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“Today, we’re all broken.”: postcolonialism,
trauma, and narrating genocide through comics.

Faculty of Social Sciences
Master’s Thesis
March 2022

ABSTRACT

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Master's Thesis

Tampere University

MDP in Peace, Mediation and Conflict Research

April 2022

In 1994, in a small African nation of Rwanda, a civil war between the Hutu and the Tutsi turned into 100 days of genocide. As the Western world watched, the Hutu looted, raped, and slaughtered an estimation of 800 000 Tutsi as well an estimation of 10 000 Twa. First brushed off as a civil war fuelled by tribal hatred in the Western media, it has now been established that the Rwandan genocide was a result of ethnic hatred strengthened by colonial involvement of the past and meticulous mobilisation of the Hutu population by the nation's elite.

Narratives play a central part in the societies' processes towards holistic forms of justice, reconciliation, and stability in transitional societies. All discourse on ethnicity is banned and classified as "genocidal ideology" in contemporary Rwanda. It has been argued that the state-sanctioned narrative, which suppresses any reference to pre-genocide differences and Hutu -Tutsi conflict, has not affected the root causes of political and social insecurity in the country nor has it cultivated holistic forms of justice. Instead, the narrative operates as a tool to suppress political opposition and silence underlying tensions, preventing effective reconciliation processes in Rwanda.

I examine how the Franco-Belgian comic book *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda* by J.P. Stassen contributes to the construction of the representation of the Rwandan genocide, especially in the context of Western knowledge tradition. Ultimately, I investigate how comics and graphic narratives in general as a visual and verbal construct can contribute to the creation and contestation of narratives around political crises and atrocities. I do this by examining the comic book's aestheticization of trauma and postcolonial criticism while relying upon a theoretical framework provided by postcolonial theory, trauma theory, and art and international politics. I employ narrative, textual, and visual analysis which in their manifoldness help to tackle comics' qualities as a unique form of expression that combines images, words, and other semantic levels.

This thesis aims to investigate how comics as a narrative, visual and verbal construct contribute to the construction and contestation of views on the Rwandan genocide. Additionally, through the findings of my research, I encourage further investigation of comic books and aesthetic material's relationship with international politics as well as an inquiry on the communicative and narrative possibilities comics offer to communication and narration of political crises.

Keywords: conflict, postcolonial criticism, trauma, comics, genocide

Acknowledgments

I want to express my gratitude to my seminar group and especially Prof. Tarja Väyrynen for her guidance. For their support, I thank my family, my friends, and the people at Tampere Peace Research Institute.

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List of Abbreviations

DRC = Democratic Republic of Congo

GBV = Gender-based violence

MRND = National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development (Mouvement Républicain National Pour la Démocratie et le Développement)

RPF = Rwandan Patriotic Front

UNAMIR = United Nations Assistant Mission in Rwanda

“There is a temptation, in writing about genocide, to tell a story of good and evil.”

- René LeMarchand (2009, p. 90.)

“All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer seeing (one might say) to everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things.”

- Aristotle in *Metaphysics* (I. 1, 980a 21 – 980b 22.)

1. INTRODUCTION

In the age of global complexity, narratives shape our behaviour and coexistence and hold increasing importance for individuals, groups, and societies in understanding the world around us. Therefore, we need to study how people make sense of the world through narratives and how communicating conflict narratives can help in cultivating more compassionate communication. Modern communication technology has revolutionised the accessibility of information globally – and while this technology is of advantage, it also comes with grave challenges, as the information consumed by the media is often not accurate or it is impartial while presented as being truthful and accurate. An alarming contemporary example of communication gone awry is the role¹ of Facebook in the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, as hateful visual and verbal material was spread through the platform with the use of algorithms.²

¹ And unwillingness to act against the misinformation on the social media platform.

² In Myanmar, Facebook is synonymous with the internet in general. In 2001, only 1% of the population of Myanmar had access to the internet whereas in 2018 more than 30% of the population used the internet. Although still little research has been done on how an average consumer in Myanmar uses Facebook and how the content in the social media platform affects their perceptions of the inter-ethnic conflict, it has been established that Facebook was used to facilitate the persecution of the Rohingya people (Whitten-Woodring et al., 2020).

In the Rwandan genocide, the role of different media outlets, such as the newspaper *Kangura* and its hateful discourse and satirical cartoons as well as pro-Hutu radio channels were effective in mobilising hundreds of thousands of people to kill others based on their perceived ethnicity. These new challenges require a careful and multifaceted approach to communication, visuality, narration, and conflict.

Aesthetics and visual images shape the way we perceive and experience events, processes, and the world around us and are closely tied to the creation of political narratives. In contemporary international politics, visual imagery in its enormous multitude of forms surrounds us in a seemingly never-ending stream of knowledge production. Visuality is inherently political: how we understand political events, such as terrorism, is determined by how “images dramatically depict the events in question, how these circulate worldwide, and how politicians and the public respond to these visual impressions” (Bleiker, 2018, p. 17). Increasingly, it has been widely accepted within academia, that art and literature offer alternative narratives that convey experiences not present in grand narratives or underrepresented in policy-making, thus potentially challenging mainstream narratives regarding events in international politics.

Although photography and film are deemed as the most dominant sources of visual knowledge in today’s world, other mediums are also receiving their well-deserved attention. For some time now, academic practitioners have shown an increasing amount of interest in comics. Unlike as recently as at the end of the 20th century, contemporarily there exists a consensus of perceiving comics and graphic narratives as a medium capable of transforming the readers’ literary consciousness, thus making them well worth of academic interest. However, still, a vast amount of research on visual international politics and art and international politics nexus has been done disproportionately on photography and film. Comics have enjoyed less academic enthusiasm, even though comics are increasingly taking part in the visual representation of atrocities and conflict. Only recently the influence of comic studies has been gaining more momentum in the field of international politics.³ A fine example is Saara Särmä’s doctoral dissertation on everyday humorous representations of Iran and North Korea and their roles as nuclear power states in international politics. In larger trends in the study of international politics, however, this interest is still modest when compared to other major types of visual media.

Contemporary representational forms that report violent conflicts and political unrest, such as photojournalistic accounts of atrocities, are often understood to strive for accuracy, leaving emotions and themes perceived as ineffable out of the account they portray. Comics, like many other forms of art and

³ See, i.e.: Chute, 2010:2016; Hansen 2017; McKinney 2008: 2021.

aesthetics, oppose the often-depersonalized realm of international politics that pursues the realist attempt of describing what is “real” and “true”. Thus, comics and a more aesthetic engagement in general in the realm of knowledge practice in international politics and conflict studies can offer wider insights into the themes at hand. Comics may produce critical conversation on various socio-political issues as well as address marginal views and themes that often stay undetected in mainstream political discourse. In other words, they can illustrate the experience of international politics and foreign policy from a perspective of an individual or a marginal group, this way expanding and challenging the themes and research questions relevant in the field of international politics. This allows the study of comics and other forms of aesthetics to expand the understanding of international politics less formally and more experimentally while simultaneously challenging state-centric global narratives in current global politics (Hansen, 2016).

According to Charles Hatfield, “the rise of comic studies represents a fortunate crisis in knowledge production”, stressing comics as a significant source of data (Hatfield, 2008, p. 147). Comics can employ means of communicating ideas and views in a way no other format of visual material or mode of storytelling can – like any other art form, comics have their intrinsic qualities which separate them from other forms of creative, narrative, and visual expression. This way complex topics can be explored in a multitude of ways in the form of comics. Moreover, especially common for contemporary comic books, they often hold a certain level of nonconformity to social norms. Thus, representations manifested in comic form may offer a vital way of confronting the past as well as exploring and giving voice to alternative histories.

Comics as a narrative, visual and verbal construct are not only approachable, but they additionally often go “against the grain” since the production of comics has for long been employed as a tool for commentary and criticism on social and political issues. This leads to comics having the capability of being less subjectable to mainstream narratives’ roots and history of origins which can be, unbeknownst to the consumer, plagued by different national aims and colonialist mindsets. According to Hillary Chute (2010;2016), comics are the only major challenger of new technological ways of communication which are still produced mainly in printed media. To expand Chute’s statement, I would add that although comics remain a media widely consumed in a printed form, they are also increasingly distributed in digital form as well, which does not diminish its qualities but instead may offer new communicational and artistic opportunities for the art form.

In my thesis, I argue that comics have the capability of shedding light on controversial and traumatic issues and events. First, comic books are one of the view printed media that still can compete with digital sources, thus making them influential in the knowledge-making tradition. Secondly, contemporary comic books

often take the perspective of the “underdog” and tend to have an autobiographical account perspective, such as minorized people. Thus, with their narrative, they challenge the mainstream narratives on a given political issue or event, enhancing, or changing the reader’s/viewer’s perception of a particular world event. Therefore, through comic books, one can gain important insight into narratives often hidden from the audience in everyday conversations about international politics. Thirdly, comics offer few conventional rules, thus enabling forms of narration and presentations that challenge the mainstream narratives. They resist objectivity - the current notion in the study of international politics to “catch the world as it is”, and instead recognise the subjectivity of experience and perception, in other words, the distance between representation and what it represents. This allows the comic form to have the potential to give space to various complex and nuanced experiences. This study aims to incorporate comics in the study of peace and conflict research by mapping out how comics as a part of the aesthetics and politics nexus operate in distributing alternative histories and combat grand narratives, presenting traumatic events, and cultivating compassionate communication. Additionally, I aim to highlight how the form of comics can bring light to complex issues by examining how postcolonial criticism and the trauma tied to it operate in works within the Western knowledge production tradition.

I draw from the postmodernist perspective which acknowledges alternative ways to comprehend “knowledge formation” beyond merely applying rigidly empirical methods. Since various global and political phenomena can be viewed through art and visual material such as comics, art and aesthetics have the potential to influence how we view the world and thus operate in it. Thus, I argue, it is important to study the connection between aesthetics in the form of comics and international politics. It is because art and narratives contribute to how we view the world, inevitably they are to affect economic and material processes as well.

Historically, Africa has rarely been a focal point for Western media. Although widely broadcasted, the Rwandan genocide of 1994 lacked adequate media coverage and attention in the West, one reason being that the genocide was overshadowed by the focus given to the bombings in former Yugoslavia. For the international community, the UN Security Council, and the Western media the war in Africa was not at the top of their agenda. Indeed, even after the Rwandan tragedy was finally verified as genocide at the end of April 1994, the Western media did not show much interest in the horrific ending of the Rwandan civil war.

After the events of 1994 writing on Rwanda emerged, exploring how such a massive scale slaughter of Tutsis could take place as the rest of the world watched through news broadcasts and TV cameras. In the West, the causes for the genocide got brushed off as long-standing tribal hatred – Rwanda was portrayed as a primitive state where a violent civil war was almost inevitable to take place (Polak, 2017). Lesser was

the attention given to the colonial influence in the country, or the inability of the global community and the UN to stop the violence. What makes the Rwandan genocide significant from the point of view of my research topic, is the fact that the genocide, although the global community did not dare to name it as such at the time, was broadcasted globally as it occurred, “making it an important event for inquiries into narrative strategies that resist an uncomplicated assertion of empathy” (Ibid., 2017, p. 39). However, despite virtually everyone in the Western countries having “known” about what was occurring in Rwanda, the “knowing” was limited to broadcasted material from refugee camps and pictures of the aftermath of the incident. The centrality of violence in the portrayal of the genocide did not give a nuanced picture of the many historic complex operations of the genocide and the fine-tuned state-led organisation behind the killings, instead, painting it as just another primitive war in Africa (Mamdani, 2001; Polak, 2017). “Historio-metaphysics”, as Kate Polak (2017, p. 1) calls them, allows the Western viewer to consider another perspective on the processes and representation of the genocide and the politics of memorialisation.

In contemporary Rwanda, a state-sanctioned narrative has been established its the accounts of the genocide, which includes all discourse on ethnicity being banned and classified as “genocidal ideology”. It has been argued that the state-sanctioned narrative, which suppresses any reference to pre-genocide differences and Hutu - Tutsi conflict, has not affected the root causes of political and social insecurity in the country nor has it cultivated holistic forms of justice. In *Accounting for Horror: Post-Genocide Debates in Rwanda* (2004) Nigel Eltringham argues that absolutist, mainstreamed narratives of the genocide reinforce the very ways of thinking that fueled the genocide in the first place and halt the processes of achieving sustainable peace in a post-mass crime society. Therefore, instead of holding onto conventional modes of historical representation, an exploration of alternative accounts and histories is needed to understand the highly contested history of the Rwandan genocide. Interrogation of the formal memory as a part of the nation-building processes is central to establishing whether the society is processing toward holistic justice and reconciliation or if the formal modes of memorialisation are serving political aims which necessarily do not support processes towards sustainable peace.

Furthermore, many decide to dismiss ethnic conflict as a problem of the Third World, pushing aside the increasing global trends of cultural pluralism in “Western”, “modern”, and “civilized” worlds – take for instance the Far-Right movement in the USA, neo-Nazis of Germany and Basque separatists in Spain. (Longman, 2010, p. 304.) Similarly, in my home country, Finland which is by many estimates one of the most socially secure nations in the world, polarization, and racial prejudices are increasing and getting louder in spaces of political discourse. Moreover, it’s also not only about “carrying the responsibility of preventing human rights atrocities as a global community” as ethnic conflicts have tended to become spill out-conflicts and spread to neighbouring countries. This was the case in the Rwandan civil war as the war in

Rwanda eventually spread into the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The international community must place even more emphasis on how to predict and prevent dire cases of loss of human life like the genocidal conflict of Rwanda. Employing more research on visual narratives may offer further comprehension of the operation of such atrocities.

In my thesis, I explore comics as a form of verbal-visual communication as a gateway for using art and aesthetics in international politics to gain a more nuanced understanding of narratives concerning conflict and crises and a provider of alternative histories through the form of comics as testimony. As Joanne Pettitt (2017) argues, since comics and graphic novels are engaged with the nexus of language and visuality, they can articulate complexities between the global and the local memories, allowing accessibility for the knowledge on a more universal level. My thesis can be perceived to have roughly two sides or levels, which address a global level as well as a local level: one is looking at what the verbal and visual communication provided by comics may have to offer for a reader/viewer in the Western sphere of knowledge production – can it help to produce a more nuanced narrative on conflicts, not within the perceived Western community? The second theme of my work is how these communicational tactics may offer to the reconciliation processes in the post-conflict⁴ society.

