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A matter of lies and death: *Necropolitics* and the question of engagement with the aftermath of Rwanda's genocide

Key words

Biopower; refugee governance; historical injustice; subjugated knowledge; performance; ethics of engagement

Abstract

This article explores Achille Mbembe's notion of necropolitics in conjunction with Avery Gordon's figures of spectres and the haunting of ghosts. These concepts are applied to consider different acts of subversion and resistance, performed in the face of dominant discourses and practices in the realm of refugee governance, which work to silence certain experiences; and in the knowledge that breaking such silences can have deadly consequences. The article is constructed around a single case study, the story of a survivor of Rwanda's 1994 genocide and its aftermath. This story is contextualised historically to illuminate important continuities, from Rwanda's colonisation and colonial governance to contemporary refugee governance regimes. It also highlights some of the particular ways in which women were affected by this history. Against the deadly and silencing effects of contemporary discourses and practices discussed, the article contemplates, following Rosi Braidotti, more affirmative alternatives. These entail questioning the notion of individual identities and being

guided by an ethos of engagement, operating in the awareness of the entanglement of space and time, of life and death, and seeking to overcome the binaries of us/them, truth/lie, fact/fiction, deserving/undeserving, perpetrator/victim, and genuine/bogus refugee that have traditionally shaped global refugee governance regimes.

I. Introduction

On the occasion of a lunch shared by a group of social workers and lawyers from an organisation for refugee protection and support, the conversation turned to what one colleague termed ‘the manipulative nature’ of the Rwandan, Burundian and Congolese refugees and asylum seekers, who at the time formed the majority of the organisation’s service user base. Implying some inherent dishonesty, one social worker pronounced, ‘People from the Great Lakes were born twice. The first time was in Hollywood’ (Hölscher, 2016a). On another occasion, a group of service users from the three countries concerned discussed the challenges they faced in getting the organisation to provide, sometimes desperately needed, legal and social support. Indicating that service users do sometimes adjust their stories to what they think service providers need to hear in order to avail the required support, one group member offered that, ‘it’s not good to lie’ (Hölscher, 2016a). These incidents may serve as a – somewhat blunt – illustration of what a wide range of social work scholars have described and critiqued for decades, namely that social work, like the legal profession, is deeply modern in origin, constitution and outlook; that it continues to perform important control functions in contemporary societies; and that as such, much of its practice continues to be framed by binaries such as us/them, past/present, truth/lie, fact/fiction, deserving/undeserving (see for example, Fraser & Gordon, 2013; Howe, 1994). Accordingly, the everyday activities of many practitioners entail assessing the ‘truthfulness’ of their clients’ accounts of themselves and their current and past circumstances, in order to determine their eligibility - or not – for services. In contexts where one party has been formally empowered to serve as a gatekeeper to that on which the other party depends, the latter may at times draw on informal sources of power – such as the ability to tell their stories

in ways that meet the gatekeepers' requirements, while also seeming to meet the expectation of being *the truth*.

Less attention has been paid to the nature of *the lie* and to what it signifies – that which rests beneath yet eludes social work's demands for facticity; to that which seems impossible or unsafe to tell; and to what happens when people find themselves unable to tell the stories of their lives. This complex is particularly problematic when the stakes can be as high as award of refugee protection on the one hand and repatriation on the other, a tension within which social work practice has been frequently caught (Hölscher, 2016b). The stakes are even higher in the case of refugees from Africa's Great Lakes region, a region with a complex history, including two major wars and four genocides that occurred between 1972 and 2003 (Songolo, 2005, pp.109-110), and which continues to be shaped by historical trauma and lingering conflicts. Thus, the question arises: what if the above-cited remarks serve not only to label an entire group of people as potentially undeserving of support but also remove from sight something much deeper, much more complex, than people's mere attempts to gain access to something they might otherwise be denied?

According to Avery Gordon (2008), historical injustice, violence and trauma make themselves known through *haunting*. Gordon (2008) explains that,

Haunting raises spectres, and ... ghosts appear when the trouble they represent ... is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view ... Haunting and the appearance of spectres ... is one way ... we are notified that what's been concealed is very much alive and present ... Haunting ... [signifies] that moment ... when ... people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving ... when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done (p.xvi; brackets added).

Drawing on Michel Foucault's notion of *subjugated knowledge*, Avery Gordon contends further that 'finding a route' to ways and forms of knowing that have been 'marginalised, trivialised, denied [and] disqualified', that 'finding ... access to ... fugitive knowledge from below and outside' of dominant institutional discourses and practices, and that 'redistributing respect, authority, and the right to representability or generalisability' are a matter of justice (Gordon, 2008, p.xviii; brackets added). In this article, therefore, we contend that there is

something at play that connects people across space and time in ways that may not be immediately apparent. We also want to show how that which connects us breaks up binaries of us versus them, past versus present, truth versus lie, fact versus fiction, and deserving versus undeserving. This, in turn, has ethical implications for institutionalised practices in which certain groups of people find themselves unable to tell their stories to those who ought to listen.

While it is not our intention to make a contribution to the study of Rwanda's 1994 genocide and its aftermath, this episode does constitute our historical reference point and for this reason, we begin our arguments with a brief presentation of Rwanda's history (see Section II: Contextualising Alette's Story). This history, as that of the Great Lakes region more generally, has been presented and interpreted very differently, depending on the particular perspectives of those doing the representing (Songolo 2005). In spite of the impossibility of doing justice to this complexity within the limits of this article, we hope our efforts will suffice in contextualising the single life story around which we have developed our theoretical and ethical arguments. This life story is that of a woman who survived what Marie Béatrice Umutesi (2004) called 'the slaughter' of Rwandans who were accused – many of them falsely – of being responsible for the 1994 genocide (see Section IV: Alette's Story).

