prevent an action or comment upon it.” Proverbs therefore exist in order to enjoin a way of thinking or doing. As such, their aim is really to evade all forms of analysis in order to emphasize the performative character of what is at stake in the event that gives rise to them. Leaving them unexplained at the start of each section of this book is therefore a way of emphasizing another dimension to the event occasioned by each section in the following chapters; a dimension that aims to evade any form of discursive analysis.

There is however one caveat to the use of these proverbs below. They are not transcribed here as if to suggest that these are examples of what overall would form the foundations of Rwandan thought or philosophy. As such, they are not understood in their traditional Aristotelian sense, that is, as Synesius of Gyrene claimed, as “the remnant of an old philosophy preserved amid countless destructions by reason for its brevity and fitness for use.”⁸⁸ The proverbs below are therefore not understood as if they were maxims, aphorisms, axioms, or adages that would amount to constitute some kind of Rwandan Holy Book of good observance. They are simply understood instead as sayings used on occasion in order to mark the limits of the knowable. I borrow this idea from the Nigerian philosopher Cambell Shittu Momoh

86 Balibusta, *Les Perspectives de la pensée philosophique Bantu-Rwandaise*, 296, my translation.

87 See amongst others: Pierre Crepeau, *Parole et Sagesse: Valeurs sociales dans les proverbes du Rwanda* (Tervuren: Musée royal de l’Afrique centrale, 1985) and Innocent Biruka, *Sagesse rwandaise et culture de la paix* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2010).

88 Quoted in Bartlett J. Whiting, “The Nature of the Proverb,” *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology* 14 (1932): 276.

who says that, “what is not or cannot be put in proverbs, is not knowable. For anything to be known has to be put in proverbs and for anything to be de-known has to be removed from proverbs.”⁸⁹ Proverbs are not therefore a *Codex Africanus*, but simply markers of knowledge expressed at the cusp of an occasion; a marking that is always already at once past *and* to-come. It is with this in mind that the following proverbs are given here.

Once past the threshold of the proverb, the following text does not aspire to do philosophy strictly speaking: it does not put forward a thesis or a theme that *only speaks of other texts* and offers itself for summary through a self-contained and repeatable keyword. In a way, *After “Rwanda”* pursues a philosophy as far as it is able to. This means that instead of claiming absolute comprehensiveness, the following arguments attempt to always remain on the edge of what can be described in philosophical terms. Such excessive ambition is intended to remain as faithful as possible to Emmanuel Levinas’s work who, as Richard Cohen rightly points out, pursues a “philosophy [in order to] reach... a point, indeed the most important point, the very point of importance, where it encounters the imposition of a non-cognitive significance (a ‘saying of the said,’ to use Levinas’s formulation).”⁹⁰ However this point or edge is a treacherous one. As the following text shows, *After “Rwanda”* always slips back in a Derridean manner *not* in order to return to philosophy, but in order to mark the limit one more time.

The idea of doing a philosophy at the point or edge where it encounters the imposition of a non-cognitive significance is here articulated through the use of a variety of modes of address: “I,” “You,” “He,” “She,” “We.” These should not *only* be seen as a faithful transcription of the modes of address that were expressed during my encounter with Emilienne Kwibanda in 2006, but *also* as a way of blurring the conventional distinction between subject and object: who writes to whom, who reads what and to whom, etc. In between faithful transcription and blurring, these modes of address further support the specific structure used in this book:

Chapter 1, Maternity – Ubuntu, marks the origin of the question. As such, *the mode of address is “I.”* This “I” is not an entity recognizable as such; it refers instead to a random number of indefinite disseminations surprisingly

89 Campbell Shittu Momoh, “Temporal Proverbs in African Philosophy,” in *Time and Development in the Thought of Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Souleymane Bachir Diagne and Heinz Kimmerle (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 195.

90 I have deliberately omitted a crucial part of Richard A. Cohen’s sentence. Such omission should become clear as the arguments in this book unfold. Cohen, *Levinasian Meditations*, 64.

arriving at multiple points at the same time to say “you.”⁹¹ The “I” in question is simply a puzzling happenstance: the origin of the question.

Chapter 2, Matrix – Akantu, emphasizes the language with which the question is raised. As such, *the mode of address is “we.”* This “we” does not embody a united front; it refers instead to the plurality of voices that make the Matrix or language to operate the way it does: the encounter of puzzling happenstances, the meeting of origins.

