

Research Article

The Truth and the Pain: A Reading of Edouard Kayihura's *Inside the Hotel Rwanda* and Marie Béatrice Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter*

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Abstract

Literary realism focuses on everyday people, issues, characters, settings and situations that are real. Some writers engage realism to document their real-life experiences. The readers as well tend to gain access to real life events as vivid as the writers can recollect them. Fictitious approaches are avoided completely in these narrations. This is done to ensure that the readers can identify with the stories being narrated. Hence, the 1994 genocide has been the major focus of contemporary Rwanda prose narratives. They project the experiences of the people before, during and after the genocide. Also, some authors document their experiences as suggested by their therapists, because it usually helps as one of the coping mechanisms for trauma. This study delves into the analysis of two post-genocide prose narratives. It adopts the use of postcolonial and trauma theories as the tools for conceptualizing, understanding and interpretation of these prose narratives. Marie Béatrice Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter: The ordeal of a Rwandan Refugee in Zaire* and Edouard Kayihura's *Inside the Hotel Rwanda: The Surprising True Story and Why It Matters Today* are autobiographies, they depict the causes of the genocide, the outcomes, specifically on the victims and hopefully the solutions. Edouard Kayihura suffers harrowing experiences of perpetual fear, oppression and extortion inside the Hotel des Mille Collines, this is his own truth, debunking the inaccuracies of the movie Hotel Rwanda. While, Marie Béatrice Umutesi, a Hutu woman witnesses and experiences inexplicable brutality and hardship. She endures the pains as she journeys towards safety. This study interrogates the contributions of political hegemony and identity crises to varying degrees of trauma and explains that the experiences and pains of these writers are factual. It also establishes that these prose narratives serve dual purposes of correcting a false claim and projecting the pain of a Hutu woman, a unique diversion from the popular focus on the Tutsis.

Keywords

Realism, Postcolonial Theory, Genocide, Pain, Trauma Theory

1. Introduction

Realism is the methodological study of empirical realities in an attempt to create factual life images. Realism treats literature as an exact reproduction of life. It is the attempt to

represent everyday life without any artificial depiction. Realism in literature focuses on candid and unembellished representations of contemporary life. Morris Pam opines that

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“literary modes of writing that can be recognised as realist are those that, broadly speaking, present themselves as corresponding to the world as it is, using language predominantly as a means of communication rather than verbal display.” [1] The realistic nature of these literary narratives appeal to prevalent societal woes. The various relationships between reality and literature are noted in psychological, anthropological, and cognitive representations. Literary narratives serve as vehicles for conveying different messages around the globe. They uniquely provide the right manuals for the society that they represent. They help in projecting the historical past in ways that service the understanding of the present.

Mostly, postcolonial African literary narratives focus on the harsh realities of Africans, the precarious living conditions, the political system both from the past and the present situation. According to Muvuti Shelton [2], “of the many negative pictures of Africa that make up what is referred to as Afro-pessimism, the Rwanda genocide is arguably the most significant in recent history. Not only was this event disturbing in its occurrence but more so in its intensity.” This has imposed on the nation a multi-layered form of trauma. Since its occurrence, literary scholars around the world have been making efforts to project this issue. Norridge Zoe explains that “literary writing has a particular role to play in offering insights into the individual experiences of survivors and the singularity of their suffering.” [3] That is one of the reasons that informed the decision of Rwandan authors who are survivors to document their realities.

Rwandan authors mostly share personal experiences or give eye-witness accounts in their literary works. This is because the country is still in her healing phase and most of the writers feel they should document their national challenges and talk about the possible ways forward. Since writers are also historians, they write to give proper accounts of the times and troubles the nation has survived. This is done to avoid a future reoccurrence of genocide or to avoid distortion of history. According to Cole Soji, “testimony of historical trauma is not intended to foster either repression or immobilization in the face of history. Rather, testimony is often understood as a vital personal supplement to impersonal documentary evidence. Pedagogically, it encompasses a means for making history come alive. Overturning the anonymity that is often the fate of victims of historical trauma, testimony is treasured to the extent that it saves the shards of catastrophic experience from oblivion.” [4] The above quotation helps in projecting the full essence of the documentation of personal testimonies.