Indeed, the process of writing this article began when Alette approached one of the authors, Dorothee, with the request to tell her story. Stating that, 'I am not who you think I am', she offered a point of connection and expressed the hope that this act of sharing might also provide a sense of relief from the hauntings of an untold past. In the interviews that followed, Alette explained how in order to survive, she changed, layer by layer, the person she had grown up believing herself to be, until finally she had taken on a completely new persona, thus having killed, if only metaphorically, her former self. To enable its publication, we changed further identifying details in Alette's story (see Section III: Methodological and Ethical Considerations). We consider the process of multiple reinventions, presented in Sections III and IV, to be a story of subversion and resistance. As such, we contend that her story holds important keys to understanding a form of subjugated knowledge which beckons for a space to articulate and express itself. In (re-)telling and engaging with it, we have sought to reconsider what it means to relate ethically across differences of time, space, geo-social positionings, and the divergent experiences to which these differences give rise.

To explore the potential openings for ethical practice to which Alette's story points, we discuss, in Section V, some of its aspects with reference to a number of interrelated concepts: We interpret the historical context in terms of Achille Mbembe's (2003) notion of *necropolitics*, which denotes a specific formation of *biopower*, namely, 'the subjugation of life to the power of death' (Mbembe, 2003, p.39). In particular, we interpret Alette's reinventions as strategies of survival against the odds of such a global politics and exercises of power, which while using the language of human rights, humanitarian aid and so on, persists in presupposing a 'distribution of human species into groups'; in perpetuating 'the establishment of a biological caesura between the ones and the others'; and thus, in continuing to divide people 'into those who must live and those who must die' (Mbembe, 2003, pp.16-17). Even if figuratively, Alette's reinventions – the killing of her former self – performed as a means of survival in the face of the deadly metanarratives and practices surrounding her, unsettle the meanings of life and death. This is an important theme for Rosi Braidotti (2013), who, in response to the inhumanity of the necropolitical condition, argues for the development of an 'ethos of engagement' with 'the horrors of our time' (Braidotti, 2013, pp.129). Her ideas correspond with the notion of ghosts and the effects of haunting developed by Gordon (2008), and Alette's story convinces us of their relevance within contemporary regimes of refugee governance. We conclude with reflections on the consequences of the choices that survivors of unspeakable violence sometimes make to survive: both for people like Alette – such as the group of service users cited at the opening of this article – and for people unlike Alette – such as the group of service providers cited above, whose right to live may have never been questioned, disregarded, disputed, or taken away.

II. Contextualising Alette's Story

Alette's story is set in the historical context of Rwanda's 1994 genocide and its aftermath. This history itself is located in the wider framework of prolonged violence, including 'four [interrelated] genocides in Rwanda, Burundi and the Congo, all but one of which have gone unacknowledged' (Songolo, 2005, p.109; brackets added). These include 'the genocide of Hutu by Tutsi in Burundi (1972), of Tutsi and Hutu by Hutu in Rwanda (1994) ... of Hutu by

Tutsi in Congo (1996-1997)', and the 'genocidal killing of innocent Hutu civilians' between 1990 and 1994 in the wake of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)'s successive invasions of Rwanda (Lemarchand, cited in Songolo, 2005, p.110). Against the background of these complexities, this section provides some historical reference points for relating to her account.

Alette is from Rwanda, a small, landlocked and densely populated country in Africa's Great Lakes region. Rwanda shares common borders with Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (previously Zaire), Burundi, and Tanzania. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2017), Rwanda had a population of over 7 million people in 1990, a number, which during the 1994 genocide and its aftermath, was decimated to fewer than 6 million. In spite of being considered to be a culturally homogenous society (Amnesty International, 2004), most Rwandans tend to identify with one of three ethnic groups, which prior to the genocide comprised 85% Hutus, 14% Tutsis, and less than 1% Twa (Hintjens, 2013).

The tendency to self-identify along ethnic lines is linked to Rwanda's colonial experience (Mamdani, 2001). Germany was 'awarded' the Rwandan territory in 1884 at the Berlin conference of colonial powers but lost it to Belgium during World War I. Belgian rule was formalised in 1921 under a League of Nations Trusteeship and remained in place until 1962, when Rwanda attained formal independence (Chretien, 2005; Hintjens, 2013). Operating from European ideas about racial difference and hierarchies, both colonial powers exploited pre-existing class divisions to rule Rwanda by constructing Tutsis as Hamitic people and superior to the Hutus, who were ascribed a Bantu origin and considered inferior to the Tutsi, and the Twa, who were judged to be of pygmy origin (Mamdani, 2001; Hintjens, 2013). From the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s, the Belgians made sweeping reforms, culminating in the issuing of identity cards to formalise and codify these categories, thereby creating rigid, racialised boundaries between what had once constituted much more fluid identities and relationships between people (de Lame, 2005). Tensions were exacerbated continuously by the colonial masters' treatment of the Tutsi as an elite, who were granted preferential access to education, employment opportunities and government posts, with the attendant formal privileges and positions of power over the Hutu and Twa. In the process, a wide political and socio-economic chasm emerged (Golooba-Mutebi, 2008; Mamdani, 2001), along with an

increasing consciousness of injustice and sense of grievance amongst the disadvantaged (Adejumobi, 2001).

Rwanda gained independence following general elections held in 1962. These elections were precipitated by what is known as the 1959 Social Revolution (Huggins, Musahara, Kamungi, Oketch & Vlassenroot, 2005). The three intervening years were marked by anti-Tutsi pogrom, during which Hutu groups ‘unleashed ... their pent-up aggression and psychological demeaning suffered under the colonial rule’, driving some 130,000 Tutsis into exile (Adejumobi, 2001, p.14). The elections gave the Hutu majority the opportunity to form a government, which ‘practiced a politics of exclusion and repression’ (Goolooba-Mutebi, 2008, p.1), in the course of which members of the Tutsi minority were eliminated systematically from the army and government posts (Hintjens, 2013). This process was facilitated by continuing the colonial practice of recording the ethnicity of all Rwandan citizens ‘on official records and identity documentation’ (Goolooba-Mutebi, 2008, p.13). Discrimination against the Tutsis continued until, by 1993, an estimated 600,000 refugees were living in Rwanda’s neighbouring countries and beyond (Hintjens, 2013), where most of whom were denied both full citizenship rights and the rights of return to Rwanda.

