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From Insolent Fratricide to Outrageous Genocide: Interethnic War and the Exorcisation of the Injustice of War in Eugène Ebodé's *Souveraine Magnifique*

By Pierre Eyenga

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Introduction

Speaking about the novel, Michel Zéraffa states that 'it is the first art form that signifies man in an explicitly historical-social manner' (1971: 16). As such, it cannot be disconnected from human facts since its vocation is to 'speak of man and the world in its entirety' (Mveng, 2010: 350). Terrorist violence and war in particular are part of the current issues that the novelist examines through their multiform representations in a world in the grip of barbarism: attacks on Charlie Hebdo; truck attacks in France; explosive charges in Sousse, Tunisia, and at Brussels airport; shooting at students in a college in the United States; inter-ethnic war in Rwanda in 1994... This raises the nagging question of whether literature is really an effective means of denouncing the injustice of war or of stigmatizing its inappropriateness, if 'the committed writer knows that to unveil is to change and that one can only unveil by planning to change' (Sartre, 1953: 27)?

Edmond Cros's sociocritical approach sheds light on our quest for the meaning of Eugène Ebodé's narrative. This reading frame of reference "is interested in what the text [...] transcribes, that is to say, in the way it is incorporated into history [...], at the level of forms" (Cros, 2003: 55). The challenge of this approach is based on the argument that "the text of a novel is not limited to expressing a meaning that is already there. Through the work of writing, it modifies the previous balance of meaning. It both refracts and transforms social discourse" (Mitterand, 1980: 7). Two essential axes articulate Cros' approach: the phenotext and the genotext. Phenotexts are "to be considered as formulas of signifiance in natural language, as successive reworking and recasting of the fabric of language" (Cros, 2003: 55). These are the textual indices or signifiers that convey meaning. The genotext, on the other hand, concerns the generation of the text. It "corresponds to ungrammaticalized enunciation, in the sense that this enunciation has not yet been formulated" (Cros, 2003: 53). Our contribution is divided into three parts. The first examines the semantic contours of the chronotope. In the second part, we examine the aesthetic components involved in the narrative of the Rwandan genocide. The last part examines the message underlying the novelist's worldview.

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I. The Chronotope in the Dynamics of the War Narrative

The etymon chronotope refers to the relationship between time and space at work in the narrative. In the chronotope of literary art, "the fusion of spatial and temporal indices into an intelligible and concrete whole takes place" (Bakhtin, 1978: 235). In other words, in art and literature, "all spatio-temporal definitions are inseparable from each other, and always carry an emotional value" (Bakhtin, 1978: 384). Time and space are thus combined to provide the background for the narration of a young woman's atrocious memories from twenty years ago in a Rwanda metaphorically referred to as the 'Land of a Thousand Hills'. Under this title, we distinguish between time as a characteristic factor of the victims' feelings and the dates that inscribe the narrative in the African lived reality.

a) The space-time relationship: a reason for the secretion of atrocious memories

The violence of the war between the brothers has spread horror everywhere and the victims remain deeply traumatized, like the now orphaned Sovereign Magnificent. In retrospect, her youthful memory is marked by overwhelming pain: 'I was eight years old in 1994; I had a father and a mother... She was waiting for my little brother... Twenty years have gone by and I

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cannot come to terms with their absence. Twenty years have gone by and I cannot come to terms with their absence." At the time she begins to relate her sad misadventure in the Land of a Thousand Hills, Sovereign Magnificent is twenty-eight years old. But the time of the 'shortening of the cockroaches', as the Shorts call it, remains dependent on the misfortune endured for a long time by a child struck with the seal of infamy by those whom she esteemed and in whose house she was playing a few days before. Moreover, she does not hide her frustration from her interlocutor: 'these are memories that come back to me like the smell of dry seasons, it breezes me' (SM, 62). The narrator recalls the days of tragedy, remembering the passage from a citizen's existence to a posture of cadaverous subsistence because of her fellow citizens' passion for war. She will speak in these words: 'in a hundred disastrous days and a hundred horrible nights from April to July 1994, a million human beings were passed over by weapons but, above all, by machetes'. (SM, 24).