Essentially, the driving motivation which guided me toward the topic of my thesis is the following questions: “How does visuality contribute to the depiction of violent conflicts and crises?” and “how can we communicate and narrate events such as genocides?”. The aim to explore these themes entails placing comics within the practice of knowledge production as a tool of communication and storytelling and expression well equipped to depict conflict and trauma, reviewing the colonial history of Rwanda as well as dipping my feet into the theoretical waters of art and politics nexus, postcolonial theory, and trauma theory. My approach, which aims to critically evaluate verbal-visual material on conflicts brings forth an alternative voice on the history of the Rwandan genocide as well as highlights the qualities that enable comics and graphic narratives to visualize and narrate violent conflicts, this way generating more compassionate and approachable forms of depicting, witnessing, and giving testimony to atrocities.

I begin my task by highlighting the ways narratives influence our life and establishing the study of narratives as a worthy subject of inquiry within peace and conflict studies. Then, I move on to determine comics and map out their relevance regarding depicting social and political critique, war, and atrocities. In the following chapter, I argue that comics have a long history not only in depicting war and atrocity, but they have also

⁴ The term ‘post-conflict’ is highly politicised and often challenging to determine. In the context of my work, I identify the term ‘post-conflict’ as period where a society, after a conflict, is in a transition continuum towards a more sustainable peace. (Brown, et al., 2011, p.4; Frère & Wilen, 2015)

for long operated as a form of documentation and testimony for both individual and communal trauma. I then turn to the Franco-Belgian bande dessinée comic tradition, to which the comic I am exploring, *Deo gratias: A Tale of Rwanda*, belongs.

2. COMICS AND THE POWER OF NARRATIVES

Narratives and making sense of the world

There is no agreement about the academic definition of narratives, although key similarities can be detected in most definitions. First, it is agreed upon that narratives are “*selective depictions of reality across at least two points in time that ... include one or more causal claims*” (Dennison, 2021) and that the formation and selection of narratives is an inseparable part of being human. Moreover, narratives are regarded as general, which means that they can be applied in different situations. This differentiates narratives from stories, as stories are more tied to specificities. (Ibid.) Narratives are a powerful force capable of shaping social perception, activities, and decisions made in different domains, such as in politics, economics, and interpersonal relationships (Shiller, 2017; Merkus et al. 2014; Dolan & Henwood. 2021). Narratives are a part of a complex, vast system of making sense of the world, used to acquire and transmit information and knowledge in our day-to-day life (Wyer, 2004). It allows us to understand the life around us and to adopt a sense of meaning in our lives as well as determine our values and identities through the process of shared sense-making (Dolan & Henwood, 2021; McAdams & McLean, 2013; McLean et al., 2007).

The famed, widely circulated, and critically acclaimed Hollywood movie *Hotel Rwanda* and its relationship to global politics through how the film moulds our views of the Rwandan genocide is an example of how visuality and narratives operate in global politics. The drama film directed in 2004 by Terry George tells the real-life story of hotel owner Paul Rusesabagina as he embarks to save the life of his family and over a thousand refugees. The movie has been criticised for its “Hollywoodization” of the Rwandan genocide to make the bloodshed suitable for the interests of the Western consumer as well as its tendency to comply with the current national narrative of the RPF as saviours of Rwandan people. Jonatan D. Glover (2011) argues that in the case of *Hotel Rwanda*, the West seeks penance for their sins in the past while it simultaneously requires resources that Rwandan military operations help to extract, distribute, and secure

in the DRC. Here, we see that forms of art may also, deliberately, or unintentionally, support repressive politics.

As a widely known public memory of the genocide, *Hotel Rwanda* participates in the global discourse of Western guilt still impacting Rwanda and DRC today. As Glover states, the production “--- clearly demonstrates how narratives can contribute to the shaping of material realities. For this very reason, we should strive to confront —the false dichotomy between the objectivity of structures and the subjectivity of representations— a distinction allowing all that is cultural and symbolic to be put on one side, all that is economic and material to be put on the other” (Glover, 2011, p. 221).

Literature on conflict resolution recognises the role of narratives and stories in the construction of identity and the development of group identities. This, in turn, guides people’s relations with other groups and influences the mobilisation of social and political actions (Ehrmann & Millar, 2022). In the wake of grievances within a society, narratives shape the moral sense of proportion that justifies actions. Therefore, narratives can work either as a driver for conflict or as a mitigator of grievances. Therefore, consistent and serious inquiry into the role of narratives in the field of peace and conflict research is required. I embark on this challenge by examining comics as they are a form of storytelling and a tool of narration through the use of images, panels and sequences as well as other narratological concepts (McCloud, 1993; Mikkonen 2017; Postema, 2013). To reach my aim to critically evaluate verbal-visual material on conflicts presented by comics, I now move on to observing the current academic discussion of this sequential art form.

Determining comics

I continue this chapter by determining comics and touching upon the historical connection between comics, politics, and conflict. I introduce some major works depicting conflict and political trauma before moving on to the Franco-Belgian bande dessinée tradition of which *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda* is a part. Before discussing the history of comics and their connection to the depiction of atrocities and trauma, I must first determine what I mean by comics when I write about them. Comics, as a medium that is often read intuitively, are effortless to recognise but it remains challenging to accurately define them. Will Eisner calls comics “sequential art”, whereas Scott McCloud adds to Eisner’s definition by describing the medium as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence” (McCloud, 1993, p. 9). To Kai Mikkonen, the storytelling in comics occurs through verbal communication and images (employing their “visual and

spatial form”) and the combined visual-verbal elements, as well as their conventions and interactions. (Mikkonen, 2017, pp. 14-15).

Comics often contain text and images, but they cannot be reduced to that, as a rich and long tradition of wordless comics resist this definition. Both Eisner and McCloud focus on the presence of images arranged in a body, in other words, sequences, in the art form of comics. As the viewer reads the images according to the pattern the artist has arranged on the page, they offer meaning. The ultimate building blocks of comic books, *panels*, are often (but not reduced to) rectangular shapes. Eisner (1985) describes panels as a stage with which the artist establishes the perspective, clarifies activity, orients the reader/viewer as well as stimulates emotion (Eisner, 1985, p. 88). Panels may include pictorial imagery, such as drawing and text, speech balloons, and photographs. Comics are usually made by drawing and writing, but they do not exclude other visual representations, such as pictures. In comics, panels alternate with the space between them. This space is called *a gutter*. The gutter is an important, or perhaps the most important part of the construction of a comic, as it is in the gutter where the reader/viewer gets involved and active in constructing the story. The distance between the panels, separated by the gutter urges the reader/viewer to close the gap with their active participation in the reading (McCloud, 1993). Hence, the reader/viewer is urged, quite literally, to read between the lines, constructing meaning through the empty space between the panels.

Comic’s multi-semiotic nature makes them a unique form of expressing, communicating, and telling. They are often considered a juxtaposition of sequential art and words. In other words, comics are multi-semiotic, combining both visual and verbal grammar as well as different symbols, such as lines indicating speech, text indicating sound, or characters changing their physical attributes with the drawing style to better convey and highlight the emotions the character is experiencing. Indeed, Robert S. Wyer (2004) places major emphasis on the role of images and other visual information in the construction of narrative representation and the comprehension of narratives. However, comics do not only engage the reader in the act of looking at pictures but they also (more often than not) employ language, the ultimate reality shaper. Language, after all, is the only cultural resource with the capacity to render visible the ideologies of narratives and narratives of ideologies. According to Khatija Bibi Khan (2018), a cartoon is a form of language in its visual dimension; thus, choosing comics as a medium for narrating and depicting a genocide is a deliberate act that has consequences in the sense that it will have the capacity to influence how the reader/viewer perceives the event depicted, in this case, a genocide. Although our world is increasingly dominated by visual images, our most essential way of comprehending what is, and what happens around us is language. Additionally, as language is inherently cultural, languages themselves shape the way we

think and perceive the world around us, resulting in the notion that even the existence of language means that we cannot perceive the world in a purely subjective way.

Comics and conflict

Within Comic Studies and Linguistics, the depictions of disaster and conflict are a common focus of research. However, in the field of International Politics, Security Studies, and Peace and Conflict Research there remains overall neglect in the study of graphic narratives, even though comics in their many styles and genres have always adopted political levels. As Möller states, even seemingly fun and mundane comic stories tend to have serious undercurrents. For example, in Schulz's *Peanuts*, a story named *Security is a Thumb and a Blanket* (1963) anticipated the United Nations' introduction of human security in its policy (Möller, 2013, p. 165). Superhero comics, the most popular comic genre of our time, is perhaps the most widely studied genre in the Western academic tradition.⁵ The intersection of politics and superheroes can be traced back to the Golden Age of Comics in the 1940s when Superman's adventures were first a part of a progressive cultural movement in the USA. The anti-racist, anti-fascist comic book hero was on the side of the oppressed. In the 1950s the Comics Code Authority was established, Superman began to support the right side of the political spectrum, showing American institutions and the authority as well as the middle-class in a better light (Möller, 2013, p. 166). Captain America, another famous champion of American superhero comics canon, was too, a product of its time. Before the USA took part in World War II, Adolf Hitler was depicted as the villain of the story in Captain America comics, ushering Americans to take part in the war on the other side of the Atlantic. Superhero comics often have political dimensions hidden between allegories and symbols, like Captain America and Superman comics demonstrate – they have strong political and ideological agendas transmitted through them.

After the golden age of superhero comics in the 1950s, the underground comix movement⁶ of the 1960s started to tackle more adult themes such as violence and sex, as well as expressing socio-political criticism. An important milestone in the history of contemporary comics portraying crises and conflict is one of the most notable comic books on genocide ever written, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, a story first published in *Funny Animals* -magazine in 1972. In the comic book, Spiegelman tracks his father's experiences as a Jewish holocaust survivor in Nazi Germany. Before *Maus*, the American comic book scene was mainly dominated

⁵ I.e., see: Marc DiPaolo. (2011.) *War, Politics and Superheroes: Ethics and Propaganda in Comics and Film.*; Dittmer, J. (2013.) *Captain America and the Nationalist Superhero — Metaphors, Narratives, and Geopolitics.*

⁶ Underground comix were most popular in North America in the late 1960s and 1970s. They were small press or self-published comic books that often were satirical or critical towards contemporary social conditions. Additionally, underground comix often included such themes as sexuality, drug use, and violence, thus going against the mainstream comic book publications of the time and normalising the addressing of adult themes in contemporary practice.

by DC Comics and Marvel, two big publication houses focusing on superhero stories. *Maus* won a “Special Pulitzer Prize” in 1992, a category which was given to Spiegelman’s work since the committee was unsure which category the comics presenting Jews as mice and Nazis as “Katz” belonged to. Spiegelman’s *Maus* helped to solidify comics as a literary medium that was well worth taking seriously, challenging the then-common perception of comic books as mundane entertainment and adolescent power fantasies incapable of mature artistic expression. Through its portrayal of the Holocaust, his work paved the way for contemporary comic books about conflict, disaster, and trauma.

Following Spiegelman’s artistic approach to showing people as animals, *Munnu, A Boy from Kashmir* (2015) by Malik Sajad is an autobiographical story of the everyday struggle of the Kashmiri people, who are portrayed as Kashmir stags (Hangul deer) while everyone else in the story is drawn as humans to highlight the oppression and dehumanisation of the Kashmiris. Not only does Sajad’s work challenge the polarising narrative of Kashmir as a subject of territorial conflict and bilateral negotiations, dismissing the Kashmiri’s right to self-determination and freedom, but it also uses comics’ visual and textual expression to portray postcolonial resistance and to highlight the importance of everyday praxes of social and ecological justice (Sarkar, 2018; Ghosal, 2016).

Persepolis I and *II* are autobiographical works of the artist Marjane Satrapi, looking at the life of a young woman during and after the Iranian revolution. Situated in both the Franco-Belgian bande dessinée - tradition as well as Iranian artistic expression, Satrapi’s graphic novels are one of the world’s most acclaimed and studied contemporary graphic novels. As she pictures herself as a child experiencing the Iranian society, she engages the viewer/reader to emphasise with the sympathetic character who is Marjane Satrapi. In many interviews, Satrapi has stated her desire to help the Western viewers/readers to see Iranian people as human instead of the exotic other while contradicting the West/the rest division by including occidental views of the West in her visual narrative (Leservot, 2011).

In Japan, manga (漫画) is a comic style originating from Japan. Although the style formed in the 19th century, its roots are in earlier art traditions in the region.⁷ In Western countries, the term often refers to comics and cartooning originally from Japan. Although primarily seen as a mundane distraction for adolescents, in addition to having a history of depicting and addressing other personal and social heavy issues, manga has been long used to document trauma, conflict, and atrocities. Keiji Nakazawa’s highly personal one-shot manga *Ore wa Mita* (おれは見た) or *I Saw It: The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima: A Survivor’s True Story* (1992) is the artist’s nonfiction comic and simultaneously an eyewitness account of the

⁷ In Western countries the term often refers to comics and cartooning originally from Japan.

atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Nakazawa himself was six years old during the event. Not only did he depict the effects of the atomic bomb, but he also criticised the wartime Japanese government and its actions. Nakazawa's work became a landmark in using the visual-verbal storytelling form of comics as a tool for bearing witness to war while simultaneously showing how comics can act as a response to the government's inability or unwillingness to confront history (Chute, 2016, p. 111).

Comic book journalist Joe Sacco is most famous for his nonfiction comics addressing the conflicts of the Middle East and Balkans. Sacco's work, like Spiegelman's *Maus*, challenges perceptions of boundaries of received categories of narrative. Known for such works as *Palestine* (1993) and *Safe Area Goražde* (2000) and *The Fixer* (2003) on the Bosnian war, as well as *Footnotes in Gaza* (2009) on Israeli-Palestinian relations, Sacco uses the form of comics to cover nonfiction events of conflicts. In his comics, Sacco actively acknowledges and reflects on the problem of transmitting knowledge and the very instability of knowing, while depicting tragic events that took place in the post-conflict and/or ongoing conflict areas he visits (Chute, 2016, p. 197.) In De Viljoen's words, "Sacco --- builds on the ethical approach of the imperfect witness by placing himself into the text, both as disembodied narrative voice and as an embodied, witnessing participant". (2020, p. 67.)

