

A Rhythm of One's Own:

Footnotes to *How To Live Together*

Christian Nyampeta, *Comment vivre ensemble*, research image,
(Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre), 30 min, 2015



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How to live in a reality of the post-genocide, and globally, in an age where intense levels of crisis are the norm rather than the exception? In other words, how to live together in our contemporary moment, in which life is experienced as an afterlife?

This contradiction embodies the challenges facing current and future generations of philosophers, educators, artists, policy makers and other civic bodies: How and where to bury the ghosts of the defunct modernisms, and the ghosts of its victims? Now that Christianity has become “African,” where to bury its African ghosts? The ghosts of our troubled histories have no resting grounds. Some are addressed as living; and others are buried in the wrong graves. The “Christian,” the “French,” the “English,” the “Islamic” and “African” have now ghosts in common, intertwined and fused. Burying the defunct Christianity would bury the living “African” with it, and yet again in the wrong grave. How to ascribe proper graves to our common ghosts?



Christian Nyampeta, *Comment vivre ensemble*, still (Botanical Garden, INES-Ruhengeri), 30 min, 2015

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Since 2012, I engage in conversations with Rwandan philosophers, artists and theorists at their homes, universities and cultural institutions.¹ Some of our conversations have focused on the subject of rhythm and its role on subjecthood and belonging. My films *Comment vivre ensemble* (2015), *Words after the World* (2017) and *A Flower Garden of All Kinds of Loveliness Without Sorrow* (2018) bring together extracts and fictions from these dialogues, whereby rhythm is a metaphor for hospitality, class, ethnicity and race: it is a regulating device

consisting of subjective and objective criteria. In this way, rhythm can give us insight in how to live together with those whom we don't share outlooks on how to structure our private and public spaces, times, our memory, and the formation of our own subjects.

The title *Comment vivre ensemble*, *How To Live Together*, references the lectures held at the Collège de France by the French literary critic Roland Barthes in 1978.² *Idiorrhythmy*, which means "one's own rhythm," is the subject of these lectures. It is

a notion of political theology, denoting ascetic formations of the Desert Fathers and Mothers that flourished in the 4th century in the Egyptian desert, a practice that informed the development of the Christian monasticism. These lectures develop Barthes's ideas about a community in which every member has the right to live according to her or his own rhythm, without being expelled by the group.

Philosophers in Rwanda tend to have important positions in the field of education and other infrastructures for the formation of the subject and the standardizing processes of society: Isaïe Nzeyimana is the founding member of Nile Source Polytechnic of Applied Arts in Butare, and his writing is used as textbooks in universities nationally; Quinet Obed Niyikiza is a senior lecturer at the Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences also in Butare; Father Fabien Hagenimana is the rector of INES–Ruhengeri; Sylvestre Nzabwanayaho has led the education programme for senior police officers at the former Kigali Institute of Education–KIE; and Olivier Nyirubugara is a senior lecturer

at Erasmus University in Rotterdam.

Like the work of their African colleagues, to paraphrase the Gabonese philosopher Grégoire Biyogo, the writing of these philosophers seems to highlight what the world is ceasing to be without yet understanding this end. The thinking in these philosophies fights against the permanent degradation of life and of living together, but also against the threat to life caused by the disappearance of our relation to each other, and the habitable environments on our planet. This philosophy revives what would otherwise be lost, and it carries a meaning and a promise which compels us to rethink life.³ 5

The themes explored by these philosophers include authenticity, development, education, generosity, history, memory, testimony, and witnessing. The references and interests of these philosophers reflect the influences acquired through their formation in Rwanda, in Bangui, Kinshasa, Yaounde, but also in Bamberg,

Rome, and elsewhere. They are versed in the “Western” Christian philosophical idioms, while they also cultivate their own thematics and treatises that address the local urgencies, which equally respond to worldly events from the perspectives of their own localities.

The question of “how to live together” is indeed a shared concern. These philosophical works tend to imply but also to contest a consensus, by outlining the meaning of this consensus, **6** not only in relation to our Western context, but also with regard to the extreme situation that led to and followed the genocide that took place in Rwanda in 1994: victims and perpetrators cohabiting for the last 25 years. At the same time, an aspect of their life is remarkable, namely, their devotion to Christianity.

Intertwined Histories: Philosophy and Christianity in the Great Lakes Region

Perhaps this is explained in part by the intertwined arrival of Christianity with “modernity.” Indeed, as Congolese philosopher Kasereka Kavwahirehi writes, these philosophers, the institutions

they represent and their teaching reflect an allegiance to Christianity. Most “pioneers and contemporary leading figures of African philosophy [were formed] in missionary institutions,”⁴ and this stamp of Christianity onto the general regional and Rwandan intellect is still widely actual. The dominant ideologies, and the types of social sciences privileged in education also reflect this Christian idealism.⁵ It reaches back to the colonial era when churches, cloisters and seminaries were established, as sites of ideological conversions.⁶ However, this colonial enterprise of cultural conversion motioned through Christianity “was appropriated by Africans who perceived it as a vehicle of modernity or found in it tools to resist colonialism and domination, that is, tools of liberation.”⁷ And yet, missionary institutions were, and still are, technologies of transmission and enforcements of colonial exploitation. Writing in 1979, the priest Smaragde Mbonyintege attests that:

The missionary activities had a common goal with that of

*the colonisers. For Rwandans, to become a Christian was not only a matter of conversion to Christianity: it was a total act of abandoning “imico ya kinyarwanda,” the Rwandan rhythms, which were suspected, rightly or wrongly, to be vectors of paganism. Between 1900 and 1960, the Rwandan Christian moved toward a cultural death. Through the Christian religion, the new Rwandan Christian was formed at school, at work, to become an admirer of the White, and to become his often clumsy imitator. Becoming a Christian meant speaking differently, eating differently, dressing differently, praying differently. More dramatically, becoming Christian meant to hate one’s own tradition and to admire all what is European.*⁸

It is suggested that despite this devastating transformation, what is properly African was not fully erased. Also, the appropriation, adaptation and cultivation of Christianity by the new African Christians led to a distinct emergence of an African Christianity and modernity that used the same arguments to fight against the colonial injustices. But other thinkers find that the civil

wars, genocides, massacres “that plague Africa today are signs of an anaemic political sphere” that is a product of foreign institutions enforcing an external order on African societies.⁹

It remains that Christianity, “which arrived in Africa within the colonial context of subjugation and domination,” is now “profoundly linked to the African experience of history in its multiple manifestations: spiritual, social, political, ethical and intellectual.”¹⁰ Therefore, “all analysis of African issues that does not take into account the Christian (or Islam) factor as well as African religious systems ends up by renouncing an understanding of African societies’ dynamics.”¹¹ As such, a theological perspective is useful in studying the effects of rhythm on living together.

Christianity: The Rhythm of Enforced Modernity

The institution of Christianity erased the Rwandan rhythms, imico ya Kinyarwanda, such that Christianity caused the cultural death of the

Rwandan ways of being in the world, decimating existing life practices that didn't separate "its expression in social action, nor readily classified as theological, political, or sociological."¹² Christianity was deployed as "a powerful tool for the transformation of physical and human spaces," and "as an institution of domestication of bodies and minds, forcing integration into a manner of being, living and thinking presented as the actualisation of a revealed Word, and as 8 the truth and norm of all authentic existence."¹³

If Christianity can dominate and erase existing rhythms, then Christianity is itself a rhythm. It created a reality that fragments the society into forms of governances that disregard the right to life.¹⁴ For some thinkers, this fragmentation explains in part the extraordinary flare in the civil wars and atrocities in Africa in recent years. According to the Congolese priest and philosopher Bénézet Bujo, "in the genuine African tradition, the genocide in Rwanda would be impossible. Palaver and rites of reconciliation in the name of the ancestors would ensure that

the worst would be avoided and peace re-established."¹⁵

Perhaps "the recognised or concealed genocides, massacres, intercommunity clashes, rape and violence, are [...] signifiers of the obvious failure" of modernity, Christianity, and other rhythmic apparatuses enforced upon the African by colonial governments of yesteryear and their contemporary military technocratic surrogates. These realities compel us to rethink rhythm, its religiosity, and its effects on the subjecthood, the community, and governance. How was rhythm understood before Christianity? How is rhythm understood today?

Injyana: Rhythm Before and After Christianity

In *Comment vivre ensemble*, Isaïe Nzeyimana suggests that to exist is to be generous: existence, or *ubuntu*, to be human, is a rhythmic bond of *giving-receiving-giving*. Nzeyimana calls this rhythm *injyana*. *Kujya* means "to go, to walk, to move, to put into motion;" and *-na* means "with." For Nzeyimana, *injyana* contributes to the structuring of religious,

pedagogical, social, political and economic bodies. In injyana, freedom exists only if the same freedom is extended to the other: to live is to live with, and existence is the coordination of rhythms. Politics is the rhythmic deliberation of time and space with the other. Injyana takes hold only if all the members of the society have equal access to civic, cultural, economic, legal, or legislative provisions. Its sociality presupposes an equality in the ritualization of memory, in the recognition of differences, and in the redistribution of resources. These “provisions” should also anticipate the needs and arrival of the “other,” of the future, situated beyond our own sociality, outside our own rhythm. Inyana suggests that generosity, *ubuntu*, giving-receiving-giving, is the practice of an anticipatory and reciprocal mutuality as the precondition of being.

Position of Injyana in Philosophy

The discipline of philosophy has contributed to the wholesale dehumanisation of Africans, and it is an intellectual tradition that seems to downplay the many contributions from women and other marginalised social groups.¹⁶ However,

philosophy existed well before its delimitation as a solely “Western” practice. The survival of humanity depended and still depends on our sensitivity and our ways of making sense of our own feelings and our worlds: whether these practices are called philosophy or otherwise, intellect is a shared human faculty.

In the histories of “Western” philosophy which engendered Christianity, such as the Greek *ῥυθμός* (*ῥυσμός* 9 in Ionian), transliterated as *rhuthmós*, rhythm meant a “distinctive form, disposition and proportion,” a way, or a manner of flowing, of doing or unfolding, of becoming. It is the transitional disposition of something animated, such as the form of a movement, the form of an attitude, a form of life but also someone’s character or nature.¹⁷

There may be three traditions of rhythm. One tradition reads rhythm structurally in rendering reality in its totality. For this tradition, rhythm is an index of differences. This reading includes Aristotle,

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, Émile Benveniste, Michel Foucault, and Henri Lefebvre. This structuralist approach sees rhythm as a telescopic device with which to make inventories of reality *from its outside*.