Many Ugandan-based refugees joined the Uganda People’s Defence Force, formerly called the National Resistance Army, where many attained leading positions (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2004). This created opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, contacts, experience, and the necessary skills, and to make significant material and financial contributions, to organise as a rebel movement, the Rwandan Patriotic Front. The RPF, backed by the Ugandan Government, invaded Rwanda on 1 October 1990 (Goolooba-Mutebi, 2008). The invasion began a civil war that killed thousands and displaced hundreds of thousands, mainly from the majority Hutu ethnic group (de Lame, 2005; Lemarchand, 2005; Newbury, 2005; Umutesi 2004). It culminated in a peace agreement, signed on 4 August 1993 in Arusha, Tanzania. This agreement envisaged a multi-party system, a broad-based transitional government that would include the RPF, and was expected to end the war (Prunier, 1999).

Instead, the conflict was exacerbated when on 6 April 1994, a plane carrying the Rwandan President and several other top political and army leaders was shot down on their return from power sharing negotiations in Arusha. A crisis committee of senior army staff was formed and assumed power on the same day. They blamed the RPF for the president’s assassination

and triggered mass killings of moderate Hutus and the genocide of Tutsis (Mamdani 2001; Prunier, 1999; Umutesi, 2004; Newbury 2005). According to Mamdani (2001), the genocide was the result of both political and military planning and popular participation, with an ‘agenda imposed from above’, which, ‘to the extent it resonated with perspectives from below’, turned into ‘a gruesome reality’ on the ground (p.7). In July 1994, the RPF took control of the capital Kigali and claimed victory over the Rwandan army. This ended a catastrophe that had lasted just over three months and claimed between five hundred thousand and one million lives (Adelman, 2003; Hintjens, 2013; Mamdani, 2001; Prunier, 1999).

Following the RPF victory, many Tutsi refugees returned to Rwanda. At the same time, due to fears of revenge attacks, an estimated two million Hutus fled the country (Olusola, 2008). About one million of them took refuge in then-Zaire, with many - over half of women, children and the elderly (Chaulia, 2010; de Lame, 2005; Tripp, 2005) - finding shelter in several dozen camps that had sprung up along that country’s eastern border (de Lame, 2005; Umutesi, 2004). In July 1994, ‘a virulent cholera epidemic killed more than 80,000 refugees’ in the eastern Zairean camps (Leopara & Goodin, 2011, p.263). A gender dynamic created particularly precarious situations for female-headed households, who, like those headed by unaccompanied minors, ‘were found to have less access to relief items, such as food and shelter material, than the households headed by men’, exposing them to heightened risk of malnourishment and starvation (Toole, 1994, p.3; see also Umutesi, 2004). In addition, water and fire wood generally had to be collected from outside of the camps, chores generally performed by women and children, placing them at a wide range of risks, including sexual violence (de Lame, 2005; Hamilton, 1999; Umutesi, 2004).

The refugee camps also comprised members of the pre-1994 party political, army and government structures, as well as Hutu militias, with some ‘ten to fifteen percent’ of the camp-based population being estimated to have ‘participated actively in the genocide’ (Passant, 2009, p.7; see also de Lame, 2005; Newbury, 2005). In some of the camps, members of Rwanda’s pre-1994 elites and their families had to access privileges which ordinary refugees did not share, including preferential access to space, building materials, sanitary facilities, food, and rare paid positions within the administration of basic services (de Lame 2005; Lemarchand, 2005; Umutesi, 2004). These privileges and the authority which

former leaders continued to enjoy in the camps, had positive spin-offs for the safety and chances of survival of women within their families, suggesting that intersectionalities such as those between gender and class continued to matter even under the most exceptional circumstances. It was also important for the subsequent course of events that the presence of militias and members of the pre-1994 party political, army and government elite led to the innocent civilian majority of refugees being associated, wrongfully and en masse, with the *genocidaires* (French, 2005; Hintjens, 2013; Hovil, 2008; Newbury, 2005).

Nonetheless, the presence of the *genocidaires* in Zaire refugee camps posed a major security threat, and forced repatriation of the refugees emerged as the intervention of choice - a decision that was endorsed by the UHCR, Zaire and major donor countries (Adelman, 2003; de Lame, 2005; Habimana, 2005; Newbury, 2005). In August 1995, the Zairian army made several unsuccessful attempts to enforce a return of the refugees to Rwanda, but instead displaced some 100,000 refugees more deeply into Zaire (Adelman, 2003). By late 1996, militants within the camps had organised repeated cross-border raids into Rwanda (Prunier, 1999), causing the Rwandan army to invade and destroy the eastern Zaire refugee camps. Whitaker (2002) reported that 'the violence forced roughly 600,000 refugees back into Rwanda and an unknown number into Burundi, with another 300,000 refugees heading west into the dense forests of central Zaire', where it is estimated that the majority either succumbed to exhaustion, starvation, disease, or 'were massacred by advancing Zairian rebels and Rwandan troops' (p.7; see also Lemarchand, 2005; Umutesi 2004). Other refugees fled to western Tanzania (Stein, 1997).