The prose narratives under review, open with the historical fact of how Hutus and Tutsis cohabited for long years before the colonial invasion. How it was difficult to foster peaceful existence after they left, and the eventual genocide. Real names and locations are used, the city of Kigali was mentioned, and the death of President Juvenal Habyarimana is unanimously documented as the beginning of the genocide. Also, Hutus killing the Tutsis freely on the streets, the roles of the international community and the mass media are also

included. The specific objectives of this study are to:

- 1) explore the representations of realism in the prose narratives;
- 2) examine the presence of hegemony as a thematic pre-occupation in the prose narratives;
- 3) explain that traumatic experiences are real in Rwandan prose narratives.

2. Theories

Postcolonial theory is dedicated to an intricate historical and psychological “recovery” project. Its intellectual input is to recover historical and cultural information. Gandhi Leeha posits that it has an absolutely unquestionable political obligation to assist post-colonial concerns to cope with their circumstances, gaps and problems, and to learn how to move forward with actualisation and understanding [5]. Trauma theory discusses the lasting emotional and psychological effects of devastating experiences on individuals. Cathy Caruth [6] describes “trauma as an event that fragments the consciousness and prevents direct linguistic representations.” It shows interests in the representations of realities and how difficult it is for the writers to find the right words to describe their pains. It has confidently declared itself as a vital apparatus for understanding ‘the real world’, and even as a potential means for changing it for the better. Trauma theory attempts to understand the testimonies of the writers, how they try to document their pains and lend voices to them. These two theories help to investigate political hegemony, identity crisis and trauma.

3. Discussions

I have been through Hell, I have known horror, and now that I have escaped, I want to testify in the name of all the men and women who did not have my luck and who died in Hell. My point of view is neither that of an historian nor of the politician. I gave testimony to what I have seen and to what I have lived [7] (page 5).

These prose narratives are socially problem-oriented. They focus on ethnicity, subjugation, violence, genocide, and all other challenges facing Rwanda. Bamidele L. O. [8] buttresses this by opining that writers and poets take a keen interest in the challenges facing their society. They expose distinct social, political, moral or economic challenges. Writers are seen as the secretaries of their various societies. They are saddled with the responsibility of sensitising the general public and hopefully proffering lasting solutions to menaces. They create awareness and make sure the world gets to hear of the existence of some problems.

The realities and the intentions of the authors are similar; their initial view is to document what they witnessed and the trauma of being survivors. This helps the authors to relieve their pains, as they live with their trauma. However, their main

intention is to see that these memories will be a part of the processes of reconstructing a less chaotic future standing on the bones of the past.

The prose narratives are not written in a vacuum, but by holocaust survivors who chose to air their voices. It is vital to state categorically that they are not combinations of tales but rather documentations of realities as seen in the following quotation: "It is a harrowing tale, told by a perspicacious observer. Umutesi's testimony- for that is the only term that can be applied to this heroic narrative- penetrates the complex nature of the immense tragedy that unfolded in contemporary Central Africa. It is "The heart of Darkness" viewed from a radically different perspective, a personal story, not an allegory" [7] (page xiv). Similarly, in *Inside the Hotel Rwanda*¹, Edouard Kayihura tells his own story of what really happened during the terrible days inside the disreputable Hotel des Mille Collines, as well as the testament of others who survived: Hutus, Tutsis and UN peacekeepers alike. He explains why he writes the prose narrative thus: "With this book, I want to shine on what really happened at Hotel des Mille Collines: who and what sustained us, who and what really saved us and how" [9] (page 11). Edouard Kayihura depicts a disjointed society and his journey to the place he thinks would be free from death. The prose narrative bares the Hollywood hero of the movie Hotel Rwanda, Paul Rusesabagina, as an asset-stripping, politically ruthless and Hutu Power backer who collects money from individuals seeking shelter, threatening non-payers to send them to the *Interhanwes*, the pleas of the hotel owners fell on deaf ears. *Inside the Hotel Rwanda* is at once a record, an acute decomposition of a Hollywood movie assumed to be genuine and a political critique poised at uncovering a fallaciously concocted champion who uses his reputation as a political bigwig, spurting tribal bigotry. The prose narrative grants insight into a true and unwavering first-hand narration of the actuality of life inside the hotel, unearthing the savagery taking undue advantage of refugees and bringing to the limelight the quandary of his victims [9].