Sacco's work highlights the very notion of the problems of visual information and its inability of being fully objective, which often gets forgotten while viewing such visual material as news broadcasts and photojournalism. Comics are drawn by hand; therefore, they reject the notion of objectivity and transparency by their very nature – they are innately subjective.⁸ This way, the work of Sacco urges us to consider the discursivity of history (Chute, 2016). With this, in addition to the medium's innate cartoonish elements and tendency to a style of exaggeration, comics resist the idea of objectivity even in the case of nonfiction works, such as Sacco's real-life accounts from the Middle East and Balkans.

Comics by African artists have lately gained more attention both in the continent as well as internationally. Many of these comics aim to reflect the experiences of African readers instead of portraying the continent and culture from a Western perspective.⁹ As African artists tend to draw from the continent's rich and colourful supernatural legacy, fantasy is the most dominating genre in African comics. However, comics depicting social and political issues are also common.¹⁰ At least one internationally recognised witness account of the Rwandan genocide has been made into a comic form by a Rwandan creator. Genocide

⁸ This notion, however, does not mean that accuracy is the opposite of creative intervention.

⁹ I.e., see: *Aya of Iop City, Kugali: An African Comics Anthology, E.X.O. - The Legend of Wale Williams*.

¹⁰ This is not to say the two overrule each other.

survivor Rupert Bazambanza's *Smile Through the Tears* (2004)¹¹ depicts the struggle of the Rwanga family during the genocide, offering an account of the tragedy of 1994 (Pégorier, 2019). Bazambanza, according to his own words, takes the role of a "town crier" who wants to help prevent further violence by sharing awareness of the genocide and communicating the experience through a comic book to the people who read it. The work goes through multiple themes akin to Stassen's *Deo gratias: A Tale of Rwanda*, such as the ethnic discourse and hate speech, dehumanisation, as well as full-blown violence and killing. As Clotilde Pecoriér states, the work offers "a literary-visual articulation of the genocide", allowing the viewer/reader to understand that to respond to genocide as an international community, the violence's humane side must be addressed. In other words, the point of view of the victims and the perpetrators and the people who fall somewhere in between these categories must be acknowledged in the often-depersonalised realm of global politics (2019, p. 189).

Bande dessinée

Bande dessinée, literally meaning "drawn strips", are comics books from either France or Belgium, original work usually written in the French language which forms a separate comic book tradition distinct from the tradition of the English-speaking world. History and memory have not been the main focus in the study of *bande dessinée* due to wider scholarly interest in the form of the contemporary comic medium (McKinney, 2008). However, Mark McKinney (2008) argues that throughout the tradition's history bande dessinées have focused on international politics and war, with their roots in the Algerian War (1954–62). Imperialism was influential in intertwining politics in the *bande dessinées* tradition in a fundamental way; one of the world's first "comic artists" Rodolphe Töpffer's *Histoire de Monsieur de Cryptogame* (drafted in 1830) addresses, while still not actually showing, France's invasion of Algeria. Töpffer later returned to it in 1844 during France's long war with Algeria. Today, politics are addressed by the new, often experimental generation of comic artists in the tradition, and Stassen's comic book *Deo gratias: Tale of Rwanda* is an example of the work of this generation. (McKinney, 2008, 18.) Stassen's representation of the Rwandan genocide is accompanied by Baru's, Théyenet's and Ledran's work on the Algerian war in *Road to America*, Sfar's depiction of Algerian Jews during the colonial era in *The Rabbi's Cat* (2005) and earlier-mentioned Satrapi's famed *Persepolis I* and *II* (2003, 2004) which have gained worldwide fame and sold over 2 million copies since their publication.

¹¹ Original title in French: *Sourire Malgré Tout*.

Hergé's Belgian bande dessinée series *The Adventures of Tintin* is one of the most notable and famed examples of the tradition. Contemporarily, the 1930's publication *Tintin in the Congo*, like other works by Hergé, has become controversial due to the colonial attitudes and articulation they convey (Glover, 2011; Frey, 2004). In the comic book, conforming to the general Belgian attitudes at the time, Congolese people are depicted in a patronising and racist way, implying that while they are good at heart, their backwardness and naivety means they require subordination by European masters. In the original comic book, Tintin teaches Congolese children about "their fatherland, Belgium" while using a chalkboard. Later, before the decolonization of Africa, as the Belgian and European climate became less favouring to such blatant colonial racism, Hergé redraws the famous scene. This time he shows Tintin teaching the children mathematics (Glover, 2011, p. 120). Despite the redesign of the notorious scene, Glover states that the scene shows an example of the paternalism of Belgian colonial ideology (Ibid.).

Mirroring Hergé, the notorious chalkboard, now a symbol of colonialist paternalism appears in *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda*, which is the comic book I chose as my data for my exploration of comics and graphic novels as narrators of war and trauma. In the comic book, a male teacher asks the classroom "Who here is a Hutu?" and proceeds to explain: "The Hutu are the majority of the people. These proud and honest farmers, of Bantu stock, are the ones who cleared the country for cultivation. With courage and care, they turned it into the wonderful garden that feeds us all. You can say that they are the true Rwandans—". While about the Tutsi, he tells: "The Tutsi are a Nilotic race who arrived much later from their faraway north. With their cows and their weapons, the Tutsi took advantage of the natural integrity of the poor Hutu peasants and treacherously enslaved them". As the scene depicted above shows us, the colonial history of Rwanda is employed and examined in the Belgian comic book, which depicts the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

The echoes of the colonial past of Rwanda as well as the limelight in the Rwandan characters and their experiences from the pen of a European creator led me to opt for this comic book as my research material. I chose to study one book instead of taking on the study of multiple artworks on the subject, as focusing on one comic book allows me to better focus on the exploration and negotiation of trauma instead of turning the analysis into a comparative analysis of different narratives found in books by various artists. In the next chapter, I lay the groundwork for my analysis of the comic book by introducing the data, considering various ethical issues concerning my data and the research of visual material in general as well as determining my research questions.

3. RESEARCHING COMICS AND CONFLICT

Data: *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda*

Jean-Philippe Stassen, the cartoonist behind *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda* (2000)¹² is no stranger to colonial themes in his work. Although he is most known for the beforementioned piece which won him the Goscinny award in 2000, Stassen's French-language comics work includes other pieces that focus on the African continent: *Thérèse* 1999 and *Les Enfants* 2004. Additionally, he has published two classic works from the European colonial period: Luis Bernado Honwana's *We Killed the Mangy Dog* (1964) to which he provided illustrations, and *Heart of Darkness* (1899) by Joseph Conrad, to which Stassen provided other materials to conceptualize the story. These publications are a part of a larger trend of artists illustrating classics of literature and inviting readers to return to the works. According to Michelle Bumatay (2015), through his interpretation and visual realms, Stassen reworks the colonial discourse of these two books, aiming to make the reader rethink their approach to the original works as well as European colonialism, imperialism, and modes of representation. Against this backdrop, it is rather fitted to consider *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda* through a lens of postcolonial theory.

As a non-French speaking person, I studied the English version of the book published in 2006 and translated by Alexis Siegel. The translator, in his preface, calls Stassen's work a historical narrative, which implies the creator's attempt to recover memories of the Rwandan genocide. However, it is notable, as the story itself is fictional, Stassen has also aimed to create other narratives with fictional contexts, which in turn "refuse to be framed by the historical events that it addresses and simulates" (Bibi Khan, 2018, p. 3). Additionally, in Siegel's English foreword, he offers an 8-page long overview on the genocide, insisting that it is to help "readers unfamiliar with the Rwandan tragedy of 1994" (*Deogratias*, 2006, 1). This historical account is utilized as a means to complement the fictional comic narrative by providing the story and the reader/viewer with a "factual" framework they can reflect the events in the fictional narrative against.

J.P. Stassen's story follows a teenage Hutu boy called Deogratias in his life before, after, and during the genocide of Rwanda. Throughout the story, the reader finds out about Deogratias' life before the genocide when he was a young boy trying to woo both Benina and Apollinaria, who were sisters and daughters of Venetia, a Tutsi prostitute. Augustine, the only Twa character in the story, is in love with Venetia and wants

¹² Original title in French: *Déogratias*.

to make her his wife and a mother for his little child Marie. Apollinaria's father is rumoured to be Stanislas, a catholic Belgian Prior who took Venetia to Zaire¹³ during an instance of violent Tutsi oppression. Another foreign catholic priest introduced in the comic book is the kind and good-hearted brother Philip, who came to Rwanda from Belgium to do missionary work. A third foreign character is a French soldier who gets introduced on the very first page of the comic book: he is depicted as condescending and rather brutish. He is present in the story both before, after, and during the genocide. The fourth foreign character I consider to be central to the story and my analysis is a Frenchman and a veterinarian who Venetia dates and who Augustine works for. The group called the Interahamwe, Hutu extremists whose name has become almost synonymous with the perpetrators of the genocide are depicted through a character called Julius who forces Deogratias to join his group of perpetrators during the genocide. The Rwandan Patriotic Front or the "Tutsi side" of the war is depicted through an RPF soldier Bosco who is present in the story after the genocide as well as the very end of the genocide when RPF finally invaded Rwanda and caused the Hutu perpetrators to flee into neighboring countries.

During the genocide, the reader finds out that Deogratias is forced to take part in the raping and killing of his friends Venetia, Benina, and Apollinaria and watched as the leader of the Hutu group Deogratias is a part of, Julius, kills his friend Augustine. After the war, Deogratias is haunted by the memories of the genocide. The memories and the unbearable trauma of the genocide cause him to turn into a dog every night as a symbol of the PTSD he is suffering. Alcohol is the only thing that brings relief to Deogratias and makes the unbearable memories fade temporarily. Therefore, he is always on the search for urwagwa, a Rwandan banana beer. Finally, Deogratias confesses to brother Philip that he poisoned and murdered the French sergeant, RPF soldier Bosco and Hutu extremist Julius. The French sergeant had to die because he was an accomplice to the genocide, Julius had to die because he himself had done horrible things and witnessed Deogratias taking part in cruelties as well. As for why Bosco had to die, he and the RPF soldiers he led shot the dogs that were eating the corpses of the victims of the genocide. Deogratias himself turns into a dog because he identifies with the canines violating the corpses of his Tutsi friends, who he raped and killed. Deogratias, in his madness, offers brother Phillip poison as well, attempting to kill him. The story ends with Deogratias physically turning into a dog and being carried away by the police, who found him guilty of poisoning the French sergeant, Bosco, and Julius.

The story takes turns between three different times, the present moment being the time after the genocide. The time of the genocide and the time before the genocide are separated from the present by panels that do not have a black frame, unlike the panels that depict the present moment of the story. The

¹³ Modern day DRC.

fragmented timeline of the story with its flashbacks strengthens the telling of trauma, as the trauma itself causes fragmented memories, which will be discussed while laying out the theoretical framework for my research. The consistent rectangular panels and framed speech bubbles are disturbed only by a few instances, where text placed outside the rectangular panels and larger scenic panels depicting the starry skies of Rwanda break the rhythm of the comic book, adding value and weight to the telling. The neat and tight arrangement of the panels urges the story to proceed hastily, even causing claustrophobic uneasiness and helplessness in the reader.

The artistic style used in *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda* is cartoonlike. This contrasts with the dark and violent events of the story, as their degrees of abstraction and identification-specific drawing techniques combined with the realistically drawn environment contribute to readers' identification with the subject and therefore increase their involvement in the narrative (McCloud, 1993).¹⁴ The contrast created through cartoonlike drawing style paired with the theme of genocide makes the reader feel unease, as the unnaturalistic pairing highlights the absurdness and awfulness of the events. The use of perspective in the frames adds levels and symbolism to the storytelling, as we will see in the analysing section of the thesis. *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda* is a coloured comic book. The strong colours used in the work bring depth to the story and add symbolic value. For instance, in the literary presentation of the story, Deogratias has rugged dirty clothes. Before the genocide, he is wearing a white T-shirt. This symbolises his innocence before the genocide. The rugged, dirty, and T-shirt he is wearing after the genocide symbolises his post-genocide corruption.

Most panels have speech bubbles in them. Wordless panels appear from time to time, breaking the rhythm of the story to stop the reader for a second to reflect on the events. For instance, the panels where the reader sees Deogratias staring in the distance with his empty eyes suggest the reader to slow down and consider his trauma and descending into madness, which is being symbolised in a surrealist manner with Deogratias turning into a dog, both mentally as well as physically on the pages of the comic book.

In a thesis studying comics and visuality in communication, ideally, visual material would also be found on the pages of the thesis as well. Unfortunately, First Second Books, a graphic novel publisher and the publisher of the English version of *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda* failed to reply to a permission request to use pages and panels of the comic book. Therefore, I have resorted to describing the pages and panels in

¹⁴ McCloud has this to say on the apparent universality of a cartoon image: “---when you enter the world of a cartoon... --- you see yourself. --- We don't just observe the cartoon; we become it.” The combination of “iconic characters with unusually realistic backgrounds allows readers to mask themselves in a character and safely enter a sensually stimulating world.” (McCloud, 1993, 36.)

detail during the analysis of the material. While not being able to visually present the data studied, I believe this to be the second-best option in a situation where despite this setback I stay highly motivated to analyse this specific comic book in this context. By describing the visual work together with the analysis of the dialogue, I stay certain that my analysis of the data supports my findings.

Ethical considerations

Like any research, mine does not come without ethical considerations. First, I must address my positionality regarding the subject I am studying. Conducting research is never purely objective, and my positionality will affect how I perceive my data and results and how I interpret them. This is a particularly important notion when studying a form of art, which is always open for interpretation of the consumer. As a white, educated female living in a Nordic welfare state, I acknowledge my limited knowledge of the experiences of those who witnessed the genocide or were victims, perpetrators, or something between or around these categories in the genocide. Furthermore, I acknowledge experiencing the tragedy through art is not the same as “walking a mile in their shoes”, thus I will never understand the experiences of the people who lived through the trauma of the genocide.