In Ebode's story, the space-time diptych allows the reader to reconstruct the psychological posture of crisis in which the eponymous character Sovereign Magnificent is immersed. The space is described as horror on stage, so much so that the pejorative vision it offers haunts the brave minds. As she flees to Bukavu, the narrator remembers a macabre setting: 'In other places, it was not the red colour of the laterite that was obvious, but that of the blood of the victims. Bodies of women and men lay here and there along our route' (SM, 86). The space that once offered superb tourist views is transformed into a site where the appalling human insanity is enthroned: it is the time of betrayal that is pointed out, since it translates a kind of psychic stagnation that has become natural among Rwandans who, only yesterday, behaved as friends. The space bears the mark of this betrayal when the narrator specifies that: 'the murderers did not hasten to give the corpses a burial, they left them to rot in the sun so that the flies and vultures could get hold of them' (SM, 87). The reader then witnesses the time of stagnation; it is singled out by the discriminatory vision that now governs inter-human relations. It is also a time of death. It plunges the young woman into the meanders of the pride shown by the ruthless Shorts towards their Long brothers.

Moreover, Ebode's narrative is full of descriptive periphrases that punctuate the text and caricature the murderous time generated by lawless reactionaries: '[moment] of the final devastation or extermination of the Longs'; 'harvests of skulls and hocks' (SM, 47). Chronological time, for its part, obeys a senseless division into years or seasons that better describe the momentum of horror and death whose ins and outs it conveys: "years of cactus"; "season of the cutters"; "season of disaster", "season of corpses" (SM, 22, 23, 25). We might as well acknowledge that the lexical field defining time bears the stamp of macabre discourse. Time also makes it possible to unveil a disastrous programme stamped with the seal of horror. The omniscient narrator recalls the circumstances of a destabilizing communication, tinged with violence and trauma, passed by word of mouth between radical Shorts. The war takes place at a frequent interval of ten years, as Sovereign Magnificent explains: 'this idea broke out [...] every ten years like a boil [...] first it was broadcast on the radio, [...] word of mouth spread it like wildfire in the country; that's how it developed' (SM, 47).

It is therefore the time of the manifestation of hatred. It unfolds like a "volcano of hatred" (SM, 56), so much so that Ebodé's heroine struggles to recover from this traumatic shock: "we have suffered atrocities that it is not possible to enumerate or even name, so much so that words have now lost their meaning" (SM, 20). Alongside the atrocious memory that still grieves the victims, there is the weight of solitude. Sovereign confesses her frustration to the journalist who has come to interview her about the war that is eating away at her memory: 'thinking about it all again is killing me! [...] I thought of the season of the cutters, of the hundred days and nights when rivers of blood ran down the green hills of a small central African state" (SM, 23 and 25). To speak of the duration of the trauma, however, is to question the temporal clues that point to what might be seen as a programmed tragedy.

b) Historical dates or the inscription of horror in time

Each war has its own time. Each war takes place in a given time that history necessarily inscribes in the collective memory. If the First and Second World Wars took place between 1914 and 1949, it has to be said that in Ebodé's narrative, the men who sublimate the act of war set themselves a series of exciting dates called to see the death of the other perpetrated. Indefinitely, dates are fixed beforehand, precisely the time for the Shorts to exterminate the Long race, to wipe it off the map of the Land of a Thousand Hills. The narrator confides that this country is only '26338 unfortunate square kilometres' (SM, 19). In the novel, there are secure temporal markers that allude, in retrospect, to the thirty-five years that a terrible civil war lasted. While these real moments place the story in the history of Rwanda, it is important to note that the evocation of the exact dates reflects the period of human capsizing into bestiality. The pronounced seduction for unpunished crime to which the Shorts give in to at the sight of the blood of the Longs is displayed through the dates that symbolize great moments of celebration for Catholic Christians, for example, but which ultimately end up in baths and pools of blood: 'there was the Red All Saints' Day in 1959, but also Christmas 1963, then 1973, and, on a smaller scale, there was Pentecost 1983. The whole cycle was like the aftershock of a badly extinguished volcano... a volcano