Of particular concern in this context are the roles of the international media, major Western powers and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. For example, scholars contend that the mass killing of refugees in then-Zaire's camps was known to, but simply not adequately reported on, by key Western media outlets (French, 2005; Lemarchand, 2005; Newbury, 2005), as well as being known to, but eliciting neither condemnation nor intervention by, key decision makers in the United States, European Union, and United Nations (Lemarchand, 2005; Newbury, 2005; Songolo, 2005). Reports also suggest that the UNHCR and the European Union sent representatives to an impromptu refugee camp of some 100 000 persons in central Zaire, which, instead of receiving aid, was destroyed within days of these visits (Songolo, 2005; Umutesi, 2004). There are even reports of a bounty being

placed by the UNHCR on the heads of Rwandan refugees, encouraging local Zaireans to capture and return them for repatriation (Tripp, 2005; Umutesi, 2004). In Tanzania, the newly arriving refugees were caught in yet another repatriation campaign when ‘on December 6, 1996, the government of Tanzania, along with UNHCR, issued a directive that all Rwandese refugees must leave Tanzania by 31 December 1996’ (Murison, 2002, p.7). To escape forced repatriation, an unknown number of Rwandans left only to re-enter the camps claiming to be ‘Burundians or dispersed’ refugees (Whitaker, 2002, p.3). A few, in helter-skelter, were able to leave Tanzania for Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Mozambique, and South Africa, disguised their nationality and registered as Congolese or Burundian refugees (Yonekawa, 2018).

Twenty-five years on, large-scale violence in Rwanda has stopped. The new Rwandan ruling elites have embarked on re-building the country’s infrastructure, developing its economy, delivering effective public services, as well as re-orienting the country towards a system that privileges national unity (Golooba-Mutebi, 2008). Yet, some Rwandans still flee the country because, it is alleged, those in positions of power commit human rights abuses to silence, control, or repress government opponents and critics, and reports of threats against and attacks on outspoken Rwandans abroad continue to emerge (Greenbank, 2019; Human Rights Watch, 2014; York, 2017). And while there are consistent efforts to commemorate the 1994 genocide, formal acknowledgement, among others, of the atrocities committed in its aftermath against Rwandan refugees in then-Zaire, is still lacking. It is against this backdrop that in December 2011,

The UNHCR issued a formal statement declaring that Rwanda is a safe country for Rwandan refugees to return, thereby requesting their host countries to apply a cessation clause that would, among other things, render their refugee status revoked and their refugee rights nullified. In its recommendation, the UNHCR stressed repatriation as the most favourable option over local integration and resettlement (Kavuro 2015, p.1; see also Yonekawa, 2018).

All of this makes it difficult, even dangerous, for survivors of the 1995-1997 atrocities committed against Rwandan citizens in the territory of then-Zaire, to speak about the killings of their relatives, friends, neighbours or acquaintances, which they may have either witnessed directly, or the news of which they may have received weeks, months, or even years later - if they received any news at all. With this knowledge being largely subjugated, the legacy of

Rwanda's complex and troubled history would be that whether as victims, witnesses or perpetrators of violence, some Rwandans would continue to be haunted by troubled memories, likely to pass the country's shared, unspoken historical trauma down the generational line.

III. Methodological and Ethical Considerations

Alette is one of those Rwandans whose stories may be considered difficult, even dangerous, to tell, and thus, as comprising the sort of knowing which Gordon (2008) describes as having been 'marginalised, trivialised, denied [and] disqualified' within the context of broader historical injustices (p.xviii; brackets added). In other words, it exists 'below and outside' of dominant institutional discourses and practices, and to afford it 'respect, authority, and the right to representability or generalisability' is a matter of justice (Gordon, 2008, p.xviii). That Alette proposed to talk about these events as part of telling the story of her life, situates the empirical methodology upon which this article rests within the genre of life story research. Life story research is a type of narrative inquiry, which is 'created and co-constructed through the stories people tell about their lived experiences, and the meanings they give to those experiences over time' (Etherington, 2009, p.225). Miller (2000) contends that life stories are well-suited to an exploration of the intersection of personal trajectories with broader historical patterns and social structures. The methodology has been used in post-conflict societies to understand the life experiences and perceptions of oppressed or subaltern voices (Ssali & Theobald, 2016) and to express counter-memories, to articulate counter-narratives and develop counter-histories as a response to Foucault's notion of subjugated knowledge (Hoosain, 2018).

Alette approached Dorothee with the suggestion of telling her story in the context of a larger study on cross-border migration, justice and social work, which employed, among other ethnographic methods, life story research (Hölscher, 2016). Seven individual, unstructured interviews were conducted in the English language, which Alette spoke fluently, thereby enabling her to determine content, pace, ordering and style of the conversation. With Alette's consent, these interviews were recorded and transcribed, and she was actively involved in

reviewing the transcripts. For the purpose of this publication, the three authors – all of whom have a background of (forced) migration and of working with (forced) migrants – opted to engage collaboratively with Alette’s story by means of a reflexive dialogue. To this end, Alette consented to participate further in order to respond to our – the authors’ – suggested interpretations and reflective questions in an iterative process that continued over several weeks. In all these respects, Alette’s role went beyond merely validating the contents of transcripts and interpretations presented to her, as is commonly afforded to qualitative research participants. Instead, Alette was critically engaged in the development of a shared understanding of her account ‘through the use of reflexivity; mutual and sincere collaboration’ (Etherington, 2009, p. 226), producing a reciprocal process of shared learning.

In her testimony, *Surviving the Slaughter*, Marie Béatrice Umutesi (2004) tells the story of her life and experiences of the same historical context and events that Alette, too, wanted to share. In the foreword to a special issue dedicated to the book, Aili Mari Tripp (2005) points out that by its publication, Umutesi ‘made herself a potential target of those in positions of power who wish to silence her’ (p.90). Alette did not want to become such a target. Yet despite considerable concerns about her own safety and that of her family, she encouraged the publication of part of her narrations and our dialogues around them. The main motive she provided for this was a desire for her story *to be heard*, as part of a quest for *justice*. Of this, Alette continued to find herself deprived, on account of feeling silenced in the context of a regime in which Rwanda’s post-1994 refugees continue to live with fears of repatriation. This merely underscores a common practice in life story research, which is to either change or withhold all details that might lead to the identification of research participants or any of their significant others (Miller, 2000). We certainly have done all we could to maintain confidentiality (in Alette’s case) and anonymity (in the case of her significant others) and to ensure that neither are placed at risk through the publication of this article.