My economic, cultural, and socio-political backgrounds as well as my geographical location and ethnicity affect my positionality. As producing knowledge is inherently tied to power, I must actively consider my ethical and political awareness during the research project. Being cognizant of one’s reality is necessary and fundamental to the research process. I, through my positionality, inevitably involve Western bias in my work and I have chosen to use this bias in my favour in regard to my research topic which questions aesthetic depictions of non-Western conflicts within the Western knowledge-making tradition. While my interpretations are still distinctively my own and cannot be as such linked to a larger social group of people, I am a member of a group to which the comic book, especially its translated version, is targeted. This aids with my interrogation of the graphic novel’s relationship with the political without raising major ethical issues regarding the analysis of the data.

My study is mainly focused on the relationship between the Western foreigners, the Hutu, and the Tutsi. Scholarly work surrounding the Rwandan genocide has been criticised for continuously neglecting the addressing of the Twa, who is the third indigenous group of people living in Rwanda. They make up approximately 1 percent of the population in the country. Despite the rapid economic growth in Rwanda, most of the Twa, who traditionally have been hunter-gatherers, are living in poverty. An estimation of

10 000 Twa was killed during the genocide of 1994 and another third of the Twas sought refuge in neighbouring countries during the conflict. Due to contemporary Rwanda's government policy forbidding all discourse on the differences between the ethnicities, the Twa can hardly commemorate their trauma and loss of members of the group due to fear of legal consequences following an act of "ethnic divisionism" or "genocide ideology". The reason for this is the Rwandan government's attempt to erase ethnic labels in the country altogether and using them is considered a serious crime that can lead to an arrest. Therefore, the suffering of the Twa has never been adequately acknowledged locally, nationally, or globally. I am addressing the Twa in my research through the Twa character Augustine who has a part in the tragic story of Deogratias, but regardless, my analysis concentrates more on the two other ethnic groups of Rwanda, especially the one of the Tutsi. The length of my research limits in-depth addressing of all the groups in Rwanda and therefore an active decision to focus on the Tutsi and the Hutu was made on my part. However, I acknowledge the need for further research on the experiences and history of the Twa before, during, and after the genocide to adequately comprehend the Rwandan genocide on an academic level as well as also to acknowledge the trauma of the Twa as well as the part the Twa played in the genocide.

While considering my positionality, one should also take notice of the positionality of the creator of the comic book. The current discussion on representation includes a very essential question: Who gets to tell a story? Moreover, one should also consider: Who gets to profit from a story? Stassen, after all, is a white male from Belgium, the former colonial power in Rwanda. In his work, Stassen uses the comic form to document the events through the experiences of a fictional character to the readers in his own country. While his intention may be pure and the artist has done a significant amount of investigative work in Rwanda before creating the comic book, the fact remains, that the author is a white Belgian male depicting the events of the Rwandan genocide. Should we focus more on creators who belong to an ethnic minority or other marginal groups, especially since this study is employing a postcolonial perspective in analysing the data? Although the producer of the graphic novel is not a Rwandan person or a witness to the genocide himself, I believe the creator's positionality should not become an attribute that safeguards a given cultural artifact from academic inspection – quite the opposite.

The positionality and background of the creator are factors that should not determine whether a piece should be investigated or not, but they should be factors that are considered *when* investigating the piece. *Deogratias: The Tale of Rwanda* is a product that produces knowledge, and thus, it should be treated as so regardless of the origin and background of the creator. Moreover, this work is not a review of the literal qualities of the graphic novel, but an inspection of the kind of knowledge it produces, and the comic book produces knowledge regardless of the creator's ethnicity, sex, social class, or other aspects affecting their positionality.

Studying aesthetic material in relation to international politics has its own set of problems. Bleiker, in his book *Aesthetics and Global Politics*, addresses some of these issues. First off, one must not turn into examining the nexus of art and the political only in the terms of popular art, as this way the work would lead closer to the field of cultural studies, thus losing its ontological footing. Secondly, one should be wary of approaching the study of aesthetics through and from the base of political objectives. War propaganda is an example of how aesthetics can be employed to support political activities that go against one of the most established dogmas of our time, human rights. Admitting these pitfalls, according to Bleiker, ensures that the research on visibility is concerned with how aesthetics can distribute sensibilities in mundane and institutional frameworks. (2009).

In addition to reading work regarded as essential in my field of study, I have aimed to employ work from people not from the former colonial powers of Western Europe and the US who remain underrepresented in Western research publication tradition as well as non-Western scholars who engage in academic activity in Western countries.¹⁵ However, for some part, it has been unavoidable to rely on Western scholars. Firstly, as mentioned before, discourse on different ethnic groups is not a wholly free practice in Rwanda. This may cause limitations in the academic inspection of the genocide in Rwanda, limiting the material produced in the Rwandan academic tradition that is useful for my research purposes which highly relies on the acknowledgment of historical ethnic division of the groups. Secondly, limitations, such as language barriers, inadequate research funding, under-representation, and the lack of citing of researchers from non-Western countries in Western and US academic peer-reviewed journals and other publications make it challenging to include and employ research from outside the Western research community as well as minority groups within the Western sphere of research. As Western scholars are often situated at the forefront of knowledge production, researchers from elsewhere still often remain outside major academic debates, which causes an imbalance in the production of new knowledge, thus undermining the quality of research.

¹⁵ I obtain from using the terms Global South and Global North, as the terms suggest geographic determinism in addition to being inaccurate, non-descriptive and homogenizing. The North/South juxtaposition shares the world in two boxes – one developed and one underdeveloped; one rich and one poor; one powerful and one powerless. Due to lack of better terms less coarse, I refer to the under-represented scholars with what they are not – a part of the mainstreamed scholarly tradition in the Western academia.

Research question

In my thesis, I examine how J.P Stassen's *Deo gratias: A Tale of Rwanda* as a part of the Western knowledge tradition depicts the Rwandan genocide and how it relates to postcolonialism. The research question in my thesis is: "How does J.P Stassen's comic book *Deo gratias: A Tale of Rwanda* contribute to the contestation and creation of the portrayal of the Rwandan genocide?". I will investigate how comics as a form of aesthetics and a narrative and visual construct can contribute to the creation and contestation of views on the Rwandan genocide and I aim to detect the postcolonial criticism the author J.P. Stassen depicts and offers in his work. In other words, I will investigate how Stassen uses visual and verbal means employed in the comic book form to express his depiction of the Rwandan genocide and the postcolonial criticism that accommodates the narrative.

The research question guides and centers my research project. In formulating a research question, I wanted to keep two things in mind. Firstly, I aimed to formulate a research question that would give me a solid, clear direction. Secondly, I wanted my research question to encourage exploration of different themes the artist brings forth in his work, this way utilizing the ability of visual art to combine a multitude of multifaceted themes and issues. I approach the comic book and its visual and verbal tactics through several overlapping themes. I will investigate how the comic book depicts the genocide through colonial criticism and representations of trauma. I examine how different characters contribute to the construction of a representation of the genocide which both highlights the colonial legacy present in the Rwandan contemporary society before the genocide as well as the related trauma depicted in the book.

I aim to interrogate the comic book's relationship with politics, and thus, I will be treating it as a cultural artifact. I am analysing the text for political meaning in both content and context. This means describing the narrative and visual strategies employed by the comic: the genre, form, and style, and discussing them in terms of the political message they communicate. By answering my research questions, I wish to contribute to the discussion on aesthetics and politics. Moreover, and more precisely, I wish to contribute to the discussion about the relationship between comics and conflict. Through my work, it can be detected that comic books, through their intrinsic qualities have the potential to subtly shape people's world views and views on politics. I aim to illustrate, that comics can act as a political force themselves and should therefore be viewed as a means to further generate diversity in global discussions and political narratives.

Methodology

I examine image-text relations in the comic book and how drawing the world by hand creates an aesthetic that contributes to the reader's/viewers' perception of the Rwandan genocide. For my method of analysis, I have employed narrative analysis and visual and textual analysis. The comic book form is a multi-semantic medium by its very nature, and a multidisciplinary approach is needed to comprehend this. I treat the graphic novel as a visual-textual artifact, analysing its visual-narrative elements through the lens of postcolonial theory and trauma theory to contribute to the discussion of aesthetics and international politics nexus and representations of genocide in a Western context. This is done by close reading the graphic narrative *Deo gratias: Tale of Rwanda* and analysing the narrative, verbal, and visual qualities of the work, and how these qualities contribute to the representation of the Rwandan genocide. I analyse the work according to postcolonial reading as I reflect the artwork to postcolonial criticism on Rwanda's historical and political processes.

Analysis of comics is often multidisciplinary, drawing from other fields of study like art history, political and social sciences, even medical sciences. For instance, Dunst et al. (2018) introduces digital, multimodal, and cognitive empirical research methods for comics. These methods draw on the computer and cognitive science, art history, linguistics, and literary studies. Additionally, experimental new approaches emerge often, for example, Shawn Forde's (2011) exploration of comics as an art-based research methodology paired with an ethnographic project studying the relationship between sports and social change in South Africa.

After some consideration, I arrived at the solution that I would be approaching the comic book through themes present in my research questions. This means that I have not chosen one, two, or a few pages or panels to examine, instead, I examine the artifact through different critical standpoints that I have chosen and detect how they materialise in the pages of the comic book. This approach helped me to extract different critical themes relevant to my research voiced in Stassen's work. Panels essential to my analysis are referenced in the analysis chapter, where I examine the textual, narrative, and visual qualities of the comic book. As I was unable to retrieve legal permission to visually present the comic book's pages and panels in my thesis, I present a description of the analysed material in the analysis chapter.

While in my thesis I am focusing on an approach of analysis loyal to Social Sciences, it is important to note that in Comic Studies, which due to my chosen data naturally influence the entirety of my work, there are differing opinions on how the data should be approached: some suggest that the images and text should be studied separately. Others suggest that images and text work together to form a visual narrative

construction and thus they should be studied as a whole, as a comic is nothing if it is not the sum of its components. Cohn and Magliano propose a framework, where each panel employs a visual vocabulary, while the layout of the panels defines the reading sequence. The panels, forming sequences, build a narrative structure that works both visually and grammatically, leading to a complex form of communication. (Laubrock & Dunst, 2020; Cohn & Magliano, 2020) In my study, I am siding with the latter response, acknowledging that the combination of text and visuality forms a message. I am analysing how the images and text work together to create meaning or meanings. Comics are both textual and visual. Drawings, in comics, together with such devices as sizes and shapes of the panels, compositions of gutters and entire pages, as well as symbols indicating different sounds, for example, are integral to the narrative, not a complementary illustration to text. Moreover, the text is a part of the visual more than it is a written discourse. Hansen, following Eisner (2006, p. 28.) points out that stylising and visualisation, as well as positioning of the text, is part of the visual language that comics employ (Hansen, 2017, pp. 581-608).

The narrative approach complements the postmodernist perspective of universal truths and an objective reality being unattainable. It aims to identify the story or stories represented in each phenomenon, producing attitudes, views, meanings, and generalisations of thinking towards the researched phenomenon. Following Barbara Czarniawska's framework of narrative research as presented by Amanda Barusch, (2012) the process included a gathering of the data, interpreting, analysing as well as deconstructing the story and the initial findings, and finally comparing them to the context of its production as well as the context of my research questions.

In the field of comics studies, as Mikkonen (2017) has pointed out, little has been done to build a comprehensive framework of narratology in comics. Thierry Groensteen (2007:2013) understands narratology of comics as a system of meaning-making, which departs from the traditional narrative theory in the sense that in comics, pictures and visual meaning play an equal part in the narrative of a comic as text and words, whereas the general strategy of narrative analysis is most concerned with language as a primary element of the construction of meanings (2007, p. 12). Mikkonen (2017, p. 10) stresses the importance of understanding narratological analysis (a variation of narrative analysis) as an interpretative process, where the framework brings forth certain features of the material. Additionally, he points out the problematics of distinction between form and content, as well as the history of artistic production in modern comics, which affects the conventions of storytelling in this format – the underground comix movement of the 1960s and the development of the graphic novel genre in the 1970s just to name a few (Mikkonen, 2017, p. 10).

Textual analysis is essentially an interpretation of how individuals in a specific culture in a specific time make sense of the world, and therefore, like the other approaches chosen for my work, it takes the postmodernist approach of disregarding the notion of objective reality. It is not limited to analysing words or text, as it analyses language, symbols, and images as well. Textual analysis, furthermore, is making “interpretations of something’s meaning” and treating it as a text, which, in turn, is understood as a word that has “post-structuralist implications for thinking about the production of meaning” (Alan McKee, 2003, p. 4).

The interpretation of Stassen’s *Deogratias: Tale of Rwanda* is personal and individual because I am analysing the work through my value judgment, logic, reasoning, and abstract systems. While my positionality may be attributed to a larger socio-political context or a subculture, my interpretation of the data remains a personal view that cannot be expected to be shared by a larger group and cannot be deemed more or less valid than an interpretation made by another individual or a subculture.¹⁶ Mario Valdes (2018), building on the thinking of Miguel de Unamuno (1864 – 1936) and Paul Ricoeur (1913 – 2005) outlines a theory of interpretation in cultural hermeneutics. A work of art’s meaning is made through its relationship with the creator and the consumers of the work of art. Moreover, from the perspective of Hermeneutics in Political Sciences, as to how something is interpreted or understood is often of more value than how something is (Medina, 2013, p. 3), my subjective positionality does not limit the academic validity of my interpretation.

According to Pauwels, “the primary purpose of visual analysis is to discover significant patterns in the depicted (the ‘what’) and manner of depiction (the ‘how’) to subsequently develop plausible interpretations that link observations to past or current social processes and normative structures” (2020, 4). When analysing a visual piece such as a comic book, one needs to be aware of the difference between what is being depicted and how it is depicted; what is the visual representation of the subject matter. Adapting to my research interests, the focus in the visual analysis includes form and style, as well as the world and context in which the visual artifact is being produced. This, from a postcolonial perspective would mean what is depicted and how, thus problematising the artifact and treating it as a mirror to the social, political, and cultural world of the producer of the artifact (Margolis & Pauwels, 2020, p. 12).