Marie Béatrice Umutesi is a sociologist who at the start of the genocide specialises in Rural Growth. She is an educated moderate Hutu but relates with the Tutsis. Nevertheless, during the civil war, both sides are on their heels after the assassination of President Habyarimana. Her account depicts the suffering both groups of refugees and raises proportion and importance to people's awareness at its highest and vilest, the compassion and dreadfulness of humanity. For Marie Béatrice Umutesi, ethnic tensions characterised Rwandan society, and it paved the way to features that hung over from the rebel incursion of 1963, and the violence and coup of 1973 following Belgian policy decisions that defined Rwandan Society, gradually building up tension and growth of regional prejudice. Subsequently, it became largely a conflict of Kiga (North) against Nduga (South), and less of a Hutu and Tutsi clash. Tribalism and regionalism point to the human trait:

bigotry, which is attended by the extremism and authoritarianism state of the country.

Like most of the prose narratives written about the relationship between the Tutsis and Hutus, this opens with the author's childhood and the knowledge she has about ethnic differences. However, the significant difference is that the novel is written by a Hutu. Her perspectives are not limited to the problems of a particular ethnic group but that of the Tutsis and Hutus and how they determine the historical output of the nation Rwanda; since the governance moves from one ethnic group to the other depending on the favoured one at a given time. Her childhood begins at a time when the Tutsis are in authority and the Hutus are subjugated. For a long time, Hutus had stayed in subjugation, under the system forced on them. Tutsis felt entitled to the unalloyed loyalty of all Hutus and were required to render services without pay or expectation of one. A Hutu could be ejected from his home by a Tutsi who would occupy it without any remorse [7] (page 7). This is how terrible the system was in 1959 before independence. The Hutus' revolt against this system led to a bloody ethnic confrontation and some of the people fled the country for safety. The challenges did not end then, they continued until they resulted in the 1994 genocide. Marie Béatrice Umutesi is also of the notion that both sides of the divide acted terribly to their own kinsmen who ranked low on the social ladder.

Edouard Kayihura's *Inside the Hotel Rwanda: The Surprising True Story and Why It Matters Today* documents the author's experiences during the dreadful days preceding the genocide, and within the premises of Hotel des Mille Collines, during the genocide. Like every other Rwandan, his ethnicity is a significant part of his existence. According to Edouard Kayihura, "there was never a time in my life when ethnicity was not a dominant part of my existence, or the existence of any Rwandan of my generation" [9] (page 1). As much as they are aware of their current predicament, the Tutsis may not have been able to foresee the gravity of the challenges ahead. The identity card is a mandated piece everyone must carry because it might be required at any point. This is the first thing that defines Edouard as "them". Edouard Kayihura's first experience of ethnic violence took place in 1973 when he was eight years old. The Hutus attacked his village with several weapons; the Tutsis could not resist them. They completely overpowered them [9] (page 4). Their homes are burnt and all properties destroyed. They stay in the forest for a week before making their way to the village, hoping that the Hutus would pay for their crimes, but the reverse is the case. Alphonse, Edouard's elder brother, is in his third year of high school when the violence breaks out. He is lucky to survive the roving band that comes to his school to carry out the violence. However, he is expelled from school, despite the fact that the Hutus are the ones spending much of their days beating the labelled enemies. Some are beaten to death, but he survives and he is not given a chance to return.

Only nine percent of Tutsis must get to work in public service, said Edouard Kayihura. Hutu leaders do not encourage

¹ *Inside the Hotel Rwanda*: Edouard Kayihura's Inside the hotel Rwanda: The Surprising True Story and Why It Matters Today

the idea of Tutsis working around them. So, they pull them out because if a Tutsi female is married to a Hutu, who holds a government office, he would rarely get a promotion. They are not only denied employment, but they also cause havoc to people who love them. It is almost impossible for these two groups to have any relationship because every benefit is withdrawn to drive home the point that the Tutsis are not wanted.