IV. Alette’s Story

In this section, we present Alette’s story as a narration, which, although interspersed with our - the three authors’ - comments and reflective questions, we preferred to otherwise remain

intact, rather than integrating it with either the historical accounts presented in Section II or the theoretical discussions, which follow in Section V. Our intention is to afford Alette the space to present her story according to, and in her own terms; that is, to assume as active a role in the re-authoring of her life as possible within the constraints of academic writing. However, we did align Alette's account with the timelines provided in the historical section, thereby paralleling the events presented there, albeit from Alette's singular perspective. We also flagged key ideas to be discussed in the final, theoretical section of this article, namely the haunting of ghosts and the intertwining of life and death, of past and present, and the blurring of what people can, should, and ought not to be, do, or say under conditions of necropolitics.

Alette stated that in 1994, she was about sixteen years old and cared for by her aunt and uncle, who were wealthy enough to look after her, in addition to their own children. Her uncle held a high-level governmental position in one of Rwanda's south-eastern provinces. Alette recalled that the time she first realised that she was Hutu when she enrolled in high school and had to complete forms that required her to enter her ethnic group affiliation. At the time, this did not seem important to her: she was not interested in politics. This changed on the night of 6 April 1994, which she described as follows:

A night anyone cannot forget. We were up, talking, packing for school, and then just all of the sudden, we heard that the president was killed. My uncle, you could see his face change. He was so confused, he just stopped talking and went to sleep, and then us, we continued listening to the radio.

How did the genocide play itself out where she lived? For one, there was no more talk of going back to school. Killings began a few days later, however, due to previous conflicts and displacements, there were not many Tutsis in the area. Because of this, Alette said, it was not the kind of slaughter as in other parts of the country. Some Tutsis found refuge in her family's compound but later left. There was a childhood friend, whom Alette saw being marched past her home on his way to being killed. There was a sense of disorientation, fear and despair. Those doing the killings, according to Alette, were –

Young rude boys who did not have anything to do, who were not involved anyhow in the society, but also the *Interahamwe* militia. These people were so dangerous. They

could not be criticized for anything they did, however evil. Whoever tried to feel compassion or pity towards the Tutsis was also treated as them and was killed.

When several weeks later, the RPF was advancing towards their area, Alette's uncle decided that it was time to leave. He knew that having held a government post was going to put him and his family at risk of retribution, and who had done what to save whom from whom was not going to matter. After all, it had not mattered when it was time for *Others* to be killed. He was the owner of a car and had considerable savings in US dollars, so the expectation was that petrol could be purchased, movement should be effortless and safe, border guards could be bribed, and safety would be reached. To Alette, the uprooting felt a bit like going on a holiday. In this respect, she was still a child of privilege, but this changed when she reached the Rwanda's eastern border. Most of what they travelled with was confiscated by Zairean soldiers: car, luggage, dollars. This was when Alette realised that,

When you leave your home and go to another country, you cease being what you were and become somebody else. People treat you however they like, with no rescue from wheresoever.

Alette and her family settled in one of the refugee camps that were springing up on the eastern Zairean border. During the July 1994 cholera epidemic, there was a rumour that it was not the cholera killing people, but that it was Tutsi who had previously fled to Zaire and who were selling poisoned food to the newly-arrived Hutu refugees. At the time, Alette shared this widely held belief. She recounted that,

When you start feeling stomach pains you just go sit by the dead bodies because you were next: there was no recovering. There was no treatment in the camp due to the lack of medical facilities. Corpses were collected, put in a truck and dumped in a common grave.

How deeply can pain run? What does pain enable people to do to one another, or to accuse one another of doing? Might pain become more bearable from thinking there is a blameworthy *Other*, or from pinning hope on the illusion that the *Other's* disappearance might make the pain disappear, too?

Alette described the refugee camps as initially bare but that once the UNHCR intervened, shelters were set up and food and other assistance began to be distributed. However, according to her, food was neither enough, nor sufficiently nutritious, to survive:

People started lying and giving false numbers of family members so they could get more food. The very same person could come back several times but under a different name. Some used to bribe the food distributors, but others could not do that. Only the cleverest were coping, only the fittest could survive.

If at times, being reduced to mere numbers of faceless, interchangeable and tradable identities helped with survival, at other time, it was the ability to re-invoke fading but not yet fully disintegrated roles, relationships and privileges. Because Alette's uncle remained well-informed about developments in the camp, given his former status, the advantages were manifold. Her family's shelter was almost like a house, with a family toilet, and unlike other women in the camps, Alette reported that people would not have dared assault or sexually harass her or her aunt. She also had opportunity to distribute medicines in the NGO-run camp clinic, earning some dollars that would later help her save her life. Within the patriarchal structures of Rwandan society that endured across uprooting, flight and displacement, her association with a male figure remained a determining factor in Alette's life.

Meanwhile, news from Rwanda suggested that it remained unsafe to return - maybe for everyone, but certainly for a high-level government official in the former Hutu administration and his family. Alette began giving up on her teenage dream of one day studying at National University of Rwanda, instead falling in love, getting married and falling pregnant. In this way, too, she was not faceless, and her identity was not interchangeable and tradable after all. She continued to be a co-author of her life, even if in doing so, she followed a dominant pattern of gender relations in the camps. Having left her family, Alette moved into another camp to live with her husband, where he, too, was among the fortunate ones to earn a rare income. She was thankful that she had already given birth by the time the Rwandan army began its cross-border incursions and attacks of the camps because it was easier to run from gunshots and bombs with a baby on your back than it would have been for a pregnant woman. This was around the time when Alette lost all contact with her aunt, uncle and their children as they were among those who were driven back into Rwanda. Today, she still does not know if they survived, and if they did, what has happened to them.