Although I am not employing multimodal analysis in my research, I am approaching my visual analysis by drawing influence from Gunther Kress’s (2010) distinction of three modes in one sign: writing, image, and

¹⁶ However: “textual analysis is a methodology for gathering information about sense-making practices, that is, how members of various cultures interpret the world around them” (Alan McKee, 2003).

colour. To Kress, an image shows what takes too long to read, while writing presents what would be difficult to show. Finally, colour strengthens specific qualities and information of the message.¹⁷ Finally, to achieve a plausible process of visual analysis of the comic book, in-depth knowledge of the specific medium, as well as the theoretical and empirical bodies of knowledge concerning the thematic focus are needed. To support my research and analysis, I use three bodies of work as a theoretical framework for my analysis: aesthetics and global politics, postcolonial theory, and trauma theory. Next, I will lay the theoretical groundwork for my analysis by examining these three theoretical frameworks and mapping out their influence on my work.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I use my chosen theoretical framework as a tool to detect themes the comic book communicates and to constructively analyse the topics arising therefrom. Therefore, instead of having the theoretical frameworks stem from the material and findings, the framework acts as a foundation for the analysis itself. This way, I work with the theoretical framework in two ways. Firstly, as mentioned, the frameworks allow me to focus on topics that arise from the research material. Secondly, as I analyse the findings, the theoretical frameworks allow me to consult the contemporary academic work on the subject and subjects, further deepening my analysis of the findings. In addition, introducing the theoretical framework before the analysis chapter of my research allows the reader to better comprehend my analytical choices as well as helps justify them. In this chapter, I start by introducing the theoretical framework of aesthetics and global politics, as it lays the foundation of the research and the chosen material. From there, I move on to postcolonial theory before finally touching upon the final piece of my framework puzzle: trauma theory.

¹⁷ To elaborate, while a natural phenomenon, colours have omitted meanings as societal products which makes it an important semiotic tool in analysing visual material. (Andersen et al., 2015.) As Andersen et al. note, while visual study in various subfields of international politics, such as security studies, has gained interest, inclusion of colour in the analysis has been widely under-investigated. While the use of colour in the comic book will not be of main interest in my analysis, it will however be addressed as the research material in question is a coloured comic book.

Aesthetics and global politics

My thesis rests on the notion of the importance of critically investigating aesthetics in relation to the study of international politics and peace. Visual peace research and the study of aesthetics in international politics are two different fields, although they have much in common and investigate similar themes and research questions. According to Möller, Visual peace research “explores what forms of knowledge on war and conflict images produce” and how they operate (or contribute) on every level of conflicts and peace and reconciliation processes, aiming for a historically and theoretically informed knowledge-based judgment. This allows Visual peace research to reconsider the ability of the visual material to widen “the discursive conditions within which human activities unfold” (2013, pp. 19-20).

W.J.T. Mitchell (2005) has long argued for a visual turn, or in his words, “a pictorial turn” in contemporary culture. In the 1960s, the linguistic turn in academia called for critical observation and attention to the role of language in our culture and everyday life. The pictorial turn urges to employ similar rethinking and interrogation about the role of images. The reasoning for the necessity of an aesthetic perspective on international politics lies in the fact that the world we live in is increasingly visual. Much of, if not all, of global politics, has a visual dimension. This pictorial or an aesthetic in the academic practice of international relations is relatively young, although a substantial amount of high-quality research has been done on film, photography, literature, poetry, and art.

The relationship between politics and aesthetics is not, however, a recently discovered phenomenon, although it has only lately been more recognised. Some scholars and thinkers have claimed that art is not, or it is not supposed to be, political. However, the opposite assumption is widely supported by academia, and visibility and aesthetics have enjoyed academic interest for a long time. Already in the late 1700s, in his work *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* (1790) Immanuel Kant determines that aesthetic judgment is based on a feeling, describing judgments about the beauty of an object, and showing that although we are unable to verify them, we are entitled to make such judgments.¹⁸ Jacques Rancière (2011) rethinks the aesthetics in his work *The Politics of Aesthetics* and examines politics from the perspective of “the distribution of the sensible”. To him, politics is about representation: who is seen and who is not. This in turn will reveal “... who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed” (2011, p. 12). This leads him to the conclusion that all art is political, as aesthetics are a part of the distribution of the sensible: aesthetics lies in the core of politics as

¹⁸ Kant, 1790, in *Critique of Judgement*.

in it lies a system of what is presented to sense experience. Furthermore, this notion endorses the fact that representation is an act of power, as the power lies within representations. Thus, not only is art through the act of representation always political, but it is also always a function of power. Of language, in *The Future of The Image* (2003) Rancière states: “speech makes visible, refers, summons the absent, reveals the hidden” (p. 113). Hence, critical reflection on the system of aesthetics is required in the study of global politics. Furthermore, investigating a specific type of aesthetic, such as comics, will give us a deeper insight into the operations of aesthetics and the political.

A compelling aspect of the aesthetics of international politics is the acknowledgment that presentation is always subjective. There always exists a gap between what is “real” and what is presented, although realism has become somewhat of a default value in many scientific fields. Comics seldom aim for objectivity because of their intrinsic qualities. Comics are created by drawing, which in itself defies the notion of objectivity or “real”. Comics employ tactics, such as exaggeration and leaving out unimportant details to emphasise what the creator/artist deems as important. For instance, the beforementioned comics journalist Joe Sacco does not aim for objectivity in his work: by making himself a character in his comics he reflects upon his positionality and how his being present affects the story he portrays and presents. *Deogratias: The Tale of Rwanda* resists the pursuit of realism by adding the surrealist element of the protagonist turning into a dog – not only mentally but also physically in the pages of the graphic novel as his appearances change into doglike features as he descends into madness. This brings about a juxtaposition between historical accuracy and fiction. By letting go of the rigorous pursuit of reality and the “mimetic approach” in Political Studies, studying human experiences transmitted in art offer new perspectives on global politics with the collective and individual knowledge and experiences they hold.

Postcolonial theory

While postcolonial theory is a body of thought that has many different orientations, all the orientations within the theory share the fundamental claim that it is infeasible to comprehend the world we live in unless its relationship to the history of colonial rule is considered. Postcolonial theory attempts to study the relationship and power dynamics of the colonisers and the colonised and the political and cultural impacts of the colonisers on the colonised. In other words, it looks into the interaction between the two groups through various complex forms of connections, such as trade networks and media. Edward Said, most

known for his work *Orientalism* (1978), has been regarded as one of the founders of postcolonial studies as an academic field. Michel Foucault's notions of power and its relation to discourse have also been influential in the emergence of this field, although Foucault himself has not touched upon colonialism in his writing. Postcolonial theory offers a constructivist understanding of social identities and societies in general, and perhaps more importantly it aims to deconstruct the hegemony of certain voices in history to expose alternate histories as well as give voice to the previously "voiceless". This allows the practice to address colonialist structures in the contemporary world in addition to studying the impacts of colonialism.

A significant focus in my analysis of the comic book becomes the relationship between postcolonialism and gender-based violence. Postcolonial feminist scholars have for long argued in favour of the connection between colonial metaphors and sexual violence under colonial rule instead of viewing ethnic politics as secondary to patriarchal oppression. In fact, many important works within the field of postcolonial theory have studied postcolonialism's linkages with and its issues to gender and sexuality. (Goswami, 2019; Chambers & Watkins, 2012; McClintock 1995; Young, 1995; Stoler, 2002) This linkage between postcolonialism and gender situates human sexuality in its multitudes as an essential element of colonial societies' complex structures of power. (Voss & Casella, 2012; Mendoza, 2016) Helina Beyene proposes that the formation of ethnicities under colonial rule reveal highly gendered projects which merged (and merge) hostility towards women in the making of racial hierarchies (Beyene, 2014, p. 66; Mamdani, 1996). As gender and sexuality are enfolded in the legacy of colonialism, gender and sexuality can hardly be undervalued as a point of inquiry within postcolonial theory.

As was previously mentioned, when touching upon Rancière's notion of aesthetics and representation as political, art is, through representation, an act of power. This power hidden in aesthetics can disguise its subjectivity and raise the interpretation to a level of objective perspective (Bleiker, 2009). This Foucauldian notion of knowledge as power leads us to consider the study of global and international politics from a different perspective, as it has been rather focused on the Western political, social, and historical narrative despite undergoing continuous evolution. In the discourse of international politics, Eurocentric narratives have remained dominant and stayed resilient even in the face of Europe's decline in the postcolonial world. (Tickner, 2016, p. 158; Tolay, 2021)

Postcolonial theory is a response to Eurocentric narratives and hegemonic writing of history produced by the Western hegemony, and it interrogates the knowledge and power nexus that is crucial for the maintenance and vitality of the Eurocentric dominance. In the context of postcolonialism and international politics, Eurocentrism points at the construction of "modern world history" forming a homogenous global space from and for European narratives, thus universalising European narratives and the West as ordinary.

European global colonisation, especially throughout the nineteenth century, influenced the modern field of international politics, as the colonisers transplanted European culture, religion, history, and philosophy and, in the case of Rwanda; the idea of fixed ethnicity on the native cultures they subjugated. Postcolonial theory is a practice that challenges the Eurocentric monopoly of knowledge production and therefore power which in turn urges us to reflect on the assumptions and ideas we hold. (Radhakrishnan, 1993; Loomba, 2015; Zaamout, 2020) Critical inquiry into the knowledge production and narratives is required to re-analyse and deconstruct the Western imaginaries of dominance and to “de-reify the spatio-temporal ordering of events” from a Western and a European perspective. (Fonseca, 2019, p. 45-46.)

Narratives are effective in shaping our understanding of the world. My analysis of *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda* rests on the assumption that the colonial era, rather than the pre-colonial era laid the foundation for the genocide since the distinctions and tensions between Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa existed before the colonial period, but it was the colonial power that created the fixed, ethnic identities of these groups. Moreover, by employing postcolonial theory as one component in the framework for my study, I am recognizing the postcolonial understanding of violence as not event-based, but long-term and systematic. This is closely linked to the third and final piece of my framework: trauma theory.

Trauma theory

The third and final part of my theoretical framework is a subfield of memory studies, trauma theory. Trauma theory is a prominent body of work that investigates the cultural effects of trauma. The tradition gained popularity within academia in the early 1990s onwards through scholars such as Cathy Caruth.¹⁹ However, trauma theory has been criticized for its rather Western understanding of trauma. From a Western perspective, trauma is often seen to have a definite beginning and end. What is often understood in the West to constitute trauma is an event-based model according to which trauma results from a single event. The postcolonial perspective on trauma theory challenges this prevailing view by understanding trauma as both ongoing and systemic (Viljoen, 2020, p. 2).

Representation is seen as mimesis in Western culture, always a lesser copy of reality. A mimetic view, additionally, supports the Western view of trauma as unshareable. Early Western trauma scholarship has established that if trauma is not or cannot be directly represented, it cannot be represented at all. This has popularised the notion of trauma as unrepresentable. As Jeanne-Marie Viljoen (2020) states: “This trajectory of thought broadly responds to the crisis that trauma presents for representational knowledge

¹⁹See: Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*.

with the Western notion that it is the individual or psychic integrity/memory that is flawed when accuracy and direct representation of trauma do not/cannot occur” (p. 3).

Additionally, according to Slavoj Žižek (2008, p. 11.) what divides violence into different types of violence is not the origin of it, but whether it is ongoing or if the victim has had the opportunity to escape it (and revisit the violence in their memory). If this is not the case, Žižek perceives that the victim lives through the ongoing trauma as if the violence was “invisible”. Viljoen (2020, p. 20) has broadened this term by using the more descriptive word “ineffable”. It is this ongoing, ineffable trauma that can be highlighted through a postcolonial understanding of trauma theory, as any attempt to represent it mimetically and directly remains futile, since, despite times of increased or lessened intensity, the boundaries of the violence are not clear-cut.

In Rwanda, the nature and ethnic anatomy of the genocide can be traced back to colonial history, although that is not the same as saying that colonial governance is the only cause of the genocide. However, examining how colonial processes have influenced postcolonial Rwanda is far from futile, as the violent and traumatic processes of post-independence Rwanda are closely and inherently tied to its colonial past. The trauma of the colonial past transforms into the comic book depicting the genocide, which presents not only forms of direct violence such as rape and murder but also portrays long-term trauma caused by the colonial past. Applying trauma theory to the study of postcolonialism offers insights on not only to the experiences of those experiencing colonial trauma, such as forced migration and colonization and their descendants, but it also helps to connect the 20th and 21st-century sites of trauma, such as war and genocide to the postcolonial world (Ward, 2013;2015). As Ward (2012;2015) quite ambitiously states, examination of postcolonial traumatic memory helps to understand and possibly even help prevent future atrocities and disasters from taking place.

As I apply trauma theory in my work, I aim to demonstrate how comics as a form of aesthetics and a producer of knowledge can offer nuanced depictions of trauma that can be considered ineffable.

Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda, for instance, addresses both direct violence as well as long-term postcolonial trauma, demonstrating how the two intertwine and operate simultaneously. The comic book not only represents direct violence but indirect violence as well, portraying a web of structural violence within the national and international context.

The Western scholarly tradition of trauma theory has tended to disregard minority and non-Western trauma. However, postcolonial criticism addresses trauma theory’s Eurocentric and monocultural bias. The postcolonial perspective suggests that there has been an emphasis on trauma studies to address the

victims, leaving less emphasis on perpetrators, this way employing dualistic understandings of trauma and further producing dualistic narratives of the violent conflict in general. From a postcolonial perspective, redeeming trauma theory's cross-cultural ethical engagement requires a critical acknowledgment of suffering engendered by colonialism (Craps, in Craps et al. 2015, p. 200). Through examination of postcolonial criticism in the comic book, I inevitably map out the visual-textual articulation of postcolonial trauma in Rwanda. Not only does *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda* focus on the perpetrators as well as the victims, but the main character is a Hutu who took part in the killings despite trying to protect his Tutsi peers. The comic book problematises and condemns the action and inaction of the West, as I will propose later in the analysis section of my work.

While the work I am analysing has a rather West-critical tone as shown in the analysis section of my thesis, the work I am studying complies with the Western tradition of aesthetic knowledge production. The comic book includes the Western consensus of trauma as event-based. However, Stassen ties the story into postcolonial perspectives of trauma as well when he treats trauma and violence as an ongoing process that is connected to multiple and various incidents and violence across time and space (Viljoen, 2020). An important example of Stassen's treatment of trauma is the main protagonist's tendency to turn into a dog at night due to his traumatic memories of the genocide. *Deogratias'* morphosis into a growling canine not only symbolises his individual trauma but it also reflects the ongoing trauma that Rwanda as a community experiences and relives. Moreover, it is worthy of pointing out that the use of surrealist techniques in depicting trauma in the comic book allows trauma to be portrayed and expressed effectively as the portrayal is not merely tied into the pursuit of mimesis and realism.