The challenges associated with this ethnic division are not limited to Hutus and Tutsis alone. Some Hutus find it relatively difficult to relate with fellow Hutus that are not anti-Tutsi or anti-RPF. They have their intra-ethnic conflicts based on differences in ideology. For instance, Wycliff Kajuga is one Hutu that does not belong to any radical group. "He bore no ill will to me or any other Tutsi", that is the testimony of Edouard Kayihura about him. He is pro-RPF, while his brother is the leader of the *Interahamwe*. The difference between him and his brother costs him the lives of some of his family members on the first day of the genocide and if he had been on the street, he would have lost his own life. Pasa is another Hutu who does not use his position to oppress the Tutsis. He takes over from Bik, the hotel manager that leaves for his country. He allows everyone to stay without charging anyone and treats everyone equally. Unfortunately, any position that is not anti-Tutsi is a prerequisite for a violent attack that might result in death.

*Inside the Hotel Rwanda*² discusses the depth some of the problems caused by political hegemony that results in the genocide. One of such is oppression and extortion. Liedauer Susanne defines oppression as an act of treating a certain kind unequally derogative and excluding them from social, economic, cultural, and religious advantages to which other groups have access [13]. It also means placing severe restrictions on an individual, a group, or an institution. Typically, a government or political organisation in power places these restrictions formally or covertly on oppressed groups, so that they may be exploited and less able to compete with other social groups. While according to Regan Bernhard and Fieri Cushman [14], extortion occurs when one person uses some combination of threats and promises to extract an unfair share of benefits from another. These definitions explain the experiences of Tutsis during their stay in Hotel des Mille Collines. They are oppressed and extorted throughout their stay.

Paul Rusesabagina, a short, round, dark-skinned Hutu, married to a Tutsi lady, is the manager of Hotel des Diplomates before it is destroyed. He comes into Hotel des Mille Collines and appoints himself as the manager. He changes the running of the hotel to a place where money is charged for every transaction. "Now he wants to charge the hotel employees! We are stuck here. We cannot go home. If we try to leave here, we will be killed. We must stay here as well as sleep. He wants to charge us for our rooms! He wants to charge us for food!" [9] (page 64).

He begins another form of oppression in a tension-soaked country. He believes the charade is uncalled for, and the hotel should keep running like a hotel. The banks are closed down and all the expatriates assigned to the hotel have gone back to their country, the money will not get to the corporate headquarters in Brussels. People struggle to pay and hope they will still have enough to pay till everything returns to normalcy. Some secretly nurse the fear of survival since they have no hope of raising any additional money.

In another instance, Serge Rusagara, one of the people who joins after the new hotel manager resumes, has an unpleasant experience at the front desk. He is helped by a dreaded *Interhamwe* head, Robert Kajuga, but obstructed by another Hutu at the entry point: "We walked toward the front desk, only to find out that the hotel did not want to let us in because we did not have any money. I pleaded with them to take my sister in because she was wounded, but they declined because the hotel is not a hospital" [9] (page 66). He looks for a family member that pays for him and his sister. Initially, when the Tutsis enter the hotel, they do not have such experience. They are first admitted on humane grounds before any question is asked, but now that a Hutu man is in charge, it is all different. He knows most people inside the hotel and those trying to come in are Tutsis. For the Tutsis, seeking refuge becomes a labourious task.

Sequel to the above, the occupants have challenges with food and communication. The food is listed in the cash register and has to be paid for, despite the decline in funds. As if that is not enough, the phones suddenly cease to function. Panic spreads as the room phones are picked up and the lines are discovered inactive. They hoped to use these phones to communicate with the international community asking for help. The people are terrified when it is not re-installed, and all attempts to get it done prove abortive: "Then Rusesabagina let it be known there was one working phone, the fax machine in his private office. Joy! We were saved. We could continue to contact the outside world. But happiness was short-lived. He informed the refugee committee that only they could use the phone in his office and no one else, and they could only do so with his permission and under his watchful eyes" [9] (page 71). The Rwandan Telecommunication Company did not cut the telephone lines, if it had, the single line would not have been working. The only logical explanation is the fact that Rusesabagina does this deliberately, especially, to put the people under subjugation and mentally torture them till they give all they have on them.