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of hate' (SM, 39). The hatred in question underlines the urgency of identifying the belligerents at war with each other

II. On War: Its Actors and Means

We will present our arguments in this second part of the work from two perspectives: first, the belligerents positioned in order of battle and, second, the means convened by the warriors to pass their targets from life to death.

a) From the cause of war to the identification of belligerents in order of battle

One of the curiosities of the scripting of war is that the two parties to the conflict do not agree in principle to the beginning and continuation of the war. The Longs remain faithful to their way of being and doing things, which attracts great jealousy from their brother Shorts. So that only the Shorts want to start a war by legitimizing it with false accusations of bunkering against the Longs. They alone control the trajectories of the war in which they are plunging the Land of a Thousand Hills. They intend to keep control of the country and reside there as masters. Faced with this selfish desire, Sovereign Magnificent retorts to the journalist: "It's nonsense, because we are from here and nowhere else. We have no country but these thousand hills' (SM, 21). If one agrees that every war is based on a specific motive, then one will wonder, at first, about the root causes that justify the war in scripted Rwanda.

It is known, for example, that the terrorist organization Boko Haram is waging war on all Christians by maliciously taking the lives of the inhabitants of Nigeria and the far north of Cameroon. In Jean Metellus' Anacaona, the unrestrained search for gold on the Haitian coast and the desire to establish Western colonial hegemony are the motives for the war between the Spanish colonizers and the various caciquats that make up the island of Ayti. The Haitian genocide is expressed in these terms: 'In 1492, the island of Ayti had about a million inhabitants: ten years later, only a few hundred remained' (Metellus, 1986: 5). As for the suicide bombers in the pay of the Islamic State, they promise war to everyone in order to justify the religious argument that sacrificing one's life by killing thousands of innocent people leads to eternal happiness with Allah. This is also the belief shared by Sihem in Yasmina Khadra's *L'Attentat*. Having secretly joined and honed her skills in the ranks of the militants of the Cause, she manages one day to deceive her husband Amine and blow herself up in a restaurant where students were celebrating the birthday of one of their own. In fact, the war that Sihem claims to be waging is a staging of the secular Israeli-Palestinian conflict through an attack.

Ebodé's novel situates the space-time relationship in a reminder of the causes of the conflict that has struck the Land of a Thousand Hills. The Shorts try to justify their barbaric imposture by displaying it to the world in order to legitimize the tragedy that they perform every ten years, accusing their brothers of every conceivable charge, some as derisory as others. Sovereign Magnificent recalls the words that apparently incriminate the Longs and justify their slaughter by the Shorts:

> Simply because we were born Longs, that we were more slender than the Shorts. They have always attributed to us an indefinite origin, bizarre! In their eyes, we are not legitimate citizens of this country. We are too many! Some have concluded that we should go back home or disappear. (SM, 21)

Through the space-time relationship, the reader is shown the instigators of the war and the charges against the Longs. One of these is their more refined physiological appearance as well as their original cultural practices. All of these assets give rise to a strong inferiority complex among the Shorts because of their negligible size, among other things. Sovereign Magnificent reinforces this argument, which sounds like an argument if you think about it:

> Our slenderness, our long noses, our mages, our rites, our ancient monarchy had created a strange feeling of inferiority in some Shorts. No matter how much we repeated that the monarchy was that of the country and did not belong to any particular group, we were told that we were distinguished by our myths (SM, 53).

Moreover, the crimes that the Longs are accused of are their agricultural practices, which the Shorts find frustrating to say the least. They are accused of owning cows, the use of which is invaluable for their own development, to the detriment of the Shorts. Sovereign Magnificent well remembers the facts that articulate this accusatory motive marked by ill-negotiated jealousy:

> The divine cow [...] gave us its milk for sustenance, its skin to cover or clothe us, its horns to make jewellery or musical instruments, its dung to fertilize our soils and cement the straw, its flesh to feed us and its bones for a whole range of art objects or kitchen utensils (SM, 53).