With her new-born baby and her husband, Alette fled south towards the city of Uvira, but they had hardly arrived when war erupted there as well. Years later, she still recalled seeing a man walking with a human head hung from a spear. She was as terrified by the sight as she was perturbed by her husband's lack of surprise. He told her that he had seen scenes like this too many times during the Rwandan civil war. When Uvira fell to Congolese rebel forces, Alette and her husband joined what she described as a trek of countless people walking southwards, in the hope of reaching Tanzania. She recalled:

There was only one main road, between Lake Tanganyika on the one side and mountains on the other. Disguised Congolese rebels, Rwandan and Burundian soldiers were among us. They had their guns and ammunitions hidden in bags and should use them at a convenient time against fleeing refugees. They were shooting in the crowd. There was no way to escape or to hide.

Alette's husband instructed her not to sleep but to keep on walking: people were killed in their sleep. She had long since become unable to breastfeed due to stress and starvation. If her child had died on her back, would Alette have cared? Would she have had the strength to care? Using all the US Dollars they had earned in the previous camp, all three survived and eventually arrived in yet another camp, in Kigoma, eastern Tanzania. It was here that Alette re-invented herself, twice. To continue staying alive, she and her husband needed new money. Alette's first reinvention happened when an employer from the previous refugee camp spotted them and informed them that their last, unpaid salary, could be handed to them. When one of their former co-workers failed to arrive to collect her share of money, Alette's husband simply said, 'Be that person'. So, being that person, she collected the disappeared woman's wage.

The second reinvention - what we have called above the ultimate, if figurative death of *the Alette that was* prior to the 1994 genocide - came with the combined UNHCR/Tanzanian repatriation order for all Rwandan refugees. Congolese and Burundian refugees were taken to different camps. *Mixed couples*, that is, couples of Tutsi/Hutu identity were guaranteed resettlement. Alette and her husband decided that it was time to become Burundians and to run again to escape repatriation. And so it was done. Maybe once you cease to be who you had thought you were - once you find yourself reduced to your identity markers; once you have merged into an indecipherable mass of *people like you*; and once your attributes become

markers for life and death – who you think you are, and who you are seen to be, become commodities you will closely guard, invest, reclaim and trade. It is at such points that, to retain at least some authorship of your life, you may develop a cunning you had not previously thought yourself capable of.

Alette and her husband managed to travel on, eventually arriving in a country where they claimed asylum, settled, and started a new life. Another child was born. More than twenty years on, their past, their family's stories, and their roots that reach so deeply into Rwanda's precolonial, colonial and postcolonial history are something that Alette and her husband do not speak about. Alette says, it is not safe: she is haunted by the fear that revelation of their true nationality might lead to a loss of refugee status, residence permit, deportation, a loss of freedom, and possibly even loss of their lives. Their trauma is also not spoken about. She says, it is too painful. Like many of those who fled in the aftermath of the genocide, she feels that –

The wheel of Rwanda's history has simply turned again. Yet world-wide, a mass-identity has been ascribed to the majority of civilian Rwandans so that taking ownership of our displacement might seem tantamount to an admission of guilt.

Witnessing her first-born's struggles in growing up, Alette believes that he will never stop suffering the consequences of their flight, trauma, and starvation. Her second child seems to sense that there is something unspeakable about their family. On one occasion, the child screamed at Alette: 'You always have to lie!' Was this an ordinary teenager's eruption as ordinarily happens in ordinary family conflicts? Or was it because deep down, this child knows that things are not what they seem to be? Alette wishes she could let her children know the names of the ghosts that are haunting them. Alas, the privilege of living her life without her right to live being questioned, disregarded, disputed, or taken away, continues to elude her.

We have been wondering, as well, about Alette's uncle. As a former government official, he had access to dollars, a car, privileged information, and better access to the resources of the camp. He used all these assets to save his family and himself - even if ultimately, he did not succeed. Does this mean he was a *genocidaire*? Alette was explicit that he was not; that although he was a member of Rwanda's pre-1994 elite, not all of them were guilty. We saw

no need to probe this further because either way, the implications for the points we are trying to make are the same. For one, it accounts for Alette not having had to fear rape and death like other women in the eastern Zairean refugee camps; she survived when others perished. Beyond that, it points to the dominance of a discourse that has enforced on Alette a form of silence which even in this article, we have found hard to overcome: a silence where even though she has opted to speak, Alette still does not dare be known as the speaker; a discourse that continues to feed on simple binaries, such as perpetrator/victim, genuine refugee/bogus refugee, truth/lies, and on the idea that those who managed to escape death between 1995 and 1997 in the Zairean refugee camps, forests and tracks have yet to meet their deserved fate. Not only does this kind of entanglement appear to keep someone like Alette trapped in a form of silence where the past continues to haunt, it also implicates others. This is the topic of the following section.

V. Discussion: On Death, Survival, and Alette's Ghosts

The purpose of this final section is to explore Alette's reinventions and figurative death, as well as the silences and experiences of haunting connected to them, and to consider, against this background, affirmative ways of interpreting her story. To this end, we draw on Mbembe's (2003) concept of necropolitics, Braidotti's (2013) posthuman understanding of the intertwining of life and death, and Gordon's (2008) explications of the sociological significance of ghosts. Mbembe (2003) introduced the concept of necropolitics as a means of making sense of the kinds of large-scale upheavals – 'the horrors of our times' (Braidotti, 2013, p.129) – such as the ones experienced by Alette. He uses this concept to denote a sovereign's power not just to manage the lives of the living, but also to administer their deaths and their dying, including the exercise of a 'right to kill' (Mbembe, 2003, p.16). This entails the possibility of a 'generalised ... destruction of human bodies and populations' (Mbembe 2003, p.19). It is through an interpretation of the contextual conditions surrounding Alette's story as an instance of necropolitics that her strategies of survival become apparent as a counter-practice, as acts of subversion and resistance. This, in turn, enables an alternative interpretation of the ways in which the service users, cited at the beginning of the article, reportedly engaged their service providers in the field of refugee protection and support. In

the face of the considerable complexity of Mbembe's (2003) work, here we address only those aspects that are highlighted by Alette's story.