Jenny Edkins, working from the point of view of mostly a Lacanian psychoanalytical understanding of trauma, points out that trauma does not exist in linear time, instead, it breaks it. This creates what Edkins calls trauma time. In *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (2003), she maps out how individual subjects and the constitution of the nation-state's order and power are tied to the experience, commemoration, and witnessing of trauma. As trauma causes disruption to the symbolic linear order of time, it cannot be presented in linear time (Edkins, 2003). Edkins proposes that the individual trauma is subjected to be represented in a way that suits the nation-state's symbolic order, as our conception of time is closely tied to the concept of linear time. This, however, subordinates the nonlinear time conception caused by trauma to the linear, symbolic time (and order) of the nation-state. From this point of view, the qualities of comics as a form of communication may offer new dimensions in the study of the negotiation of individual memory and trauma with the one of the nation-state. Munslow Ong cites Chute and Marianne DeKoven as they point out that the graphic novel embodies the "iconic nature of the traumatic image" as the "intensity

of trauma produces fragmented, imagistic memories” (Chute & DeKoven, 2012, pp. 187, 193; Munslow Ong 2016, p. 212).

Before moving on to the analysis of the comic book, I contextualise the data as well as my chosen theoretical framework within an overview of the Rwandan history while placing special importance on the postcolonial processes that have influenced the genocide and Stassen’s comic book depicting the genocide. I finish my introduction to the history of the Rwandan genocide by addressing the contemporary situation and Rwanda, focusing on the importance of national narratives and memory and the contestation of the global and the local narratives and memory in the processes of cultivating sustainable peace.

5. INTRODUCTION TO RWANDAN GENOCIDE

Rwanda and the colonial past

Writing an overview of Rwanda and its genocide remains a challenging task not least because of the nation’s contested history. The Rwandan genocide is deeply embedded in the politics of the country, the region, and the international community today. It is a continuum to a tumultuous and violent history between the Hutu and the Tutsi, even though it cannot be argued that the genocide was a natural and unavoidable culmination in Rwandan history. The causes of the genocide remain debatable within academia. The reason for the Hutu majority’s antagonism against the Tutsi minority is manifold, as is apparent here in Nigel Eltringham’s quote from a church worker elaborating what caused the disaster:

“Many have looked and still look at the Rwandan tragedy as the result of ethnic hatred, others as the consequence of bad politics and power struggle; some take it for the direct outcome of colonial and neo-imperialist manipulations, while others take it to be the outlet of socio-economic frustrations, and so on. Blind men with a big elephant in the middle to identify! And the truth again is there in the middle – as big as all those elements put together.” – Rwandan Protestant church worker, 1998. (xv)

Many scholars have looked into the colonial past of Rwanda to explain the violence between the groups. The distinction between the Hutu and Tutsi was formed before the colonisation period of Germany and later Belgium. Tensions between the groups existed due to differences in wealth and social positions in pre-

colonial times, the consensus being that the Tutsi emigrated to the area where the Hutu lived and took over the land and the cattle, leaving Hutus in a subordinated position as compared to the Tutsi. However, the two groups had been rather flexible, not based on race but wealth and political power, as Tutsis are generally considered wealthier than Hutus. A wealthy Hutu could become a Tutsi and correspondingly a Tutsi who lost land, cows, or other goods, could become a Hutu. The distinction, instead of being based on race or culture, was determined by their tasks as well as their socioeconomic position; the Hutu were traditionally farmers, the Tutsi owners of cattle (Fujii, 2009; Mamdani, 2020, p. 51). The Hutu make an estimate of 85percent of the population, while the Tutsi constitute 14 percent of Rwanda’s population, the rest of the population consisting mainly of the Twa.²⁰

There are not a significant number of differentiating factors between the two groups of the Hutu and the Tutsi. Both speak the same language, Kinyarwanda.²¹ They share the same nationality, culture, and social rules. They lived, and often still live, in the same villages as neighbours. It was not utterly uncommon for the wealthy Hutu to marry a Tutsi: this was called *kwihtura*, which meant ceasing to be a Hutu and to become a Tutsi (Baines, 2003, p. 483; Straus, 2013, pp. 19-20). The two groups come from different origins, the Hutus are of Bantu origins and the Tutsi are considered to originate from Ethiopia, but the two “ethnicities” have co-habited the same land for centuries. Thus, a plausible main reason resulting to the antagonism between the Hutu and the Tutsi is not the different origin of the groups.

When colonisers arrived in Rwanda, they were amazed by the eloquent social and administrative system of the community (Straus, 2013, p. 20). To make the already existing distinction of the tribes serve the colonial rule, the colonisers enforced the differentiation of Hutus and Tutsis in different groups, aiming to benefit from the increasing antagonism between the Rwandans. The colonisers created a system of tribes based on the aesthetics of the people and the colonisers’ Western understanding of ethnicity. The Tutsi, who were considered more elegant, tall, lighter-skinned, and thin-nosed corresponded less on the racist stereotypes of a black person and thus were considered more beautiful and intelligent – connecting their “less African” outlook with their higher social status. The Hutus, instead, were described as short, stocky, big-nosed, and big-lipped (Straus, 2013, p. 21; Prunier, 1998, pp. 5-6). In Lee Ann Fujii’s interviews with Rwandan people, some of them defined the differences of appearance between Hutu and Tutsi similarly – associating thin noses, tall figure and light skin with Tutsis and wide noses, shorter figure, and dark skin with Hutus, yet they

²⁰ Today, the distinction between the different groups does not officially exist in Rwanda, thus, estimations of the percentages of these groups in the country remain unclear.

²¹ However, the cultural community speaking Kinyarwanda cannot be reduced to the ones confined within the national boundaries of Rwanda. Speakers of Kinyarwanda and its variants can also be found in Uganda, DRC, Tanzania, and Burundi.

did not make distinctions between the “ethnicities” based merely on looks, but other cultural and social stereotypes as well (Fujii, 2009, pp. 113-114).

During the colonial times, a new dimension was added to the now fully ethnicist concepts of the Hutu and the Tutsi: the dimension of indigeneity. The Tutsi became to be identified as an alien race whereas the Hutu were considered “Rubanda Nyamwinshi”, ordinary folk. Now, instead of holding the status of the top group in the local hierarchy, the Tutsi were positioned by the colonial power between the Hutu and the colonial administration which further antagonised the Tutsi in the eyes of the Hutu (Mamdani, 2020, pp. 101-102; Prunier, 1998, pp. 26-27, 39).

Rwanda’s independence was a turning point in the dynamics between the Hutu and the Tutsi. In November 1959, during a series of events regarded as “the Hutu Revolution”, the Hutu burned Tutsi houses and killed over 20,000 Tutsi in a course of three years. The riots began after a rumour about the Tutsi of the Union National Rwandaise (UNAR, a nationalist separatist party demanding independence from the colonial rule under Belgium) assaulting two Hutu sub-chiefs of Parti du Mouvement de l’Emancipation Hutu²² (Prunier, 1998, pp. 48-49). During this revolution, the previous Tutsi domination in Rwanda was replaced by a Hutu government with the support of Belgium, as supporting the Hutu majority was now more profitable for the Belgians. In 1962, Rwanda was declared independent under a Hutu power (Ibid., p. 54). The Tutsi elite of Rwanda was banished into exile and during the time between 1957 and 1964 until 1973, the Tutsi faced many violent attacks (Straus, 2013, 23; 175). The refugee status of many Tutsi fleeing the violence to neighbouring countries increased the invader narrative typical of the Hutu antagonism towards the Tutsi.

During Hutu president Juvénal Habyarimana’s rise into power through a military coup in 1973, again, the Tutsi faced violence from the Hutu. After the coup, a period of calm until 1990 followed until a civil war between the Hutu-government and Tutsi rebels (descendants of the exiles who escaped the country after the revolution of 1959) took place (Prunier, 1998, 93). The Tutsi rebel group was called the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and the Hutu were part of the Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement (MRND). The goal of the RPF was to regain some of the rights they lost after the Hutu Revolution. A peace agreement between the warring parties almost came into force, until the process took a sharp turn as president Habyarimana was killed in an airplane attack. This was the last moment before Rwanda the tragedy perceived as the gravest of its history during the following 100 days.

²² PARMEHUTU, a pro-Hutu party in Rwanda.

The genocide

In 1994, between the 7th of April and the 15th of July, an estimated 800 000 Tutsi, as well as moderate Hutu and members of the Twa were killed in genocide as a part of the Rwandan Civil war (1990 - 1994). There is no one universally accepted definition of genocide, and the contested definition of the term is a whole other academic debate, as genocide studies form its own field of scholarly inquiry. (See, for instance: Lemkin, 1945; Mann, 2005; Chabot et al., 2016; Straus, 2013) The current academic interest in genocide was partly fuelled by the broadcasting of the Rwandan genocide as well as the mass atrocities in the Balkans. (Apsel & Verdeja, 2013, p. 3) In my thesis, genocide will be understood as it is stated by the United Nations and how Alain Destexhe determines genocide. According to the United Nation's Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (December 9, 1948), genocide includes:

“--- any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group” (UN General Assembly, Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 9 December 1948, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 78, 277.)

Destexhe defines genocide in his book *Rwanda and Genocide in the 20th century* following Raphaël Lemkin who coined the term in 1944 using the Greek word 'genos' (race) and the Latin word 'cide' (to kill) to explain Adolf Hitler's policy of exterminating Jews during World War II. (See also: Apsel & Verdeja, 2013, p. 1) "Genocide is distinguishable from all other crimes by the motivation behind it". It implies the existence of a coordinated plan, aimed at total extermination" of the target group simply and exclusively because they are members of said group (Destexhe, 1995, pp. 2-3.)

After centuries of violence and tension between the Hutu and the Tutsi, the genocide in Rwanda started when a plane carrying the Hutu president Juvénal Habyarimana was shot down on the 6th of April, ending already created peace accords between the government of Rwanda and Tutsi refugee-led rebel group Rwandan Patriotic Front (RFP), which had initiated the war in 1990 when they invaded Northern Rwanda from their base in Uganda. What followed was the slaughter of at least, by a modest estimate, 500 000-800 000 Tutsi, moderate Hutus, and 10 000 members of the Twa community, as well as the rape of approximately 200 000 women. Notably, the perpetrators were not only soldiers and Hutu police officials,

but regular people using clubs and machetes, motivated by the will to exterminate the Tutsi population in Rwanda.

To see the genocide as tribal hatred and antagonism between two parties would be flawed as it is not constructive to look at the genocide “merely” as a civil war, as the Hutu were a majority with all the means and potential for the annihilation of the numerically minor Tutsi group (Straus, 2013). Much of the killings were government-orchestrated, and therefore systematic. According to Prunier, “the genocide happened not because the state was weak, but on the contrary, because it was so totalitarian and strong that it could make its subjects obey any order, including one of mass slaughter”, making it atypical to other violent conflicts in the continent (1998, pp. 353-354).

The Hutu-led genocide began a day after the president’s death and Hutu-hardliners (representatives of the ruling MRND-party) took control of the state, killing political opposition and attacking international peacekeepers. Soon after the killing of the Tutsi population started, leading to the twentieth century’s fastest genocide (Straus, 2013, p. 41). The persecutors included members of the Hutu militia, the Interahamwe, and Hutu civilians. The génocidaires killed people in their houses, churches, and other buildings, built roadblocks, and combed fields, hills, and marshes in their hunt for Tutsis (Ibid., 52). Notably atrocious was the former MRND wing Interahamwe which has nowadays become almost synonymous with the genocide perpetrators. Most of the perpetrators in rural areas were ordinary Hutu men who resorted to machetes and farming tools as their weapons. Notable about this is that these weapons had to be used in close contact with the victim (Ibid., pp. 18:26-27;96). This use of weaponry used for butchering the victims is an indication of the brutality of the Rwandan genocide – however, in its brutality, the Rwandan genocide was systematically planned and coordinated with the clear aim of extermination of the Tutsi population.

Tutsis were not the only ones losing their lives during the genocide. The Twa and moderate Hutus were killed and harmed as well. According to Straus, in rural communities in Rwanda génocidaires physically punished and killed Hutus who did not want to take part in the killings. Some Hutus were killed as an example of what happens if one resists the killing of the Tutsi. Additionally, the RPF killed MRND officials as well as Hutu civilians as they advanced. The RPF first took control of most of central and eastern Rwanda by the end of May, and on July 4th they took control of Kigali. The Hutu regime, as well as the militia and an estimated one million Hutus, fled to Zaire, and another million took refuge in Tanzania (Straus, 2013, p. 50).

The international community was slow to act to stop the atrocities, although the events happening in Rwanda were well known and broadcasted at least in some sense, as the broadcast outlets were flooded

with imagery from the refugee camps and later, bodies of the victims of the genocide. An independent report assessing the UN's involvement in Rwanda commissioned by Secretary-General Kofi Annan revealed that the UN peacekeeping mission in Rwanda failed due to an insufficient mandate and later the Security Council's unwillingness to strengthen it once the genocide started.²³ This was because the high UN officials, such as the then-Secretary-General of the UN Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Annan²⁴, did not act based on the information from the field. (Grünfeld & Huijboom, 2007).

The international community failed to prevent the genocide and they failed to stop the killing once it had started. Many have seen the international community's lack of action mostly as a lack of political will, due to such reasons as general peacekeeping fatigue, bad experiences in Somalia, and guarding of national interest, as the main actors France, Belgium and US did hold important information about the genocide and had no major challenges evacuating foreigners out of the country in addition to France's intervention in the country in July. Annan has since expressed his regret for the international community's inaction. Additionally, the UN's contribution to the Rwandan tragedy was paired with the UN's role Srebrenica massacre in the Bosnian War: UN peacekeeping officials were reluctant to heed requests for support from their forces and failed to fully comprehend the Bosnian Serb war aims, which led to them failing to act as Bosnian Serbs carried out a systematic mass execution of civilians in the town of Srebrenica, as well as looting, raping and other forms of violence.²⁵ The UN's image suffered from its inability to act in the case of the Rwandan genocide and the fall of Srebrenica. This caused increased and strong criticism of the UN's imperative as well as its ability to prevent and stop grave human rights violations. To this day, the Rwandan genocide and its heritage remain a dent in the credibility of the UN.