The last motive that sets fire to the beams between Longs and Shorts is the false accusation itself embalmed with vile slander. A false trial is orchestrated against the Longs in order to question their religious convictions, better their spirituality. They are considered outlaws or religious non-conformists. Describing herself as 'a survivor of a season of horrors' (SM, 54), Sovereign Magnificent confides to her interlocutor the other charge against those of her race: 'we were accused of holding more to these myths than to the person of Jesus Christ, the son of God who died on the cross for us. We had come to be identified with those who had crucified him" (SM, 54).

One can also look to politics to find a major justification for the war waged by the Shorts against the Longs. On the eve of a final war, the accident of

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Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana constitutes an additional but essential motive to motivate the Shorts to accuse the Longs of assassinating the political leader. One of the women 'in charge of innocent jugs' pays attention to this recrimination that she utters in front of the Babazimpa couple: 'Your wife and you, you two Muslims, are you aware that the cockroaches killed the President by bringing down his plane? (SM, 70). By turning this accident into a political recuperation, the Shorts and their wives base their war argument on tribalism and the corollary revenge: the murderers of 'their' President must now be made to pay. The vocal performance of a female water collector illustrates the seriousness of such a revengeful discourse:

> Can you believe it, shooting down the plane the President was on! God in heaven, he still wanted to die at home, almost in his bed [...] President Juvénal Habyarimana was not alone in his plane. It was the rebels; these Longs, whom we will shorten to the last, who did the job (SM, 71).

Since all these elements are sufficient to launch the assault against those who sinned, all that is missing is the examination of the means that will be used by each of the belligerents to bend their opponent to their will.

b) A strange framework for human barbarism

With a view to destabilizing the United States and thus seeing the collapse of the twin towers that used to furnish the World Trade Center and symbolize the power of the United States of America, terrorists have resorted to using aircraft packed with explosives. In the two world wars that have marked the history of the modern world, the use of tanks, very long-range rifles and powerful missiles is noted. For its part, the 'postmodern' terrorist variant 'enshrines the use of chemical, biological and even nuclear materials' (Chaliand, 1998: 9). In *L'Attentat*, Sihem uses an explosive belt to fatally hit as many targets as possible at the risk of her own life. In the light of the above examples, it is clear that the means required to wage a war vary according to the ambitions of the warriors. In the case of the Rwandan war, its singularity lies in the harshness of the war material used to bear witness to the barbarity that characterizes it. The Short massacres use tools that are more easily malleable but whose effects on the human body are immediate. They use sharpened cutters and machetes to 'cut off feet and heads in order to shorten cockroaches' (SM, 56). The Longs, on the other hand, had only the most paltry of equipment, which could nonetheless take a Short's life: 'a few slings, arrows and pieces of wood to defend themselves' (SM, 76-77).

It is important to note, however, that the weapons used by the Shorts are not only material: they also take the form of verbal aggression. The war is therefore also verbal. Indeed, the Shorts make abundant use of an unpleasant lexicon covering the semantic field of horror, as well as of every conceivable word of language secreting a barbaric discourse with a view to intimidating those of the Longs who are still hidden in the surrounding hills. Faced with Souleymane and Sara, a couple of humanist Shorts who assist the Longs in distress by offering them shelter and meals, the water-drawers do not hesitate to assimilate the Longs respondents to animals that must be disposed of. The Longs are described as 'cockroaches scattered in the bush that had to be crushed' (SM, 69). Thirsty for bloodshed, these women, followers of Shaytan the villain, rely on the broadcasting of brutal programmes by the Mille Collines radio station to give a tribal character to the war, planning to carry out their intimidation of the suspected couple:

> You were born Christians, weren't you? Do not forget that! Those who stray from the Christian family will sooner or later regret it. One wonders what keeps us from breaking your hocks, even if you are from the family of the Courts, you still betray the other Christian family (SM, 79).