Another likely tradition considers rhythm as means for describing experience and phenomena from within reality. Here, rhythm is an emancipatory, exteriorising and **10** interventional force. This tradition includes Giorgio Agamben, Julia Kristeva, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, and perhaps also Roland Barthes's idiorrhythmy, as well by Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Souleymane Bachir Diagne; in the break of Nathaniel Mackey and Fred Moten; in the waywardness of Saidyia Hartman, etc. This viewpoint uses rhythm equally as an apparatus to study reality, but *from within* its interior.

A possible third tradition regards rhythm as a generative work of invention. Rhythm can support the emergence of a new subject and

a new reality. This reading may include Luce Irigaray, and Iris van der Tuin. Perhaps injyana can be understood in these terms: as *ubuntu*, as a genesis of being in common.

However, like all rhythms, injyana is also bound to the paradoxes of tradition, the toxic references and the negative aspects of religiosity. While injyana and ubuntu, understood as "I am because you are," remind us of the social nature of the individual, its political implementation by the post-apartheid South-African government is, to some, unsatisfactory, because it prevented the rendition of justice.

However, what if this paradox of injyana helps to "provincialize," that is, decentralise the dominance of Christianity as the rhythm of modernity?¹⁸ If injyana can offer meditations on the limits of modernity, history and subjecthood, then thinking through injyana is also a self-criticising practice of learning about our own intellectual histories, and their roles in the formation of a supposedly universal subject

and its institutions. Thinking injyana is performing a critical elegy for our own intellectual formation and inheritance as formerly colonised, Christians, modernists, post-modernists, and so on.

To paraphrase the French philosopher Severine Kodjo-Grandvaux, perhaps what is at stake in this cohabitation of both flawed and promising histories, knowledge and feelings, is the making of “indiscipline,” understood as a “transgression of disciplinary boundaries rather than a ‘disintegration of disciplines.’”¹⁹ By studying inyana in the presence of historical and current realities such as Christianity and other destructive rhythms of “civilisation,” or “progress” that amount in devastatingly standardizing manifestations enforced upon the African subject, we perform the *crossing*, a notion proposed by the Cameroonian philosopher Jean-Godefroy Bidima as “thoughts that refuse ‘the withdrawal of identity, neurotic and claiming, as well as the dissolution into a coagulating universalism.’”²⁰

Perhaps injyana, as

one such rhythm of the the crossing, invites us to be mindful of “the trap of the supposed universality or peculiarity of African philosophy, by making it possible to think of its own subjects differently, in a reality which encourages movement instead of constricting itself only to the given.”²¹ Rather, the rhythm of the crossing bespeaks “of the plurality which makes up any given history.” Inyana as the crossing is “a practice, an attitude that confronts the real, the 11 desire to detect the multiple and the diverse, to perceive the potential and the not-yet expressed, to unravel the confused and the unspoken.”²²

Indeed, the historical and current forceful realities have materialised new experiences: Islam and Christianity are by now also African experience; in the same way that, as Senegalese philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne proposes, English, French, or Portuguese are also African.²³

Injyana: New Rhythms of Life?

In conclusion, the brutalities committed in

the name of Christianity as the rhythm of modernity call for a complete rejection of Christianity in African societies, cultures and politics. The possible benefits of Christianity throughout the Great Lakes region pale in the face of the atrocities committed by the missionaries and by Christian (and Muslim) African leaders and their wilful or manipulated followers. And yet, in the wake of these terrible encounters with modernity's devastating rhythm, those tasked with

12 subject formations are still Christians. As exemplified in *Comment vivre ensemble*, two of the philosophers are priests, one is a pastor, and further conversations with nuns are forthcoming. How to understand this contradiction?

This is the paradox of injyana: it contains both the standardizing coercion of today's credo of progress, and the emancipative impulse of invention. This contradiction embodies the challenges facing current and future generations of philosophers, educators, artists, policy makers and other civic bodies: How and where to bury the ghosts of the defunct modernisms, and the

ghosts of its victims? Now that Christianity has become "African," where to bury its African ghosts? The ghosts of our troubled histories have no resting grounds. Some are addressed as living; and others are buried in the wrong graves. The "Christian," the "French," the "English," the "Islamic" and "African" have now ghosts in common, intertwined and fused. Burying the defunct Christianity would bury the living "African" with it, and yet again in the wrong grave. How to ascribe proper graves to our common ghosts?

Thinking one's own rhythm such as injyana involves inventing a new life, but also making an inventory of what remains in the afterlife of subjection, violence and survival.²⁴ Also, it involves mapping the trajectories of the past, in an attempt to render the inhabitable present somewhat viable and hospitable. And, it involves tracing the vectors of our common future, in a way that foregrounds the conflicted historical mutuality and reciprocity. As such, thinking Africa involves thinking Europe. Thinking Rwanda

involves thinking Congo. Thinking Congo involves thinking Arusha; it involves thinking Sahara; it involves thinking The Hague, it involves thinking the “West.” Perhaps thinking one’s own rhythm is thinking the world’s rhythm?