The fear of being cut off from the world rules their hearts. Paranoia arises amidst the people when in addition to food and communication, they lose water and electricity. They become petrified because they are more vulnerable to attacks now than before. It will be easier for the Hutus to see them if they leave the hotel in search of water, and also easier for them to sneak in due to the lack of power supply. If they do not fall by the machetes of the Hutus, they may die from dehydration, illness, or starvation. A solution is proffered: Rusesabagina patronises

² *Inside the Hotel Rwanda*: Edouard Kayihura's *Inside the hotel Rwanda: The Surprising True Story and Why It Matters Today*.

a man, Georges Rutaganda, *Interhanwe*'s vice president and a classy European beer importer. Georges strongly believes in the Hutu's ideology but sees the period as a time to enrich himself. Rusesabagina buys his beers and sells them to the thirsty occupants of the hotel at inflated prices. Those that can afford it buy and others take the highly chlorinated water at the swimming pool carefully, as the eyes of the Hutus on the street penetrate through their skins.

Survival becomes more difficult because of lack of money. The money from most of the refugees has gone into the pocket of the hotel manager. None of them can step out because of their identity. The only solution is to get a banker to help transact with the bank at this period. Louis Rugerinyange, a reliable and respected employee of Bank of Kigali, has bank receipts for those who have Bank of Kigali accounts. These receipts are signed by those inside the Mille Collines, and then Rugerinyange goes to the bank in Gitarama, 45 km from Kigali, to make withdrawals and bring them back to the hotel.

This helps the refugees to ward off any threat of eviction from the manager. The committee tries to outsmart the manager but at their peril. They only aggravate their sufferings. On May 18th, 1994, the refugee committee sneaks into the hotel manager's office while he is unaware and fax an SOS letter addressed to international organisations, as well as Sabena, the corporate manager of the Hotel des Mille Collines, asking for protection and specifically pleading with the hotel management to stop Rusesabagina from harassing them.

The fax is responded to as soon as they could and Paul Rusesabagina is asked to stop harassing the people and allow them to live freely. The letter makes him more furious and he becomes more violent against the people. To intensify the execution of his plans, he hires Asuman Ngagi, someone that is more openly hostile towards the Tutsis than he is. The lives of the people in the hotel become a living hell. Rusesabagina hides drinks, water, and cookies in the basement for his consumption and entertainment. Unfortunately, there is a bomb scare and they all run to the basement. Christopher, sighting the items, distributes them to the refugees without taking permission or consultation. Rusesabagina catches them and asks for a pound of flesh without blood from Christopher. He calls him and the following conversation ensues: "I asked why he wanted to see me. He told me it was about the incident in the basement. He said if I didn't pay him five thousand francs, he would eject me from the hotel. I begged and said we were all hungry. He said he didn't care" [9] (page 93).

None of these actions is feasible for Christopher because sending him out means death without trial or an open call to a firing squad. Since he has no hope of payment, Christopher arrives at a negotiating point with him but not without a price. He, more than any other person in the hotel, lives in the constant fear of insecurity. He feels like a marked man. The oppressed therefore have no option but to comply with the dictates of their oppressor because their chance of survival is based on their compliance.

Also, Kamilindi in *Inside the Hotel Rwanda*³, to make matters worse, broadcasts live from the hotel to the Hutus that Tutsis are living inside the hotel, corroborating the earlier announcement made by the radio station. He gives a full and detailed analysis of all the people living there. How Kamilindi can contact the outside world can also be traced to Paul Rusesabagina, his strategy of oppression, and his partial way of leadership that handicaps a set, and empowers another over them. By the time the evacuation of the people to a safe zone is in full swing, the *Interhanwes* already have the information. They block the highway and do not allow the people to leave. It takes the full help of the United Nations to take them back to the hotel.

The people make some attempts to leave the hotel to go to the RPF zone or the Government protected zone, but the focus of Rusesabagina is different. He wants those owing him to make promises of payment even after the war and not to take with them anything that belongs to the hotel. He cares nothing about people's survival but only about profit at any cost. The few people in the hotel make it to safety after months of oppression in a place they thought they could call home.