Some male massacres, on the other hand, compare them to chaff. The Longs are like "those weeds [...] that choke and harm the fertility of the national soil" (SM, 69). They are meant to be the sounding boards for the aforementioned radio, which praises vice and sublimates abuse, as the omniscient narrator shows:

> When the Mille Collines radio station began, well before April 1994, to broadcast its noxious programmes and its calls for murder, which it ended with the same recommendation: 'Cut down all the big trees', the Longs knew that they were being talked about, that they were being singled out, that their days were numbered (SM, 135).

For example, Melchior-Gaspard, a very short artist who was married to a Longue, Dorlothée, will be split into two equal halves: 'with a sharp, cutting gesture, the murderer split Melchior-Gaspard from top to bottom like a coconut' (SM, 136). The figure of comparison visible in this macabre account illustrates the cruelty of the facts and the barbarity of the murderer coupled with his cold-bloodedness. Above all, it shows that the rudimentary war equipment requisitioned by cruel Shorts to pass the Longs from life to death sometimes hurts the naked eye more than the bullet from a simple hunting rifle.

If the war between the Longs and the Shorts stands out as a tumultuous period reminiscent of the misty days of uninterrupted streaming tears and implacable monstrosity, it must be agreed that 'the production of meaning is both the meaning produced and the mode of production of meaning' (Mitterand, 1980: 227).

III. The Genotext or Meaning through Aesthetics

Defining sociocriticism, Edmond Cros states what it should be: "[...] it is first of all a work through

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which the encounter between subject and language takes place" (2003: 52). The encounter in question takes place through two significant attributes: the issues inherent in style or aesthetics and the novelist's vision of the world. We might as well agree that the genotext is articulated through "the semantic latencies of a single statement" (Cros, 2003: 55).

a) From the play of style to aesthetic issues

Style being defined as the way in which a writer appropriates language in order to convey his or her message, the style that characterizes Eugène Ebodé's text is both rich and varied, since "with words, writing creates a meaning that the words do not initially have" (Barthes, 1981: 15). We will highlight the meaning of retrospections, inter-generecity and intertextuality.

i. *Between retrospective narrative and double narration*

Ebode's narrative is offered to the reader in the form of a vast analepsis that Genette still calls retrospection. The whole novel structures a very long dialogue between a journalist and a victim of the genocidal tragedy. The art of the dialogue consists in the narrator informing the reader as much as in narrating the facts endured long ago. The change of narrator, manifested through the passage from "I" to "she", translates an alternation in the narrative: "I am not ashamed of my life" (SM, 13). In this instance, it is Sovereign Magnificent who speaks. But after her intervention, the narrator takes over the narrative as if to replace her: "she lowered her eyes. It seemed to me that she had been more astonished by the last words she had spoken' (SM, 13). The narrative under review is also distinguished by the mixture of genres it offers to read. The double narration can also be seen as a strategy of embedded narrative. Sovereign Magnificent summons it in the form of a tale when, in the middle of the first narrative, she begins the story her father once told her: 'I remember the story my father told me, which pitted a master blacksmith, Muana, married to Cumana, against his neighbour Giromani, the hunter and husband of Kito' (SM, 128). In fact, this story, which recounts the circumstances of the blacksmith's death, aims to expose the irrationality of the trial at the Gacaca.

ii. *Inter-generecity perspective: a bundling of literary genres*

Inter-generality is defined as the mixing of genres in the same story. In addition to the regular use of the oral genre, which sees many Lingala sentences translated into French, such as "Nyakamwe ntavumba mu Bakara! he who is not related to the Bakara is not going to beg them for beer! (SM, 122), Eugène Ebodé inserts the epistolary genre into his text in order to complete the narration of the misfortunes born of the war between sister tribes in the heart of a battered Rwanda. Fatigued, Sovereign Magnificent writes a letter to the journalist, allowing her to learn more about the end of the events of the genocidal war that she has been recounting since the beginning of the novel. The journalist now knows as much as the victim about the contours of the Gacaca in a five-page letter: 'Dear stranger, Gacaca means 'green grass', the grass on which we sat to settle the problems of the hill' (SM, 125).