This seems to be the suggestion of Diagne, for whom “thinking Africa is thinking across languages,” such that to think is to translate.²⁵ In Rwanda, this thinking across is further accentuated by the shift from the Francophone system to the Anglophone system, instituted by the Rwandan authorities since 2008.²⁶

In such translative thinking of how to live together, “how” suggests a manner, a way of being, thinking and doing, a manual, a way of handling, a way of holding, of holding oneself or being held. “How” can be a rule, a law, a policy. It can be a quest, a search, a questioning; it is a philosophising. The French term for “how” is *comment*. This meaning is sedimented in English: “to comment,” “commentary,” “to command,” and “commando.” In Kinyarwanda, “how” is “uko,” and here derives the meaning

“ubwoko,” race, ethnicity, type, character: *Ubwo* “truth” and *ko*, “that-which.”

“To” indicates a movement: this can be a break, a waywardness, a destination, transgression, a renunciation, a reduction, but also an excess. “To” is a vector, and even when it points to a stasis, it is an orientation, it points the way, purposefully or otherwise. “To” is a rhythm, it is a crossing. It can indicate a declension and an ascension, for instance un- 13 of unlearning, or de- of decolonial, and perhaps also desedimentation.²⁸ This rhythmic thought of the crossing, this translative reading of how to live together, invites a reflection of rhythm as the crossing, whereby injyana is but one of the plural synonyms of rhythm, of a possible movement, of ourselves of life, of the world.

By practicing with the Rwandan philosophers and their regional colleagues in their thought of thinking life anew through undertaking a crossing of the present, we may revisit translation as relocation: the removal

of a saint's body or relics to a new place. It is a theological practice, and because theology presupposes demons, then there is a demonological imperative in this practice of thinking and inhabiting the rhythm of living together and its material, practical and theoretical synonyms.

How to live together in a political reality of the post-colonial and the post-genocide, and globally, in an age where intense levels of crisis are the norm rather than the exception? In other words, how to live together in our contemporary moment, in which life is experienced as an afterlife? In Rwanda, the sight or the invocation of bones constitutes an elementary part of the ecology. My own forehead is literally fractured, permanently injured at the level of the body, thought, emotions and memory, by a blow at the hand of fellow Rwandans with intent to kill and to decimate life. Taking such displacement of the bone literally, materially and metaphorically, it makes sense to ask: how to live together with the forced movement, crossing and relocation of our bones? What roles remain for those

we considered saints? What does their relic signify and what does it interpret? What demons threaten our relics and our ghosts in such a way that their remains have to be relocated?

Such could be the uses of studying rhythm: an act of tracing the vectors of our common future that is attentive to the posteriority, that is, the "afterlife," the perpetual otherness of our own subjecthood, in the face of the conflicted historical mutuality and reciprocity between our own rhythm, our present, our manners and forms of lives, and those of the wider world, its pasts and its futures.

Footnotes

1. This public forum took place in May 2012, at Goldsmiths, University of London, at the occasion of the 5th Visual Cultures Public Forum, convened by philosopher Jean Paul Martinon. The Forum explored the question of “How to live together?,” by drawing to the implied consensus and by outlining the meaning of this consensus, from the perspective of the writings of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. Alongside Martinon and myself, the other participants were philosopher Isaïe Nzeyimana, contributing through a video interview; and Andy Stafford, a theorist at University of Leeds, who presented a paper on Roland Barthes and the mediation of violence.

<https://www.gold.ac.uk/calendar/?id=5210>.

Accessed March 25, 2013.

2. *Comment vivre ensemble: simulations romanesque de quelques espaces quotidiennes*, ed. Claude Coste (Paris: Seuil, 2002), and translated as *How To Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Living Spaces*, translated by Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press,

2013).

3. Biyogo, Grégoire, *Histoire de la philosophie africaine*, Vol. IV, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006.

4. Kasereka Kavwahirehi, “Have we failed Christianity? Or How violence in the Great Lakes Region Challenges Christianity and the Nation State.” In *Citizenship Studies*, 21:2, pp 210-223, 2017. DOI:10.1080/13621025.2017.1279799.

“From Placide Tempels, author of *Bantu Philosophy* (1945), to Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, author of *Muntu in Crisis: African Authenticity and Philosophy* (2014) and *Christianity without Fetishes: Revelation and Domination* (1981), and V.Y. Mudimbe’s *Tales of Faith: Religion as Political Performance* (1997) through to *La philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l’être* (1956) by Alexis Kagame, *Visage africain du christianisme* (1965) by Vincent Mulago, and *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969) by John Mbiti, not to mention *L’Afrique dans l’Église. Paroles d’un croyant* by Engelbert Mveng, *Afriques indociles: Christianisme, pouvoir et État* 15

en société postcoloniale (1988) by Achille Mbembe, and *Théologie africaine pour temps de crise* (1993) by Kä Mana... all these scholars bear witness to the challenges and issues born from extending to Africa a bourgeois Christian model of being. Hence, theologies of cultural identity, liberation or reconstruction, ethnophilosophy and critical philosophies represent moments when Africans try to recover coherence in their individual and collective lives by inscribing themselves in the open horizon of colonial modernity and the evangelising mission.

This involves trying to think critically about the integration of traditional values in the modern world while ensuring that modernity fulfils its promises within the African experience of history." p. 215.