Unfortunately, the discriminatory ideology that led to these problems was introduced by the colonial masters, but it was encouraged by many churches. Religion has been a necessary tool for any Tutsi that desire upward mobility in society due to its intertwined relationship with education. Edouard Kayihura says:

As for religion, I was raised as a Christian in the Catholic Church. This gave me a chance to take the National High School state exam as well as the Catholic exam required to enter seminary school. I cannot say it was always my ultimate dream to be a riser, but Catholicism offered me an opportunity for higher education that might otherwise be off-limits to me as a Tutsi [9] (page 6).

The opportunities available within the confines of the church limits the chances of anyone to revolt against the leadership. The church supports the obedience of every leader in power not minding the principles propagated. They help spread this through theories in schools and seminaries. Every form of hegemony is accepted from the onset, the church sees it as the means to gain relevance. As much as the prose narrative focuses more on the situation inside the Hotel des Mille Collines, the discourse is a microcosm of the nation during the genocide. The cascading ripple effects of every decision before they all arrived at the hotel was very potent to the state of affairs inside the hotel.

According to Dilwar Hussain [10], "over the past two decades, a growing body of research has demonstrated that writing about traumatic or stressful events or experiences have a positive impact on physical, behavioural and psychological health." Expressive writing provides a secure way of purging one's emotional experience without the risk of a negative impact from the other's inappropriate response. It

³ *Inside the Hotel Rwanda*: Edouard Kayihura's Inside the hotel Rwanda: The Surprising True Story and Why It Matters Today.

creates the opportunity for more cognitive processing and integration of traumatic experiences in memory. It leads to higher emotional awareness and fosters better regulation of emotion and coping with distress.

The above is evident in Marie Béatrice Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter, the Ordeal of a Rwandan Refugee in Zaire*. "One day when I was on the verge of cracking, I took a pen and began to write down everything that was in my heart. I described the suffering of Muhawe and the other children, who, like him, were starving and whose graves lined the long road into exile. I described the tragedy of the old women who lived alone in plastic blind é riddled with holes, and the suffering of the street children of Bukavu who lived by begging. I imagined the horror experienced by the young RPF soldier who, back from the war, found that the militias had exterminated his entire family. I spoke of the murder of my cousin Laurent and my mother's friend Nyirarukwavu. I made a habit of writing so that people could know and break their silence, but also to stop my own pain. I often wept while I wrote, but when I had finished I felt comforted." [7] (page, 78).

The events leading to the Rwanda genocide are a multiplication of catastrophes. She projects the challenges that ordinary people face after fleeing the Rwandan genocide, being housed in cramped camps built for refugees in Zaire, and being caught up and struggling for survival in Laurent Kabila's war of 1996 and the rebels' armed conflict of 1997. It also demonstrates that many individuals are caught in the maelstrom, including the Hutus. The story is that of a person who finds herself like so many others, in the whirlwind of savage conflict of her time. Newbury Catharine and Newbury David attest that the central focus of the novel is the condition of the Rwandan refugees. It is written in plain language, and its burning honesty makes it an intensely personal account. Yet, more than a personal story, it is a collection of horrifying stories told by a victim and an observer [11].

For example, while giving accounts of how kids and people generally handled the adverse conditions, her explanations are mostly vibrant in their dreadfulness. For instance, a young girl comes to be so withered and fatigued that she gives in, with death appealing to her rather than escaping. Here she explains how difficult the young girl finds it to embrace life. In another instance, a teenage girl decides to proceed with a swifter clan but meets her Waterloo at a bridge. The fall of Kigali is not attended with the dearth of extremism, as she is enmeshed with the culpable and blameless as they run to Zaire, known in the present day as The Congo. The "genocidaires" continue the hunt to exterminate the refugees as a reprisal. She is adequately skilled to see and keep records as the paradox of the Rwandan society engulfs her and others in revulsion away from respite. The cover made available by lots of Zairians makes survival possible for her, in fact, the vast majority dies in Zaire, rather than in Rwanda, with the rest of the world turning a blind eye. Marie Béatrice Umutesi's tale gives a pointer to the will to survive and the resoluteness of the human spirit. It is also an additional charge on the conspirators

and schemers of the dreads and those who refused to help. Presumably, Marie Béatrice Umutesi's tale is devoid of bias, in the face of fear for one's life and one's wards for several days of hunger, killings and deprivation. The resolve to survive, in spite of the pressure on her mind, one wonders how she could still document her journey full of sardonic wit while detailing the woe and hostile occasions [12].