Ebodé's novel also contains an evocation of other texts that precede it and which he transforms in order to re-tell the horrors of a war on the main victim.

iii. *From paratext to intertextuality: the quotation*

The paratext consists of

A heterogeneous set of practices and discourses - virtually unlimited, synchronically and diachronically variable - whose main function is to surround the text, to announce it, to highlight it (or even to sell it), in short to make it present, to ensure its presence in the world, its reception and its consumption (Genette, 1987: 8).

As for intertextuality, it refers to the 'literal presence, more or less literal, integral or not, of one text in another' (Kristeva, 1979: 87). In Ebodé's novel, the citation paratext escorts the narrative. It is the most obvious example of this type of [intertextual] function, which includes many others" (Kristeva, 1979: 87). It provides the reader with clues that enable him or her to make reading assumptions that are indispensable for understanding the contours of the story even before reading its substance. As a mode of intertextual declension, the quotation opens Ebodé's narrative by giving it a pathetic tone. The evocation of a passage from Victor Hugo's *Les Châtiments* predisposes the reader to the suffering that the central character will face at the heart of the text's society. It turns out that very early in her life, she becomes an eyewitness to the murder of her parents. She will have to suffer the consequences of this trauma until the end of the novel. The words of Hugo's quote then articulate an implicit message:

> Murder by your side, follows the divine service,
> Screaming! Fire on who moves!
> Satan holds the cruet, and it is not wine
> That your ciborium is red (SM, 12)

Another quotation from Denis Diderot that Distinguished Judge Ovingué invokes to describe the moral decrepitude in which Sovereign Magnificent is immersed during the trial can be mentioned. Putting himself in the shoes of the victim, he states that she thinks that 'when hatreds have broken out, all reconciliations are false' (SM, 131). This quote shows that for a young woman who has lost everything like Sovereign, the idea of reconciliation seems biased because it is not thought of but imposed on the guilty. This is why Sovereign 'did not want a generalized forgiveness of the victims' (SM, 131).

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This last part of the analysis shows that it would be reductive for the novelist to confine himself to mimesis. It would be important for him to inscribe his invention in semiosis by conferring a new meaning on the social facts observed in the reference society. From then on, we can share the argument that 'it is in the very form that the novelist gives to the social mode of existence of his characters [...], that the ideological gesture slips in' (Reuter, 1996: 69). Thus, the use of retrospective narrative, double narration, as well as the mixture of genres and the inscription of intertextuality at work in the novel, position the writer above all as an artist, that is, an inventor of new worlds, a creator of discourse. This is crystallized in his ability to let a singular style speak for itself in order to convey his vision of the world on war. So that 'interpreting a text is not a matter of giving it a meaning (more or less well-founded, more or less free), but rather of appreciating the plural it is made of' (Barthes, 1970: 11).

b) Beyond testimony: denouncing the injustice of war

To the question of whether the work of art can constitute a testimony, it is appropriate to answer in the affirmative in that it unfolds as a "discourse on the world" (Mitterand, 1980: 5). As if to say that the world through which the novelist holds up his Stendhalian mirror is bathed in all kinds of horror born of the throes of inhuman behaviour. The testimony that the work claims to bear does not therefore aim to relate the facts in their exactness, but to ward off the evil pointed at in order to allow a harmonious world to emerge that is more just and more worthy of humans. More than just a poignant testimony from an eight-year-old war survivor who witnessed the massacre of her Hutu parents (the Longs) by Tutsis (the Shorts) during the Rwandan genocide of 1994, it is about tracing the furrows of a strong reconciliation likely to foster or bring back peace to a war-torn country. Having managed to escape from the scene of the fratricidal crime thanks to the good auspices of a court, Souleymane Babazimpa, the 'survivor of the 1994 carnage' will return to the country twenty years after a forced exile and will obtain reparation during the Gacaca, a national meeting that reinstates peace between the belligerent parties. A judge will confirm this: 'if the country returned to the Gacaca, [...], it was to paint our hills with the colours of peace. Our traditions came to the rescue of modernity' (SM, 129). We can therefore share the opinion that literature is an effective means of denouncing the injustice of war by affirming, following Serges Doubrovsky, that it '[...] is the sum of possible answers to the real questions that a man, and through him, an era, a civilization, and ultimately, humanity, asks' (1966: 93). As such, it becomes a postulation of living together.