5. Ibid.

6. Christian Nyampeta, *Comment vivre ensemble*, Conversation with Dr Fr. Fabien Hagenimana, Sept. 2015.

7. Kasereka Kavwahirehi, "Have we failed Christianity?" p. 212.

8. Abbé Smaragde Mbonyintege, "L'urgence de l'inculturation

du message chrétien dans la tradition rwandaise," in *Urunani*, Kabgyayi: Nyakibanda Seminary Press, 1979), p.23–24. My translation. Cf. "cultural death" with akedia in the next chapter.

9. Bénézet Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethics. Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality*, trans. Brian McNeil (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company), 2001. p. 96. Quoted in Kasereka Kavwahirehi, "Have we failed Christianity?", p. 218.

10. Kasereka Kavwahirehi, "Have we failed Christianity?" p. 212.

11. Ibid.

12. Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, *Christianisme sans fétiche. Révélation ou domination* [Christianity without Fetishes. A Recapture of Christianity]. Paris: Présence Africaine, 198. Quoted in Kasereka Kavwahirehi, "Have we failed Christianity?" p. 212.

13. Kasereka Kavwahirehi, "Have we failed Christianity?" p. 212.

14. Bénézet Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethics*, p. 96.

15. Ibid.

16. For a critique of the racism of Kant, see: Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Achieving Our Humanity: The Idea of the Postracial Future* (London: Routledge, 2001). For a critique of the racism of Hegel, see: Maniragaba Balibutsa, *Les Perspectives de la pensée philosophique bantu-rwandaise après Alexis Kagame* (Butare: Editions Université Nationale du Rwanda, 1985).

Concerning the unacknowledged role of women in philosophy, including African philosophy, such as the articulation of rhythm in Negritude, there persists “masculinist genealogy constructed by the poets and shored up by literary historians, critics, and Africanist philosophers continues to elide and minimize the presence and contributions of black women, namely their francophone counterparts, to the movement’s evolution.” It is suggested that Léopold Sédar Senghor’s thesis of rhythm and vital force—which was published in 1939, fifteen years ahead of Placide Tempels’

controversial writing,—owes a great deal to from his reading of Jeanne Nardal. See: T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, “Femme negritude: Jane Nardal, *La Depeche africaine*, and the Francophone New Negro,” in *Souls: A Critical Journal of BlackPolitics, Culture, and Society* 2: 4 (2000): 8–18.

17. Émile Benveniste, “The Notion of “Rhythm” in its Linguistic Expression,” *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek 17 (Florida: University of Miami Press, 1971), p. 287-288. For the history of philosophy that includes its African origins, see: Gregoire Biyogo, *Histoire de la philosophie africaine, Vol. I: Le berceau égyptien de la philosophie* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2006).

18. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

19. Severine Kodjo-Grandvaux, “Effets de miroir : penser l’Afrique, penser le monde,” quoting Anthony Mangeon,

Lumières noires, discours marron. Indiscipline et transformations du savoir chez les écrivains noirs américains et africains; itinéraires croisés d'Alain Leroy Locke, V Y Mudimbe et de leurs contemporains, thèse soutenue à l'Université de Cergy-Pontoise le 17 décembre 2004, p. 771. In Alain Mabanckou, ed., *Penser et écrire l'Afrique aujourd'hui* (Paris: Seuil, 2017), pp 60–71. My own translation.

20. Severine Kodjo-Grandvaux, “Effets de miroir : penser 18 l’Afrique, penser le monde,” quoting Jean-Godefroy Bidima, *L’Art négro-africain*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, « Que sais-je? », n° 3226, 1997, p. 108. In Alain Mabanckou, ed., *Penser et écrire l’Afrique aujourd’hui* (Paris: Seuil, 2017), pp 60–71.

21. Jean-Godefroy Bidima, *L’Art négro-africain*, quoted in Severine Kodjo-Grandvaux, “Effets de miroir.”

22. Severine Kodjo-Grandvaux, “Effets de miroir.”

23. Alain Mabanckou, Lectures at the Collège de France, session of 2 May 2016: Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *Le philosophe*

africain comme traducteur” [African Philosopher as a Translator]. <http://www.college-de-france.fr/site/alain-mabanckou/symposium-2016-05-02-09h40.htm>. Accessed 4 January 2017.

24. Souleymane Bachir Diagne, “Le philosophe africain comme traducteur” at the colloquium “Penser et écrire l’Afrique aujourd’hui,” convened by Alain Mabanckou at the Collège de France in May 2016, in the context of *Lettres noires: des ténèbres à la lumière*, his seminars lectures at the Collège de France in 2015-2016.

25. Chris McGreal, “Rwanda to switch from French to English in schools.” In *The Guardian*, Monday 13 October 2008. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/oct/14/rwanda-france>.

26. Saidyia Hartman, *Intimate Trespass: Hapticality, Waywardness, and the Practice of Entanglement—A Study Day with Saidiya Hartman*. A study day organised on the occasion of Arthur Jafa’s exhibition at Serpentine Gallery in London, Professor Saidiya Hartman (Columbia University) joined

scholars, artists and writers to discuss themes from her landmark text, *Scenes of Subjection* (1997), including questions of political economy and ecology, race, gender and legal theory. Convened by curator Taylor Le Melle and presented in collaboration with Dr. Rizvana Bradley (Yale University), with support from *Women & Performance*, a journal of feminist theory.