Calm after the storm? Reconciliation and state-sanctioned genocide narrative in contemporary Rwanda

Life in Rwanda is communal and the transition to peace has been increasingly challenging due to survivors and perpetrators having to live close to each other, often as neighbours (Ingelaere, 2016, p. 147). The RPF has exerted total control over the Rwandan political space since their invasion in 1994. The RPF-led

²³ Report of the Independent Inquiry into the Actions of the United Nations During the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda [S/1999/1257] (https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1999/1257).

²⁴ Annan acted as the head of UN peacekeeping operations during the time of the Rwandan genocide.

²⁵ Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35: The Fall of Srebrenica [A/54/549] (<https://undocs.org/A/54/549>).

government's major focus has been restoration, peace, and reconciliation in Rwanda to break the cycle of violence and hatred. A part of this process has been the prosecution of the génocidaires still within the borders of Rwandan territory via the UN Security Council Resolution 955 the International Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). Additionally, nationwide gacaca courts were established to combat the massive number of detainees and genocide suspects in Rwandan prisons²⁶ (Ibid., 2016, Clark, 2010.). However, as Mamdani has proposed, the largely retributive reconciliation practices having led to what he calls justice without reconciliation. (1996.) Whilst no violent outbreaks have occurred in the country since the genocide, an underlying fear of re-emerging violence in both sides has caused many Rwandans to regard the increasingly authoritarian RPF-led government as the only entity able to keep the security and prevent the country from sliding back to full-blown violence (Buckley-Zistel, 2006).

Whereas resolution refers to the process of shaping an agreement between conflict parties, reconciliation aims for individual and collective rebuilding in environments of seemingly irreparable history of violence and antagonism, which has led to a climate of anger, fear, and mistrust between people. It is understood as a dynamic not married to a certain goal, but rather, it holds a commitment to a certain way of thinking and acting through such terms and concepts as truth, justice, trauma, societal healing, conflict management, rehabilitation, trust, empathy²⁷, and transformation. (Krondorfer, 2018, p. 1, 3-4.) Indeed, it has become an important theme in the political discourse of many divided societies. (Schaap, 2005, p.8)²⁸ Since the Cold War, it has been recognised as a tool for reconciling an ill history and working towards sustainable peace in the future of a group or a society.

However, reconciliation, as an academic concept, is manifold and contested. The increasing use of the word in both academic and political contexts does not equate to an increased understanding of what the term entails and what practices can and should be included in the process. (Zambakari, 2018; Verdeja, 2013a; Bloomfield et al., 2003; Hirsch, 2013, p. 168; Hermann, 2004; Galtung, 2001) For my purposes, I conform to

²⁶ According to Totten & Ubaldo, gacacas (in Kinyarwanda the word means "grass") are "an indigenous form of local justice used in pre-colonial Rwanda that was adapted in the late 1990s and implemented in the early 2000s to try alleged perpetrators of the 1994 Rwandan genocide". They aim to emphasise restorative justice and community reconciliation by allowing victims/survivors to voice their stories and find out how and where the ones close to them were killed or buried in addition to trying low-level génocidaires. (2011, 196-197.)

²⁷ Plenty of research advocates and emphasises the role of empathy in enforcing kindness in societies as it is thought as a prerequisite for concern (Riess, 2017; Pinker, 2012; Elliott, et al., 2011; Hardee, 2003). However, recent studies have shown that the correlation between (especially cognitive) empathy and prosocial behaviour may not be as central as often established, and instead, empathy's relationship with both kindness and cruelty is complicated (Buffone & Poulin, 2014; Prinz, 2011; Jordan, et al, 2016). More research is required on the role and abilities of empathy in catalysing reconciliative processes in post-conflict societies.

²⁸ This is a common occurrence, despite, as Andrew Schaap (2005) has pointed out, reconciliation and politics operate according to rather contradictory logics, as reconciliation works towards closure and harmony, while politics lean towards plurality, openness, and conflict. (p. 8)

Björn Krondorfer's understanding of reconciliation as a conceptual framework of reconciliation of relational and psychological terms over its implications for policy and structural aspects; hence, I understand reconciliation as a practice that aims to rebuild trust between alienated parties and individuals and reconcile with a history of wrongdoing. (2018, p. 9.)

While regarded as an essential condition for a stable, long-lasting peace in a society (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2000, p. 237), reconciliation has simultaneously been described as "a rather crude analytical tool" (Hermann, 2004, pp. 40-41). Reconciliation aims to create an environment in which conflicts become negotiable. (Schaap, 2005, p.21) While this makes them an important tool and a process for a more just and stable society, it is important to keep the expectations towards these deep, multi-faceted processes in check: they are not a one-way ticket to a peaceful harmony between former antagonists. (Rosoux, 2013, p. 487) Indeed, in former Yugoslavia, reconciliation became an 'R-word' following the EU-led implementation of the Franco-German model which led to a politically driven as well as a top-down elite-driven process. (Touquet and Milošević, 2018, p. 179-193) As with any practice, blind belief in its universal functionality will lead one nowhere. It is the value gained through putting the concept of reconciliation under close inspection that will give us further insights on how to better use it to work towards repairing antagonism and mistrust between groups and individuals, as well as rebuilding trust.

As Krondorfer argues, it is of utter importance to find pathways of co-existence in the aftermath of violence. If the memory and trauma of a conflict go unhealed, as recent studies in memory and trauma state, there is an increased risk of a renewed outbreak of violent conflicts. (2018, p. 3) Thus, in the contemporary world, reconciliation has a role of considerable importance on a global level. In transitional societies, narratives play a central part in the society's processes towards hybrid and holistic forms of justice, reconciliation, and stability. On a collective level and in long-standing, extreme conflicts different sides are identified with their perspective and their narrative, not able or rarely able to accommodate a competing narrative. Both the Tutsi as well as the Hutu believed to be right as they regarded themselves as the victims and the other group as the "evil"; Hutus saw their history as a continuum of being subordinated by the white man and the Tutsi, the Tutsi saw themselves as the victims of unforeseen genocidal violence, thereby both sides dehumanising the other as the enemy, ultimately falling into a spiral of retribution and perpetration. Apportion of survivor's justice and mediating public and private memory while avoiding major inconsistencies between the two are central in reconciling society's ability to "never forget" while moving on; healing while also remembering.

While considered relatively successful when compared to other post-conflict societies in the area, the RPF-led government has been criticised as the government's approach has not worked in favour of creating

sustainable peace in the country. For instance, the post-genocide government's response to the postcolonial identification of the Hutu and the Tutsi and an attempt to reshape social cohesion by reshaping the society's collective memory was to criminalise discourse on ethnicity in political identification altogether (Mamdani, 2002; Jansen, 2014). This was done promoting a state-sanctioned narrative about the history of Rwanda which suppresses any reference to pre-genocide differences and Hutu - Tutsi conflict, instead of focusing on the colonial causes of these constructed identities. It has been argued that the authoritarian social, political, and legal changes have not indeed affected the root causes of political and social insecurity in the country nor cultivated positive peace, instead, they merely suppress dissent and political opposition and silence underlying tensions ultimately hindering reconciliation processes between the groups. Additionally, it turns a blind eye to the colonial and national political legacy. (Mamdani, 2002, p. xvi; Waldorf, 2009).

As I finish the chapter on the historical background of the Rwandan genocide from the point of view of my research focus points, I have now laid out the groundwork for the analysis of my material. The analysis is sectioned into three themes that I detected to arise continuously as carrying themes addressing trauma and postcolonial critique in the comic book. These themes will be discussed under separate subheads to give clarity and structure to the analysis which additionally allows me to efficiently reflect on my findings on contemporary academical work on the subject. I will begin by investigating the institutionalisation of colonialism in Rwanda, then move on to how Western characters are depicted in Stassen's work, and finally, I investigate how the artist addresses gender violence and gendered trauma through the use of narrative, words, and drawn images. After analysis, I bring all these themes together in the conclusion part of my thesis, where I situate my findings on the body of academic work situated within my thesis topic.

6. ANALYSIS

Institutionalisation of colonialism

One of the most studied scenes in Stassen's comic book shows the French sergeant and Deogratias sitting at the terrace of Hotel Umusambi (Figure 3).²⁹ I begin my analysis with this scene, as it is very relevant in relation to my research. I interpret the scene from the point of view of my research question and continue by tying it to the themes detected in the comic book which support my interpretation of the scene. As the French soldier and Deogratias sit by the table, the sergeant asks Deogratias: "By the way Deogratias, do you remember Venetia?" The image in the panel shows a cockroach crawling on the bar table. The perspective of the cockroach is from above, symbolising the inferiority of the cockroach. The next panel shows both the sergeant and Deogratias looking at the cockroach, now showing the perspective from below, showing the white foreigner and Deogratias higher than the cockroach. In pro-Hutu discourse, the cockroach was a symbol for the Tutsi, a group of which Venetia was a part. The usage of the word *inyenzi* to refer to Tutsis has its roots in the restlessness of post-independent Rwanda of the 1960s. Exiled Tutsis had formed armed groups in neighbouring countries and launched attacks and pillages to Rwanda, gaining the nickname *inyenzi* from the Hutu government. Later the term was used to refer to all Tutsis in a derogatory manner.

It is not uncommon, in genocidal discourse to animalise a group of people – take for example the Nazis, who assimilated the Jewish with rats or mice, an aspect Spiegelman later employed in *Maus*, his graphic narrative on the Holocaust. Calling the Tutsi cockroaches, *inyenzi*, was part of the rhetoric that aimed to show the Tutsi as vermins in need of extermination. The racist narrative is echoed on the page where Benina and Apollinaria overhear the radio while reading a Western magazine. The radio broadcaster calls the Tutsi cockroaches and expresses his wish for the Tutsi to "swim back to Etiopia" through the Akagera river (2006, p. 34). As the sergeant tries to crush the cockroach with his hand in the first scene, Deogratias stops him. To him, killing the bug would remind him of the killing and raping of his Tutsi friends that Deogratias was guilty of, as the reader/viewer finds out during the climax of the comic book. The animalisation of the Tutsi is translated into Deogratias' animalisation of himself: he sees himself as a dog, which symbolises the trauma he continues to relive and cannot leave behind himself. This animalisation of and the ethnic discourse it spawned from is tied to the colonial racial discourse which was based on the Hamitic myth.

²⁹ I.e., Khan 2018, Polak 2020.

According to Mamdani, the origin of European race doctrines lies in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which offered a nurturing ground for the growth of scientific racism and the tendency to categorise Africa into two parts divided by the Sahara. Hegel's writing on Africa describes the division: "Africa proper, as far as history goes back, has remained— for all purposes of connecting with the rest of the world— shut up; it is the gold-land compressed within itself— the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of conscious history is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night" (Hegel, from Mamdani 2020, p. 78). As the Europeans got more acquainted with Africa below Sahara, they were met with sophisticated and organised civilisations. This clashed with the predominant idea of the area as a land of "childhood, which is lying beyond the day of conscious history" in dire need of European civilising processes. A new theory was needed as to where the land of childhood received a civilising influence of an outside race. The Hamitic hypothesis filled this gap and constituted the intellectual construct of race in Rwanda.

The general belief around the Hamitic myth is that all significant achievements in Africa were brought there by Western people (Lemarchand, 2018, pp. 79-80; Sanders, 1969, p. 34). The Hamitic hypothesis or Hamitic myth was constructed as a part of race science during the colonial era in support of colonialism and slavery. According to the hypothesis, which is based on a Biblical myth, the sons of Ham, who was the son of Noah, populated Africa. This "Hamitic race" closely related to the "Caucasian race" was far superior to the "Negroid" populations in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to the Biblical story foretelling the origins of nations, after flooding the Earth, Noah's sons Ham, Japheth, and Shem were to re-populate the earth with their offspring. Ham, however, bore a curse: after seeing his father Noah drunk and naked and telling two brothers about it, Noah cursed Canaan, the son of Ham, saying that his offspring shall be the "the servants of servants" (The Bible, 9:25).³⁰ Since the Middle Ages, in European Jewish and Christian narratives Ham was seen to be the ancestor of all Africans. Some theologians interpreted Noah's curse on Canaan as having visible racial characteristics in Ham's offspring, most notably black skin. Edith Sanders summarises the sixth-century Babylonian Talmud which states: "the descendants of Ham are cursed by being Black and [it] depicts Ham as a sinful man and his progeny as degenerates" (Sanders, 1969, pp. 521-532).

During the colonial conquest paired with the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the 19th-century curse of Ham was used in justifying the enslaving of Africans and the consideration of Africans as lesser than Caucasians (Mamdani, 2020). European scientists paired the Biblical story with anthropology and biology to explain the

³⁰ "Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. 23 And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant." The Bible: Genesis 9:23-27.

hierarchy of races through evolution theory. This included pseudo-scientific practices, like measuring the length and width of a person's face to determine their "ethnicity". The Hamitic hypothesis operated as a base for the institutionalisation of Rwanda and naturalised the constructed political and social differences between the Hutu and the Tutsi.

As the education system was brought to Rwanda from the coloniser countries, the system was used for the construction of ethnic division. Stassen addresses the educational system as a part of the colonial, oppressive structures with a scene in which Deogratias, Apollinaria, and Benina attend school (Figure 4). The first panel of the scene shows the kids sitting at a school desk in a classroom, imitating the perspective of the teacher. The worried look on the kids' faces increases their vulnerability in the situation as well as the authority of the teacher.

A male teacher wearing sunglasses, thus covering his eyes, asks the classroom "Who here is a Hutu?" and as most of the classroom consisting of young Hutu boys apart from Benina and Apollinaria raise their hands. The perspective of the panel is from behind the teachers, but from his head level. Therefore, it looks like the teacher, and the reader/viewer alongside the teacher is gazing upon the children in the classroom. This gives the reader/viewer a sense that the teacher is in the position of authority, which makes what he has to say next more startling. The teacher proceeds to explain: "The Hutu are the majority of the people. These proud and honest farmers, of Bantu stock, are the ones who cleared the country for cultivation. With courage and care, they turned it into the wonderful garden that feeds us all. You can say that they are the true Rwandans—". While about the Tutsi, he tells: "The Tutsi are a Nilotic race who arrived much later from their faraway north. With their cows and their weapons, the Tutsi took advantage of the natural integrity of the poor Hutu peasants and treacherously enslaved them" (2006, p. 18). True to their personalities, Benina has an angry expression on her face while Apollinaria looks defeated. After the class, as Deogratias comforts them by calling the teacher a fool, they seem visibly devastated.