Chapter 3, Material – Ahantu and Chapter 4, Maturity – Ahantu, focus on the space and time of the question. As such, *the mode of address is both “I” and “You.”* This intertwinement of “I” and “You” expose the way the question is enounced and heard: by a set of creative subjective (spatial and temporal) vectors: an “I” puts forward a question, “You” hear it, and by hearing it, “You” also create it.

Chapter 5, Matrimony – Ubumuntu, focuses on the contents of the question. As such, *the mode of address is again “we.”* However, unlike for Chapter 2, this “we” stands for a united front: the mutual recognition (a re-cognition that is necessarily both violent and peaceful) that alter egos are having a conversation.

Chapter 6, Matter – Ukuntu refers to the manner in which the question is raised. As such, *the mode of address is dia-logical:* “I” speaks to “You” and vice versa. Unlike for the following chapter, the dialogue is here limited to the protagonists involved in the encounter.

Chapter 7, Materiel – Ikintu focuses on the destination of the question. As such, *the mode of address is ana-logical,* a situation for which it is no longer possible to discern who exactly is speaking to whom: “I,” “You,” “We.” You (reader) are now involved, and in being so, You create the destination of the question.

The overall intention behind this methodology is to take in consideration the problematic of writing on such a topic, that is, *after* “Rwanda”: a writing that ultimately can only be an address *to* the other, *to* the reader who, like

91 This is a reformulation of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s famous sentence in: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Love Me, Love My Ombre, Elle,” *Diacritics* 14, no. 4, (Winter, 1984): 28.

“Rwanda” can only come *first*, that is, can only appear *before* me.⁹² As such, it is written with the understanding that the reader, whoever he or she is, not only (inevitably) knows *more*, but also is *already* participating in the writing and reading that attempts to articulate violence and peace in a world in which there is and will always be “Rwanda.”

I started this introduction with an explanation for the title of this book. I need to finish it with a word on its subtitle: In Search of a New Ethics. This subtitle could give the impression that the aim of this project is to uncover a set of moral principles that would help to work out the difference between good and evil. This subtitle could also give the impression that the aim is to provide an ethics and therefore a set of principles for the reconciliation process taking place in Rwanda today. Alas, these are not the intention behind this subtitle. This subtitle aims *only* to *search* for an ethics, not to eventually put forward an ethics or set of principles. Behind this more modest aim, there is the idea that not all philosophy should be programmatic and that, on the contrary, instead of looking for a set of moral principles, philosophy needs to expose how ethics unravels itself, and here specifically, how it unravels itself within the context of an inter-subjective relation. In a way, an ethics should destabilise not only ontology (which would ask, for example, “what is ethics?”), but also abstract inventions such as good and evil. In a way, to know the good is already not to have done it. One does the good before knowing it—ethics lies in this “before.”⁹³

So how does one *search* for an ethics without aiming to put forward a set of principles or precepts? An immediate answer would be to search for a type of ethics that would evade all ontological, sociological, cultural, and more widely, anthropological horizons, a type of ethics that would focus exclusively on the event, on a “here and now” that knows *as yet* no discourse, rule, code, or precept. But is this really possible? Can there be a pure ethics of that which comes, of that which must be questioned again every second of time? As will become clear in this book, the “search for an ethics” will not limit itself to the event, to what comes, or to a type of messianic eschatology that only God or a saint could seriously embody. It will attempt instead to search

92 And in this way follows Levinas’s work respectfully. As Levinas says at the end of *Totality and Infinity*: “The description of the face to face which we have attempted here is *told to the other, to the reader* who appears anew behind my discourse and my wisdom. Philosophy is never a wisdom because the interlocutor whom it has just encompassed has already escaped it.” Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 295, my emphasis.

93 On this topic, see Richard E. Cohen’s Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas’s *Ethics and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 10.

for a type of ethics that still retains itself as a *work* to be accomplished. The difference is crucial in as much as this search does not ignore the fact that, as Spinoza writes in *The Ethics*, one “persists in one’s own being,” suggesting that ethics must always *also* marshal some life drives.⁹⁴ The search for an ethics in this book will therefore open itself to the event, while also taking in this marshalling of life-drives without which the event could not take place.

94 Benedictus de Spinoza, *Ethics: Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 108 and 136.