27. Nahum Dimitri Chandler, *Toward An African Future—Of the Limit of the World* (London: Living Commons, 2013).

Living Commons Collective is an experimental publishing imprint by philosopher Denise Ferreira da Silva and theorist Rashné Limki. It is “set amid and apart from neoliberal practices wherein sterilization of thought is lucrative business and from autonomist practices that have ceded themselves a peculiar racial valence,” and its output is “a reflection of the inherent counter-disciplinarity of thinking; and it traces “the political as constituted across the various modes of the creative and the material, that is, the ideational, the emotional, and the spiritual.”

Affirmative Self-Negation:

The act of tracing the vectors of our common future that is attentive to our afterlife demands not only a *writing* but also a *reading* that effect an exploratory surgery. This tracing calls for an aesthetic engagement that performs an autopsy upon our own bodies and their histories.

This proposition shouldn't be apprehended only in its negativity, because its affirmation is deposited in the early meaning of autopsy: eye-witnessing, seeing for oneself.

Aesthetic Practice After "Rwanda"

The following pages attempt such a seeing for oneself and yet together, by way of epigraphic quotations. In "Writing as Exploratory Surgery: Yambo Ouologuem's Bound to Violence," Algerian writer Christiane Chaulet-Achour mentions that an epigraphic quote "connects 'the new discourse to a larger textual ensemble in order to integrate it into a series of previous textual enunciations.'" ⁰

The intent is to sketch out the directions which this writing desires to take, as a way of signaling that it belongs to a definite ensemble of other discourses.

0. Christiane Chaulet-Achour, "Writing as Exploratory Surgery: Yambo Ouologuem's Bound to Violence." In Christopher Wise, ed., *Yambo Ouologuem: Postcolonial Writer, Islamic Militant* (London/New York: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 1999).

The year 2019 will mark the 25th commemoration of the Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda. The Rwandan genocide, or “Rwanda,” has to be read as a metonymy for a wider self-destruction in the world at large, and in the context of the history of Francophone Africa in particular.

This reality implicates not only the West, but, more importantly, what had gone under the name of African philosophy until that point. “Rwanda” plays a role for world literature, it plays a role for the thought of “world.” “Rwanda” parallels the role that Auschwitz had in the 20th century:¹ Thinking “Rwanda” puts pressure on

1. Since the comparison of suffering borders denial and sometimes is actually a proto-denial (although denial is a term that is also wrongly used to silence reflection), what are other ways of studying such genocidal politics transethnically, translocally, transnationally and transhistorically? Which is to say, how to study the genocide without perpetuating further separation and risking opening new wounds and thus?

Thought today, because there is no discipline that was left unaffected by it. This means that there is no discipline that can claim the authority to think the implications of “Rwanda.” Equally, this means that thinking “Rwanda” is not the duty of African philosophy alone, nor is it the obligation of political science, nor journalism, nor postcolonial history. Rather, “Rwanda” has to be thought

outside the disciplines that claim the expertise or the authority to discuss it, or those that claim to exhaust or contain its implications. Authorities and disciplines are exactly what failed, their authority has been nullified in the face of “Rwanda.”

This problematic of “Rwanda” destroys all authority and exceeds all disciplines. It exceeds Negritude, Panafricanism, and contemporary Black Studies. It also exceeds the progressive humanisms upon which the Western discourses are founded. As such, can there be an agreement on method, discipline or field for thinking through the epistemological and the ontological implications of “Rwanda?” This reality compels us to think with and across “Rwanda,” outside of the fields that authorise themselves to think “Rwanda.” Such is one of the tasks of thought today. This thinking outside of ourselves is what has to be invented and reinvented. No thought is untouched by this imperative. It means that all thought can think “Rwanda;” each thought has to discover its own rhythm for thinking the force of “Rwanda.”

21

The most immediate consequence of this is that African thinking and writing

now have to define themselves as necessarily post-genocide. Furthermore, the drama and “truth” of the Rwandan genocide lies precisely in the fact that it was not exceptional: not only was it the logical culmination of a series of earlier “smaller” episodes of genocidal violence that scarred the history of Rwanda, which was merely the latest in a long history of barbaric colonial and post-Independence political regimes in Africa, but also it is the time of the exception which has become the rule. Unfortunately, in global historical terms, horrible as it is, **22** the Rwandan genocide could hardly compete with far larger-scale crimes against humanity in modern times: the systematic slaughter of American Indians, the annihilation of Tasmanian Aboriginals, the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust, the Chinese Great Leap Forward, Cambodia, to name but a few. Furthermore, after the Rwandan genocide, there is Congo, where allegedly over six million people have died between 1996 and 2003. But it is through a cruel irony that the Rwandan genocide, insofar as it becomes part of this broader history of world barbarism, marks the moment when Africa becomes fully human. This is the tragic paradox: After “Rwanda,” the myth of Africa as different, extraordinary, other

(whether positively or negatively conceived) no longer holds. Instead, the Rwandan genocide is the moment of the violent entry of Africa into simple, that is to say flawed, humanity: a genocidal humanism.

After “Rwanda,” the Kantian or Hegelian subject around which most humanist discourses are constructed is replaced by the figure of the survivor. “Rwanda” is a foundational moment for contemporary African philosophy. “Rwanda” compels us to think negatively in order to survive: this is the new gesture which becomes an imperative for philosophy after the genocide, which founds a new humanity, a new subjecthood.