Furthermore, the attendance of the political hegemony to trauma is vividly represented in various ways in *Surviving the Slaughter*⁴. For instance, with a five-year-old witnessing a horrible experience. Laurent remembers a man who runs off, pursued by other people with spears. He fights back vigorously until he has no spear left. He decides to hide under a pile of wood for safety. A man sees him from the hillside and exposes him. He is discovered and killed. The experience leaves an indelible mark on the young man. It is a pictorial representation of the trauma that he grows with. For Marie Béatrice Umutesi, her ethnic affiliation opens her to various traumatic experiences. She constantly sees dead bodies as she moves from one town to another, running away from rebels. Her heart is terrified she might not make it out of Zaire alive. She is psychologically and physically exhausted and stops menstruating after a few months of arrival in Zaire. This health challenge points to how her body reacts to her mental state. Trauma is multifaceted, it can be mental, physical, emotional or physical etc.

In *Surviving the Slaughter*, at a phase, it is the Hutus that were harassed. One of such experiences is captured when she goes to harvest sweet potatoes on the farm without the permission of the relevant authorities. The law is to seek permission to do such, as punishment for disobedience is public humiliation and flogging. She cannot overlook her family's hunger, as her father is in jail. In consonance with expectations, her escapade is discovered; she gets eight lashes in the public glare, with her buttocks exposed without considering she is engaged to be married [7] (page 8). Marie Béatrice Umutesi's aunty is subjected to hardship because of her identity.

Also, in *Surviving the Slaughter*, before the genocide started in full force in 1994, Marie Béatrice Umutesi receives so many bad news about the crimes perpetrated by hoodlums in rural communities as there is a sudden rise in criminality. She recounts as follows, "the first case I heard was that of a woman from Masango killed by her father and his wives over land. At Nyamabuye, a few months later, a man killed his two children and his sister's fiancé because they wanted part of the insurance money given to the man after the accidental death of his first wife" [7] (page 41).

After a while, Marie Béatrice Umutesi believes that the situation of things will improve. Alas, she waits in vain. The night she hears about the death of the president, she refuses to believe. The exploded grenades and gunfire confirm that the settlement of scores begins. It is tended with heavy casualties,

⁴ *Surviving the Slaughter*: Marie Béatrice Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter: The ordeal of a Rwandan Refugee in Zaire*.

and no one is safe, especially with the vacuum President Habyarimana's death had created. She tunes to Radio Rwanda around six in the morning to listen to the news. She hopes against all reason that Habyarimana is just severely injured, but not dead, they will report it. Sadly, she hears a report confirming his death. They order Rwandans to stay at home until further orders are received. She expects the country to be controlled by an interim government, but the information she gets points to the fact that her survival is near impossible. Within 48 hours, she receives the news of the death of several people. Her police officer friend, and her neighbour, Claudette, a young Hutu widow, is killed alongside her daughter. Supera, who works close to her office, dies with not less than twelve people who seek refuge in her home. The news leave Marie Béatrice Umutesi and her entire household petrified. The horrifying news keeps coming daily. She laments thus:

Two days earlier I learnt that the militia had killed Musema, a friend who worked at Inades - Foundation...another piece of bad news awaited us at house. Vianney, Goretti's brother, had been killed getting out of his car at a gas station in Kanombe [7] (page 54).

Communications are not limited to death but also from militias who boast of the number of people they kill to curry respect and create fear in the people.

Another experience that leaves her traumatised is that of a man who rejects her help outrightly on the way to the refugees' camp. She narrates her experience thus:

I managed to slide two tablets into his mouth. He used his last bit of strength to spit them in my face. For him, death was probably welcome. At least he was going to rest and forget the Hell he had been living in every day. I had to accept leaving him to die on the road. Every time I found myself unable to help, I was disgusted. [7] (page 185).

Like this man, several other people reject the offer to help. They are too exhausted to continue the journey. They also do not have the will to live any longer. This rejection leaves her with bitterness in her heart and tears in her eyes. She finds it difficult to believe their level of hopelessness.