i. *The postulation of a 'new' living together*

Living together is no longer a new discourse in the global geosphere; rather, it is the content assigned to this way of life that has to put on the diadem of novelty so that it is renewed over time. The variant of living together that places man at the centre of its humanistic concerns is what Dominique Mvogo understands as the ethics of being together. He sees it as 'the imperative of refounding our world to establish a healthy life worthy of man' (2009: 65). In order to take shape and be built harmoniously, this ethic calls for the participation of all stakeholders. This is why Mvogo maintains that it 'requires a minimum of respect for common rules to which everyone must submit' (2009: 65). As a theorist of the discourse on living together, Eugène Ebodé also illustrates himself as a literary activist for the emergence of peace. By scripting human fraternity, he draws the appropriate lines with a view to making them engines for the emergence of a new city. In this space of the new, evils such as barbarism, gratuitous cruelty, tribalism and especially war are no longer allowed. The idea celebrated is thus that of curing man of any nihilistic desire, like the clan divisions that could cause the country to capsize in the escalation of horror. By portraying characters such as Souleymane Babazimpa, an adept of the 'culture of kubana, of cohabitation' (SM, 73), Ebodé attests to her willingness to postulate living together among brothers from different clans within the same homeland. Having just resided for months with this Short, who could have eliminated her and her brothers at any time, Sovereign Magnificent bears witness to the fact that peace results from a patient quest. However, it must involve extraordinary risk-taking: 'At the Souleymane house, I had to hide at the slightest suspicious noise and throw myself under the bed, in the kitchen, behind the pots' (SM, 73).

Moreover, at the height of the inter-ethnic war, Souleymane defies the threats of the Court women and makes the heroine flee to Bukavu, to his brother's house. Having gracefully arrived on the banks of the Ruzizi River, Sovereign meets another Short, Polycarpe Logambugu, who proves to be a kindly helper to her. Subscribing to the argument that 'whether it is a war of liberation or a civil war, war is always a failure of the imagination [since...] the history of Africa and of the world is there to teach us' (Nganang, 2005: 25), Eugène Ebodé sculpts the figure of the ethical man: he is a virtuous man who behaves with everyone indiscriminately; he does not discern the ethnic origins of any one person before coming to the aid of those who are tortured. Sovereign finds in Logambugu the face of such a man: 'He distributed water and food to us. He took the wounded with him and took them in his boat [...] He was subjected to assassination and imprisonment attempts, and received threats from groups that were opposed to his action' (SM, 107).

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Moreover, by mentioning that in 2001 the government promulgated a law proposing that criminals who had confessed to their crimes be tried on the hills, Ebodé highlights the urgent need for every human society to use the force of law to repair the abuses committed against individuals while punishing the guilty. One might as well believe that the materialization of such a postulate requires a relentless fight against all forms of disastrous discrimination aimed at reifying others. A sort of exhortation to greater humanism thus emerges from Ebodé's text.

ii. *Literature and the quest for humanism*

"One only goes to war to finally make peace, says a French proverb (*French Academic Dictionary*, 1839). In other words, when men have allowed their bestial instincts to triumph over reason, nothing but an escalation of barbarism can follow. It is therefore appropriate for them to smoke the peace pipe and thus return to better feelings in order to (re)bring about the shaken calm. This is the argument behind the creation of a work of art. Gaëtan Picon clarifies the contours generated by the literary work by stating that it "[...] offers itself to the mind as an object of interrogation [...]. As soon as it meets a gaze, [it] irresistibly calls for critical consciousness' (1953: 11). The consciousness in question here is defined as a quest: that of a more humane world, in which social actors no longer look at each other as dogs, but as brothers and sisters concerned with the development of their country.