Thinkers such as the Cameroonian social theorist Achille Mbembe have taken the risk of thinking Africa from this morbid condition of our present post-genocidality. For them, the Rwandan genocide can’t therefore be considered to be an “epiphenomenon,” a kind of exceptional and uncharacteristic madness. The genocide should be understood as symptomatic of our present-day condition, a time which can be best described as an afterlife.

As such, this African entry into the post-genocide humanism makes manifest the flaws of the African, Diasporic and African American traditions which, since the Harlem Renaissance, Negritude, Panafricanism and Black Studies, have dominated African thinking: these are Marxism in its various guises, and Afrocentrist indigenism. From the perspective of radical political philosophy, our subject is perpetually stuck in the mode of victimization, projecting everything negative onto colonialism, and seeing him/herself as Other, in Hegelian terms. On the one hand, Marxism professes that in Rwanda, the external origins of a mass extermination predetermined by the dichotomies of Belgian colonialism and the long genocidal hand of France. But, this thought effectively stymies the possibility of an unconditional responsibility for autonomy. Indigenism or nativism, on the other hand, can only be founded on essentialism. It was precisely this essentialist thinking, an identitarian thinking, which informed the racialism motivating the genocide. It revealed at the same time the profound historical and ideological complicity linking rationalism with racialism: it was the very foundation of rationality that was shaken. "Rwanda" is the graveyard

of Negritude, as well as of all of its conceptual corollaries.

It is from the morbid hollow of the mass grave that Thought and its subject can rediscover itself. It is within this crumbling world that Thought can situate the autonomy of its subject. This demands an aesthetics that is willing to ask the question of the sovereignty of the subject in its chaos, and in so doing, inhabits its lack, close to danger, on the border with death, for sure, but also in the negation of both of these. Post-genocide aesthetics comes²³ precisely from a willingness to position itself specifically within the space left as a result of the wreckage of the two traditions of radicalism and nativism.

This negative foundational moment gives an impetus for a new, pre-emptive, or anticipatory aesthetics.² It

2. Bourahima Ouattara, *Penser l'Afrique, suivi de l'Afrique « fragmentée »*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), p. 45.

Ouattara speaks of "anticipatory inertia." Philosopher Jean Paul Martinon explains: "this expression could give the impression that Ouattara is yet again reinforcing the clichés: an inertia could be seen as a typical intellectual lethargy, a weakness of spirit, an aversion towards reason, or, even worse, an incapacity to think, the hallmark of inferior societies. Nothing is further from what Ouattara is trying to do. For him, the crucial thing is not to confuse this being-third with an object of study, but to think it as it happens, as an event irreducible to any form of category. An anticipatory inertia is therefore what opens itself to a future not already conceived and calculated, predetermined and programmable [i.e. non identitarian]. Jean Paul Martinon, "The Equivocal Concept: The Work of Bourahima Ouattara", Goldsmiths, University of London, 2015.

is a search for an expression of a “pre-visionary,” or rather “post-visionary” kind of life. A certain African practice, philosophy, ethics and aesthetics died in Rwanda, and this can only be reborn in a practice considered as essentially, profoundly, necessarily transgressive. Otherwise, its

rebirth would simply fall back into the same old traps, perpetuating the same old structures and complicities.

Perhaps this renewed transgressive subjecthood can be called an affirmative self-negation. This new subjecthood

is not to be found in the old discredited philosophies. This is not so much the expression of a commitment to practice in a populist vein, or to place a finger on an authentically popular “pulse.” Rather, it is to develop an incessant, urgent, anxious vigilance, informed by a knowing wisdom about what it means to live, to live with, to live with the without, and most often to survive in the African postcolony and in the genocidal world at large.

3. One of the issues with the narrative of the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda is its revival of the colonial and racist “grammar of animality”, as Mbembe says. This narrative describes Africans, albeit a specific group, the Hutu, as wholesale guilty, ruthless killers. This characterization demands to also generalize in describing Africans, albeit another group, the Tutsi, as defenseless victims. This line of thought is found in many, if not most renown documentaries and most studied scholarly texts on the Rwandan genocide. Such works rely on or amplify the intensity of the violence committed: the authors encounter violence through its image from afar, or even through the display of the bodies or the bones of the victims, the scars on their face, their deep gaze or the exhausted smiles of the survivors; or through the allegedly unrepentant commentary of the perpetrators. These texts imply that this violence resides within the Rwandan subject, the perpetrator and the victim. This implication always criminalises the Rwandans and by extension the Africans: They carry the violence within, either as givers or receivers. The violent impulse is an innate interior feeling, a thought developed and strategized over decades, and brutally and dazzlingly executed in a space of 100 days, resulting in an indelible trauma. The violence is now stored within the body, the locality, the history. But what if this is not an intensity but an extensity? An identity of violence transmitted from a number of outsides?