Mbembe (2003) cites, as classic examples of necropolitics, the phenomenon of colonialism and the racist ideologies upon which it was based. In Section II, we presented some of the continuities of race-based ideologies and practices in Rwandan history in that the construction of Hutus, Tutsis and Twa facilitated colonial governance, as well as being inextricably woven into Rwanda's post-colonial history right up to the 1994 genocide and its aftermath. Coming full circle, these very categories were then applied by the UNHCR in administering their deadly outcomes – for example in the categorisation and differential treatment of refugees along ethnic lines at the end of 1996 in Tanzanian refugee camps (see Section II). How deeply these broader discourses and practices reached into and affected Alette's being is demonstrated at the point when, faced with the threat of repatriation to Rwanda, she changed not her identity as a Hutu, but her national identity, declaring herself a Burundian where being a Hutu did not entail the same kind of threat.

Drawing on the works of Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben, Mbembe (2003) employs the ideas of the *state of exception* and the *state of siege* to explore some of the ways in which necropower operates: The state of exception signifies ways in which certain categories of people can be reduced to the status of being disposable, that is, being 'divested of political status and reduced to bare life' (Mbembe, 2003, p.12). Indeed, Mark Duffield (2008) regards refugees as a prime example of this reduced state of being. In this context, the state of siege 'allows a modality of killing' in which 'entire populations' – those who have been rendered disposable – 'are the target' (Mbembe, 2003, p.30). The state of exception provides an imagery that aptly characterises the myriad of camps – containing different categories of people at different points in time – that from 1959 onwards sprung up in and around Rwanda, only to be dismantled, destroyed, and to spring up again. And, illustrations of what it might mean to live under a state of siege are dotted throughout Alette's story, for example, in her description of the fears instilled by 'those doing the killings' during the Rwandan genocide; her experience of powerlessness vis-à-vis the Rwandan/Zairean border authorities; and the random nature of death meted out by both militias and government soldiers in and between the refugee camps of eastern Zaire and Tanzania.

What does it take to survive under conditions of necropolitics? Following Roger Abrahams, Mbembe (2003) notes that the art of survival entails maintaining ‘alternative perspectives towards [and ways of acting upon] time ... and self’ (p.22; brackets added). At the heart of survival, he suggests, lies a paradox: being ‘treated as if he or she no longer existed’ the survivor manages to turn ‘almost any object, instrument, language or gesture [or relation, or situation] into a performance’ (Mbembe, 2003, p.22; brackets added). Understanding Alette’s story through this paradox, we can offer the following interpretation. In the eyes of those administering the killing, and of those tasked with rescuing Rwanda’s post-1994 refugees, each and every one, whether dead or alive, could be merged with all and any other. Yet, it was precisely this merging that opened possibilities for subversion and resistance, and the means by which Alette survived was performance. This included her ability - and that of significant others - to read the prevailing discourses and to predict the practices that might flow from them and, in a subsequent step, to discern which roles to adopt, for example, when and what to do and say or not to do and say, and who to be seen to be, or not be seen to be.

To expand: once Alette, at the Rwandan/Zairean border post, ceased to be ‘what she was’ and was turned into ‘somebody’ who could be treated ‘anyhow’, she became exposed to the random kind of deaths that become possible under conditions of necropolitics – be it through cholera, bombardment, slaughter, shooting or raid. Yet as a direct consequence of this merging – the point at which it seemed no longer relevant who precisely she had thought herself to be – Alette began to treat different kinds of identity as exchangeable and to perform these exchanges purposefully. It was through these performative choices that ultimately, Alette was able to re-claim authorship of her life - and to keep her self alive. At the most general level, there were decisions of when to stay and how, and in which direction, to move. Another strategy was being many people at once, for instance when it came to the queuing several times over, each time claiming to be somebody else, for the collection of food at mass distribution points. Then, there was the ability to blend into the crowd at some points, being able to stand out at other times, and being able to impersonate another at yet other points in time.

Possibly Alette’s most consequential performative choice was when, having judged that the dominant discourse at play meant that ‘taking ownership’ of their past, their experience and their perspective was ‘tantamount to an admission of guilt’, Alette and her husband decided

to abandon their identities as Rwandans. This is what we have interpreted as the culmination of Alette's string of prior reinventions, and as the ultimate death of that person who ceased to be, in order to make space for that Alette, who could survive the dominant discourses which determined, in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, who would be granted refugee status, who would be allowed to settle where, and who would be returned¹. It was this decision which, while ensuring survival and the opportunity of a *new beginning* as a *new person*, wedged Alette between a past, that could not be spoken about in order to protect this renewed possibility of life, and a present, that required the past to be spoken about in order for some justice to occur, for some of her ghosts to be banished, and for some healing from trauma to occur. This is how we interpret Mbembe's (2003) contention that under conditions of necropolitics 'resistance and self-destruction' can be 'synonymous' (p.36).