From this point of view, the reconstruction of peace in the heart of a humanly ravaged Rwanda cannot be the sole concern of politicians, any more than it is of novelists. It concerns all stakeholders, first and foremost government institutions. This is why the aim of the Gacaca organisers is to 'mend the country in tatters' (SM, 140). The role of the government becomes indispensable in that it ensures concerted negotiation by bringing it out of the Rwandan ethnic tribulations. It is a question of basing the new life on the virtue of humanism that will restore the city to its former glory. It is for this reason that the government agrees on a number of precautionary measures to restore the threatened peace. It undertakes to 'remove the ethnic references that have appeared on identity cards for too long' (SM, 118). Subsequently, he organizes a public palaver in the form of an impartial customary court to establish responsibility for the genocidal crime. The aim is to punish the guilty parties in accordance with the law. It is at the end of this legal process that the Longs will regain a taste for life.

But the novelist does not stop there in the process of regaining peace in the fictionalized Rwanda. Although Modeste Constellation is sentenced to seven years' imprisonment with the obligation to rebuild the damaged house of the Magnificent, it is the work of the 'NGO Renaître ensemble' that strikes people. In an effort to bring the former enemies back together, it announced the donation of a cow that would belong to both Sovereign Magnificent and Modest Constellation. This animal will oblige them to maintain it out of love and to arouse this virtue around them, for, as the elders say

It is by the chance of birth that we are Long, Short or Very Short; only our actions make us [...] good neighbours or good citizens of our hills and our country. The elders ask us [...] to be reborn together (SM, 149).

Named Doliba by the murderer Donatien, the cow acts as an umbilical cord between the two 'belligerents' of yesterday. It assigns them a mission, that of sowing the seed of true forgiveness while at the same time generating a dose of hope intended to resolutely ward off the reclusive life led by the Longs. The humanism that Ebodé's writing conceals bears the mark of forgiveness. This is seen in the words of Sovereign Magnificent: "around this beast [...] we have, it is true, relearned how to talk to each other [...] Doliba is our rope to get us out of the abyss. It was thrown to us so that we could speak with ourselves" (SM, 166-167).

IV. Conclusion

All in all, Eugène Ebodé's novel is a plea for the advent of a more humanistic world, stripped of the infamous souls that lend themselves to war. It further attests that literature, as a possible answer to the existential questions facing mankind, is an effective means of denouncing the injustice of war. By expunging from the city the outdated ethnic convictions that fuel a visceral hatred between brothers by setting them against each other in the context of a genocidal war, the novelist works to build a blissful humanism that only peace can sustain. Literature thus contributes to a dynamic of living together that is based on ethical virtues such as tolerance and mutual forgiveness, even where war has generated horror and resulted in the loss of many human lives.

Biobibliography

Pierre Suzanne EYENGA ONANA is the author of about sixty (inter)national scientific publications, including "De l'auto-narration à la trame autofictionnelle : significativité sociohistorique de *Les Imparfaits* de Clément Dili Palaï" ; "Stratégies de désaliénation, déficit émancipatoire et modélisation d'un monde alternatif dans *Trop de soleil tue l'amour* de Mongo Beti". Participating in many (inter)national conferences (France 'Dijon and Nancy', Gabon, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso), he teaches, among others, the epistemology of African and African-American literature, literary modalisations of living together and Gender Studies. Co-author of *Le genre dans tous ses états. Perspectives littéraires africaines* (Connaissances et savoirs, Paris, 2017), he is currently working on the publication of two critical works,

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one on the application of sociocriticism to the contemporary Cameroonian novel, and the other on gender.

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