For this reason, the description of the Rwandan genocide shouldn't relapse into the exceptionalism of either coloniality, radicalism or nativism. If indeed the genocidal governance is the norm rather than the exception of life today, then the Rwandan genocide is

only but a symptom of a wider practice of our current human condition.³

And if so, the Rwandan genocide points to the limit of rationality as it was known before “Rwanda.” Philosophy, Western and African, has failed: by not foreseeing, by being silent during, and by offering a belated response to the Rwandan genocide. Is it only philosophy that failed? Or have politics, technology, science, journalism, and the list is long, also failed? In other

words, what discipline hasn't failed? Furthermore, if Thought failed then, even within the minds of the most esteemed of African thinkers, in what way are we, their mere students, equally

failing now? What genocides are we blind to? If genocidal politics is the norm, what are the ongoing genocides and how to intervene?

Such intervention would demand a particular aesthetic inventiveness, including a “linguistic” one. This linguistic intervention could play a role within the development of a new generosity. This means generating “our own” linguistic hospitality, and forging the place where we begin to ask questions and to philosophise, in practice. Such language of the new subjecthood, emerging from the *crossing*, can be called translation. In what way can a translative practice help us to move across the commandment, the “founding violence” of the imperial conquest and its legacies, intellectually, sensually and in the imaginary?

The commandment is Mbembe’s notion, misused in this context to point to the arrival and institution of Christianity as the rhythm, as the movement of colonialism. Christianity remains a political and educational rhythm which, in Rwanda, still define, overtly and otherwise, the formation of the body, the subject, the emotional and intellectual ecologies. The failure of humanities in the face of “Rwanda” implies that the study of Christianity cannot be left to Christians alone. After “Rwanda,”

such disciplinary studies are to be undertaken translatively, as an act of the crossing. Perhaps this indiscipline—a transgression of disciplinary boundaries rather than a disintegration of disciplines—may diminish the wholesale generalisations and racialisms.⁴

4. Speculatively, separation, particularly the kind effected through violence and resulting in extreme forms of suffering, is the marker of identity, it is what gives birth and punctuates identity. Let’s call identity the sets of references that command our memory, history and allegiances, disciplines and professions, gender and sexuality, races. All these can be references that we use electively or those that are used against our will to solidify ourselves into “who we are”: heroes, wars, bank holidays, education, affiliations, etc. In my text, identity remains to be defined, but if I may attempt a minimal definition, identity seems to be an addition or a subtraction (intensive or extensive) onto the condition of a body or a subject. Therefore, if “separation” really has any bearing upon identity, then identity is a sequential process and a given, which suggests that its result, identity, is a rhythmic entity.

Perhaps thinking across, translatively, at the limit, indisciplinarily, may forge affiliations or refuges within otherwise toxic historical forces such as Christianity itself. For this reason, a crossing through 4th century desert asceticism is relevant, as some aspects of the latter’s rhythmic practices of affirmative self-negation may provide useful contributions to the study of the origins of modern day lexicons of post-genocidality, in which imposed

identities result in genocidal politics. The lesson and the question from the men and women ascetics and hermits of the desert, before they became or were turned into missionary Christians, is this: how to unhinge ourselves from (imposed) identity, which to say, rationality? What tactics can this unhinging,⁵ this flight, this break, offer against racialism and its identity-driven genocidal politics? What would come in its place?

26 A number of these mystics share this question of how to live together with some of the Rwandan philosophers, such as Isaie Nzeyimana. Contradictions and paradoxes abound in both the ascetics and the philosophers. The question of gender remains an issue. Also, their veneration of Christianity remains unquestioned. Perhaps, the latter peculiarity can be studied as a marker of the polyrational faculty of the African philosopher, a concept by Kenyan philosopher D. A. Masolo. The Christianity of the African is a source of paradoxes. And yet, it points to the ability of the African to speak more than one

intellect: The African practices the language of languages, an act which Souleymane Bachir Diagne, after Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, sees as translation. But the paradoxes are not necessarily welcome: these new languages and religions arrived as an imposition of brutally

5. Ouattara, *Penser l'Afrique*. Ouattara "borrows this expression from Habermas: Entkoppelung." See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld and Systems, a Critique of Functionalist Reason II*, trans. T. McCarthy (London: Polity Press, 1989). "With every unhinging, necessarily comes a legitimate hinging (Rückkoppelung), a valid attachment to what has been 'unhinged' so to speak. With the verb 'to unhinge' instead of 'to take-off,' Ouattara is thereby highlighting the need to escape all ratiocinations in order to begin philosophizing anew, to restart philosophy from a perspective that precisely evades conceptuality. To unhinge is to open up a new space for philosophy, to emphasize the condition of possibility of what has not yet been thought. The difference is slight but immensely significant because with 'unhinging' Ouattara is no longer emphasizing an absence or a lack, but a possibility, a promise pointing in a direction outside of already established discourses." Jean-Paul Martinon "The Equivocal Concept", p. 8.

asymmetrical systems of the founding violence of the colonial rules. However, by now, their very presence, not unlike an unwanted child, compels us to engage in an act of plurarising rationality, as a method of avoiding being dominated by an identity-driven rationality and its demands of singularity.

To ask how to live together after "Rwanda," in the afterlife of our present, is to translate across ourselves, across "Rwanda", across the desert, in historical movements effected through intellectual promiscuities, indisciplinarily and transgeographically.

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Christian Nyampeta, *Comment vivre ensemble* still, (near Institut Polytechnique de Byumba), 30 min, 2015



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Christian Nyampeta, *Words after the World*, 15 min, 2017