While the death of the *Alette that was* prior to 1994 was a metaphorical one, Braidotti's (2013) work on 'life beyond death' (p.108) engages with the concepts of life and death as material realities. Still, her understanding of the two conditions - life and death - as inextricably entwined and as transcending the time-bound existence of individual selves is relevant for our purposes. Braidotti (2013) proposes a 'move from the traditional location of mortality as the defining ... horizon of being', suggesting instead that we adopt a 'post-identitarian' mode of thinking, that is, to treat *being* as a matter of 'singularities without identity', that is, as a way of relating 'intimately to one another and the environment in which ... [we] are located' (Braidotti, 2013, p.129; brackets added). For Braidotti (2013), the wish to survive is an inherently problematic desire, as she considers it to be a tool of 'entrapment ... into a bio-political regime of discipline and control of bodies' (pp.128-129). Survival was certainly a key driver of Alette's choices and actions. Nonetheless, through her performances - by treating multiple identities as roles she could take on, as well as discard, by killing, performatively, the one in order for the other to live - Alette enacted a postidentitarian idea of being. Not *lies*, then, but *performances* that treated identities as exchangeable; performances which, under the prevailing conditions, became necessary for her self to survive.

¹ Note that more than twenty years on, *biotechnologies* have advanced sufficiently to ensure that several of strategies employed by Alette are no longer at the disposal of refugees, even in the *death zones* (Mbembe, 2019) of this world: biometric data verification tools are now readily available for use on each and every refugee, even under catastrophic conditions where they may arrive suddenly and *en masse* (see Bogle, 2019; Bond, 2018).

If we consider performance to be a form of resistance and a way of being that required self-destruction as a means of surviving the aftermath of Rwanda's genocide, and if the discourses and practices, which made this tragedy possible, still prevail in contemporary regimes of refugee governance (not just in the region concerned, but wherever survivors may have moved over time), then it might be unsurprising that these modes of being continue to be performed across space and time. This interpretation implies that Alette's story is not simply her individual story but a story of 'our time' (Braidotti, 2013, p.129). And, it might be precisely what the refugee protection and support workers, cited at the start of this article, appeared to allude to: 'Hollywood' – in the eyes of some, the centre of perfection as far as the performing arts are concerned; 'manipulation' – of the scene of refugee protection and support, in which the service providers, too, performed their roles. Yet, in passing judgement rather than interrogating what might be at play in what they were commenting on, their sight was blocked from how they themselves were implicated.

This is a good point to return to Gordon's imagery (2008) of haunting. We know that ghosts are around when 'people who are meant to be invisible' have shown up in a manner and style that is upsetting the expected order of things – and when they are showing no 'signs of leaving' (Gordon 2008, p.xvi). Ghosts are real: their haunting 'registers harm[s] inflicted' and 'loss[es] sustained by ... violence done in the past or in the present' and, importantly, it urges that 'something else ... be done' (p.xvi; brackets added). They clamour for injustices to be recognised, amends to be made, different ways of relating to be forged. In short, Alette's feelings of being haunted are far more than her personal affair; they are a political concern in that they point to a shared affliction. Her reaching out to tell her story, in and on her own terms, suggests that she is in fact proposing a way of connecting that offers an ethical alternative to the confrontational mode on which we began.

VI. Conclusion

This article opened with a brief vignette narrating a power contest between a group of service users from Africa's Great Lakes Region and a group of service providers in the field of refugee protection and support. On its face, this contest revolved around the question of *truth*

telling versus *the telling of lies*, but implicit questions of us/them, past/present, and the question of being deserving/undeserving of protection and support also played a role. Against this, we posited that the conflict, while typical in the field, might remove from sight a set of deeper problems that can entangle different role players in historical regimes of injustice, which often go unacknowledged. To explore this complex further, we presented as a single case study the story of Alette, a survivor of Rwanda's 1994 genocide and its aftermath. While highlighting some of its intricate aspects, we also presented some of the ways in which women were affected by this history in particular ways, pointing to the intersectionalities in that a woman's class position and its attendant privileges (or the lack thereof) affected her chances of facing, or escaping, harm. We have treated Alette's story as an example of subjugated knowledge, and one of this article's contributions, in the face of this major catastrophe, is the furtherance of justice by providing an opportunity for her story to be told.

Furthermore, we presented some of the available evidence that the discourses - and silences - which contributed to the massive atrocities that preceded, defined, and shaped the aftermath of Rwanda's 1994 genocide, still prevail within contemporary regimes of refugee governance. Returning to the incidents presented at the beginning of our arguments, we can now state our initial point more strongly: The discourses and practices that separate those who are seen as deserving from those who are undeserving of refugee protection and care may well be linked to those discourses and practices of necropolitics that previously contributed to people's division into group: those with disposable lives on the one hand, and those with lives worthy of preserving on the other. To consider Alette's strategies of survival against this background renders thinkable the idea that in fact, many survivors of large-scale violence experience the past as alive in the present; regard the relationship between fact and fiction as fluid, complex and fraught; and sometimes treat their relationships with their designated service providers as requiring performance, rather than a commitment to telling *the truth*.

Braidotti (2013) argues that life and death must be regarded as intertwined and as transcending the time- and space-bound existence of individual selves. The haunting of ghosts signifies such intertwining and transcending in a manner that implicates those whom it touches: it urges them to respond other than with disregard and dismissal of that which just shows no inclination to leave until justice is done, historical wrongs are acknowledged, and

amends have been made (Gordon, 2008). It is thus that ‘against necro-political destruction, we need to ... actively and collectively work towards a refusal of horror and violence ... and to turn it into the construction of affirmative alternatives’ (Braidotti, 2013, pp.129-130). To engage with the ghosts of Rwanda’s genocide and its aftermath, for us, means appreciating the complexity of the injustices committed in process, which cannot be disregarded as past in that they continue to affect both survivors’ lives and contemporary practices in refugee protection. This places a responsibility on practitioners and activists within this field to engage affirmatively with service users and to interrogate, call out, and refuse complicity with such policies as may be shown to be unjust. This is how we interpret Braidotti’s (2013) call for an ethics that is ‘based on the praxis of constructing positivity ... out of injury and pain’ (p.129).

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