Virginie, Marie Béatrice Umutesi's niece, survives death by a whisker. She is running for her life from INERA with a young boy. They attempt to wait and adjust her pagnes when they encounter a rebel that almost kills her with a Strim. Unfortunately, the boy she is running with is decapitated. She sees his head rolling away from his body. She is left feeling distressed and the site plastered in her heart. Closely related, Marie Béatrice Umutesi finds it difficult to sleep at night because she sees refugees falling like flies from unknown sicknesses. The camps are overcrowded and help is not forthcoming. During the day, she thinks over her ordeals and the possible way forward. This is responsible for numerous nightmares at night [7] (page 145).

The experiences at the refugee camps in Zaire are appalling since different people are accommodated on the campgrounds. According to Marie Béatrice Umutesi:

In addition to the practical problems, we were confronted

with constant threats to our safety. The great majority of Hutu of all classes had left Rwanda when the rebels took power. This meant that in the camps, bandits, ministers, bankers, assassins, businessmen, simple peasants, and soldiers lived side by side, and victims lived with those who had persecuted them in time past [7] (page 79).

With this type of arrangement, people's lives are in total shambles. Children are exposed to early sexual education. Rape cases are on the high side resulting in teenage pregnancies and AIDS. People lose their lives to pilfering. The health situation of the camps is beyond human control. There is little or no provision for defecating and menstrual hygiene. It results in an outbreak of several diseases since there are no hospitals, and lives are lost. Unfortunately, death is so rampant that it becomes a norm. People are buried in their hundreds daily. Mothers leave their young children to fend for themselves. It is beyond the control of anyone in the camps. Marie Béatrice Umutesi attends more meetings and funerals during her stay in Tingi-Tingi. She describes her experience partly thus: Death was so close at Tingi-Tingi that we made jokes about it. When someone died, we wrapped him in a white pagne donated by Doctors Without Borders and took him to the cemetery, carried on the shoulders of four men. Every time that I come across a cortege, often limited to the four porters I would glance at the body to see if it were a child or an adult that they were taking [7] (page 151).

The death toll keeps increasing because of the numbers of people trooping in and the management of the camp becomes difficult. This situation keeps affecting her psychologically. Similarly, Marie Béatrice Umutesi in *Surviving the Slaughter*⁵ experiences flashbacks that inflict pain on her heart. She describes one of such as follows: "Even now, more than a year later, the image of this young girl haunts me and with it the feelings of futility and revulsion that I felt every time that I found myself faced with the death that lurked all around me and against which I was utterly powerless" [7] (page 166). Her pain is internal and it is beyond the death of the young girl. Her inability to save the girl inflicts on her mind a form of pain that keeps reoccurring.

Marie Béatrice Umutesi in *Surviving the Slaughter* lives in fear as a result of a lingering tormenting memory. This she describes thus:

Machetes frightened me. When I had one in my hand, I imagined what would happen if I suddenly went crazy and hurt someone or hurt myself. Then I put it down right away. After the genocide, when I met someone with a machete, I wanted to run away, even if he didn't show any hostility toward me. I tried to convince myself that all these fears were infantile, without any logical basis, but in spite of everything I kept my fear of machetes [7] (page 207).

This fear from the past is disrupting her life and inflicting pain on her presence.

⁵ *Surviving the Slaughter*: Marie Béatrice Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter*: The ordeal of a Rwandan Refugee in Zaire.

4. Conclusion

These prose narratives have been able to depict harsh realities of war. The writers have established postcolonial disillusionments and its cons, the hazards of violence and various traumatic experiences. They foreground that what happened in Rwanda was real, they were actual witnesses and the problems associated with the genocide are still lingering. They believe the world needs to understand that some of the versions propagated are not seemly so. The Hotel des Mille Collines was not a place of pleasure during the genocide, rather a place where people struggled to survive. Factually, the genocide did not only affect the Tutsis, some Hutus also suffered during the genocide and the refugee camps after the genocide was not a safe haven.

Author Contributions

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Biography



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Research Field

Abimbola Afeyisetan Ayo-Afolayan: Creative Writing and Literary Criticism