According to Elisabeth King, (2013) many Rwandans, scholars as well as Rwandan government officials name ignorance and lack of education as contributing factors in the genocide. However, King's research claims otherwise: education played a major part in the mobilisation of the genocide as it plays a harmful role in the intergroup relations in Rwanda. Education and formal schooling with its unequal structures and psychocultural processes contributed to violent inter-ethnic conflicts in both the colonial time and in the independent state of Rwanda.

Notable in the chalkboard scene in addition to the scarcity of Tutsi pupils is the absence of any other female students apart from Benina and Venetia who sit in the front row of the class. Everyone else are Hutu boys.

Patriarchal ideas partly stemming from colonial influence led to a situation where girls had limited access to the Rwandan education system (Bumet, 2012). Families prioritised the education of males over females since after marriage, females would be a part of another conjugal community and because females provided household labour. On page 21 Apollinaria is seen telling Prior Brother Stanislas that she prefers household chores and working at the church over the possibility of education.

In a dark room, sitting and drinking urwagwa with Deogratias, Bosco speaks of the ethnic division and ID cards, contradicting the history of ethnicities that were provided in the classroom scene (Figure 4). The perspective of the panels imitates the one depicting a classroom from their point of view, and Deogratias' facial expression resembles his expression as he tried to comfort Benina and Apollinaria after the Hutu teacher's class on ethnic groups at school. "...Hutu, Tutsi... The white made up those differences between us! They wrote those words on our ID cards! Before they came, before they sowed the seeds of division before they enslaved us, we lived peacefully here...". Deogratias finishes Bosco's sentence: "...In a land of milk and honey" (2006, 19). It is worth mentioning that when Europeans first set foot to Rwanda, they called it a prosperous "land of milk and honey" where the people lived in "impressive harmony" (King, 2013, p. 36). With this, Stassen draws a parallel with the promised land of Jewish tradition in the Bible.

The conversation is held in the dark. The dark colour of the panels highlights the secrecy of the conversation between Deogratias and Bosco and reflects the current climate of Rwanda in regard to political narrative, where all talk of ethnic differences is restricted. While Bosco is a Tutsi, who were perceived as victims of the genocide, he does not dare to speak of the ethnic history freely and in public, instead, the discussion between the two is confined within the walls of his house. The result is a broken society: as Bosco is seen receiving a vessel full of urwagwa from Deogratias, Bosco concludes his speech by saying: "Today, we're all broken: you're crazy. And I'm just so tired" (2006, p. 19). Bosco's speech, which complies with the official RPF narrative, relates to both the colonial past and the divination caused by applying the Hamitic hypothesis and mobilising the differences between the Hutu and Tutsi for administrative purposes of the European colonialists. Bosco's speech and the mention of the ID cards traumatised Deogratias as well as the location in which the conversation takes place embodies the ongoing, systematic colonial trauma in Rwanda. "Today, we're all broken" marks how colonial trauma is relived in the contemporary post-conflict Rwandan genocide. Just like Deogratias and Bosco share the vessel meant for storing urwagwa, they share the trauma of Rwandan history regardless of their ethnic identity and distinctions between victims and perpetrators.

Another instance where Stassen makes a reference to the ID cards in addition to Bosco's speech is during a roadblock, where foreign soldiers stop the bus Deogratias and Benina are riding on (2006, pp. 19,22). The

ID cards Stassen depicts are a major factor in the intergroup polarisation between the Hutu and the Tutsi in Rwandan society. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, the Belgian colonisers introduced identity cards into the Rwandan society, requiring every Rwandan person to carry the card with them all time. This ID card determined whether the person was a Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa. Ultimately, this contributed to making Tutsis and Hutus into two racially and ethnically different and fixed groups. Moreover, the employment of ID cards was an important factor in the magnitude and speed of the genocide. During the genocide, carrying an ID card that stated one to be Tutsi meant a death sentence at a roadblock built by the génocidaires. In addition to the ID cards as a part of an identification system stemming from the colonial era, the reader can see that during the genocide, the word “HUTU” has been written on Deogratias’ house’s door (2006, p. 64). This references to a larger system of identification and systematic practice of marking buildings that belonged to either Tutsi or Hutu. Similar practice has been reported in for example during the Holocaust, the “riots” of Indonesia, which targeted people of Chinese people (Zha, 2000; Winarnita et al., 2020) and in Yugoslavia between 1992 and 1995 (Procknow, 2020; Mojzes, 2011).

As mentioned before, rigid racial and ethnic division and group identity did not exist in Rwanda until colonisation. The notion that it is the white foreigners in the comic book who use ethnic identification cards reflects the history in which rigid ethnic divisions were introduced to Rwanda by colonial powers and then only later adopted by Hutus. In fact, in the Hutu manifesto, 1957, Hutu leaders were against eliminating the ID card system: "We are opposed vigorously, at least for the moment, to the suppression in the official or private identity papers of the mentions 'muhutu', 'mututsi', 'mutwa'. Their suppression would create a risk of preventing the statistical law from establishing the reality of facts." The ID cards, from the perspective of the Hutu leaders, would prove the majority of the population to be Hutus. The first president of Rwanda as well as the leader of the revolution of 1957, George Kayibanda, was one of the nine authors of the Hutu manifesto of 1957 (Mamdani, 2020, p. 117; Fussell, 2004, p. 64). Group classification with the ID card system by the Belgian government was retained after the independence in 1961 and the system of *carte d'identité* remained, displaying the "ubwoko", "ethnie" or group affiliation of the card's owner. Even before the genocide, while negotiations of power-sharing were taking place under the Transitional Government, the ID cards aided in identifying the victims in North-Western Rwanda in an early 1993 massacre during the civil war.

This incidence shows that the function of ID cards in ethnically targeted killings was known even before the genocide of 1994. Additionally, not only the potential but also the hazard the documents posed was recognised. Before the genocide, NGOs and several countries had urged the removal of ethnicity in ID cards. The system continued to ensue, despite talks in the Ashura Accords (August 4, 1993), as projected by

the transitional government, about eliminating any reference to ethnic origin in government-issued documents (Fussell, 2004, p. 64).

Juvenal Habyarimana became the second president of Rwanda in 1973 after a coup. After first retaining the *carte d'identité*, in November of 1990, he declared to abolish the ID cards simultaneously with his declaration of a multi-party system that would include both Hutu and Tutsi. Abolishment of the ID cards, however, was never delivered. Later, in April 1991 Habyarimana was encouraged to proceed with the abolishment of the ID cards by the United States Ambassador, however, the French Ambassador opposed the statement by the ambassador of the United States. (Gourevitch, 1998, p. 90) Again, in July 1991, independent consultants pressed governments giving aid to Rwanda to establish a prerequisite for assistance that would urge the Rwandan government to give up inclusion of group affiliation from ID cards. Like in April of the same year, the attempt to seize the use of ID cards failed as the governments neglected the advice. (Ibid.)

During the genocide, ID cards played an important role in identifying the ones who were to die. Not only did they aid the perpetrators to recognise their victims based on their “*ubwoko*”, but they also additionally created psychological distance between the victims. (Distancing the perpetrators from their targeted victims by group classification.) The systematic and organized killings were occasionally even divided into segments which included bureaucratic processes, such as retrieving ID cards from dead victims and using them as proof of a “mission accomplished”, in other words, succeeding in killing Tutsis (Fussel, 2004, p. 65).

Foreigners: Western attitudes, global inequality, and the role of the bystanders

The Catholic church was the most dominant institution both socially and religiously in Rwanda before the genocide. J.J. Carney (2012) has proposed that while white church leaders had complicity in the ethnic discourse and violence that led to the genocide of 1994, they did not view nor enforce the distinctions of the groups in merely ethnic ways. However, the church, as a part of Western institutionalisation in Rwanda was a part of the process of setting ethnic frameworks in the society. Surely enough, on page 36 Brother Philip asks his friends Benina, Venetia, and Deogratias which ethnicity they belong to because he can't tell the difference despite knowing them for a long time. To this Deogratias exclaims: “Ha ha ha! No one but whites asks questions like that!” This highlights the notion of the importance of the ethnic categories to Western foreigners. Although he cannot determine the “ethnic” differences between his Rwandan friends,

he is concerned about their ethnicity and the concept of different ethnic groups in Rwanda. However, I interpret this as a not depiction of merely the church's attitude towards the concept of ethnicity, but that of the white foreigners in general.

J.P. Stassen does not depict the church leaders as contributors to the ethnic rhetoric, rather they seem to be the most concerned about their influence and authority in the country as well as their position as the caregivers and protectors of the integrity of the Rwandan people. Brother Philip, who is a friendly and kind Belgian priest wants to do good for the Rwandan people and believes the church can change the lives of catholic Rwandans. He reminds Augustine of the education he got thanks to the church, however, when Augustine points out the education has been useless to him, Philip calls his friend "incurable" while making a gesture that resembles rolling his eyes. Furthermore, according to my interpretation the church leaders, especially Brother Phillip and his mom and dad who visit Rwanda symbolise not only the Catholic church but a Western viewer/outsider/bystander in general; they mean well, but they do not see behind the oppressive structures and reality behind the everyday lives of their Rwandan friends.

On page 66 (Figure 1.), Brother Philip is shown at his home in Belgium during the time of the genocide in Rwanda. The first panel of the page depicts a relatively wealthy suburban area during the night-time. In the front, we see Philip's home. The next panel shows Philip, with a worried, defeated look on his face, as he sits in the dark. His face is hit by the dim light coming from the TV. The speaker says: "From the capital Kigali, where the evacuation of Europeans has now been completed, come reports that small-arms fire has been heard all night and that many lynchings were witnessed". The third panel now moves on the television screen; however, it is not located in the middle of the panel. Instead, half of the image depicts the television screen which shows the location of Rwanda on a map. The second half shows Rwandan vessels, which symbolises Brother Philip's close ties to the country. The last panel shows Philip and Marie, Augustine's young child who Philip took with him to safety, as well as Philip's parents. As they all look away from the TV screen, Philip's mother tells her son to turn the television screen off, as she does not want little Marie to see the upsetting footage that they are about to show on the television screen.

More than being a depiction of the Catholic church's relationship with Rwanda, Philip's Belgian family depicts and symbolises the reaction of the Western world in general. Their act of looking and not looking establishes them, spectators. Philip and his family contribute to the "visual-discursive construction of political space" based on global spectatorship as witnesses (Möller, 2010, p. 131). Apart from Belgium and France, during the time of the genocide very marginal Western interest was given to what was happening in Rwanda. Fred Grünfeld and Anke Huijboom (2007) have established that as the Western community and the UN dismissed the early warning signs of the upcoming genocide, their inactivity led to the

implementation of a preventable genocide. Brother Philip's family standing by the television points out at the Western community and UN/UNAMIR as the bystanders of the genocide.

The television screen, which does not show the people of Rwanda but a map showing the borders of Rwanda shows how much of the political international narrative dismisses human experiences and local narratives, opting for a state-level presentation of the current political space. The fact that the Rwandan genocide was one of the most visually broadcasted conflicts at the time does not diminish the fact that the narrative produced gave an impartial and depersonalised image of the tragedy. The broadcasted narrative primarily represented with a framework of Western media enforced depersonalisation of the victims and failed to identify historical processes leading to the genocide, instead of bundling the Rwandan tragedy to the same category as other violent conflicts in African nations: ancient tribal hate. The rest of the page after the 4 panels I described is empty, leaving the reader with a white background – nothingness. This way, Philip and his family embody the Western world – Europe and USA – as well as the UN with their decision to not look at Rwanda at the grimmest moment of its history, leaving a blank space where there should be a more adequate international response.

As the graphic novel nears the end, the viewer/reader finds that Deogratias was forced to rape and murder his friends. The graphic novel ends in what Kate Polak (2017) (from in t Veld, 2019, p. 117) calls an "ethical uncatharsis" as Deogratias is revealed as a murderer who poisoned all the people he saw as compliances to the horrific events related to what he had done and his friends' gruesome fate. As Polak argues, this duality of Deogratias as both a victim and a perpetrator causes discomfort, as the reader identifies and sympathises with the protagonist who turns out to be a perpetrator. By identifying with the character in a quest for revenge, the likely Western reader/viewer is put in a position that is closer to that of a bystander than that of a victim. This suggests the West's compliance in the disaster by its inactivity – the role of the bystander, which is depicted in the scene described above.

In the comic book, individual characters and their relationships reveal larger currents within contemporary international relations and global structures. In the comic book, individual characters and their relationships reveal larger currents within contemporary international relations and global structures. They reveal inequalities that can be linked to the colonial influence of the past. Although Western education was (and still is) highly esteemed in the Rwandan society, the comic book shows that education is not a guarantee for a more equal life, opposing the Western gospel of education opening doors and possibilities in non-Western countries. Venetia is struggling to get her daughters a proper education due to "ethnic quotas" (2006, pp. 19-20, 41-42). However, Augustine, a well-read man of Twa origin who has a university degree works as a groundskeeper for white men less educated than he is – his degree, to him, is useless

(2006, p. 45.) This points to two directions: it highlights everyday inequality in Rwanda as well as global inequality; non-Western countries are still in a subordinate position as compared to Western countries even when they comply with Western norms such as the Western education norms. With an annoyed expression on his face, Augustine is seen resting his face with his hands, as he explains to his white Belgian guests: “We have no gold, no copper, no diamonds but we have whites. You just have to bend down to pick up the money falling from their pockets... --- The drawback, of course, is the bending down part” (2006, pp. 45-46).

The landlocked, hilly, and small country of Rwanda, unlike for instance its neighbour state DRC (formerly Zaire), is not rich in raw materials such as diamonds and copper. Augustine’s opinion reveals that unlike in many other African countries, economical subordination to richer Western countries and wealthy Asian countries such as the Republic of China is not formed through the trade of raw materials, but they instead rely on accommodating foreigners in other ways, such as tourism.³¹

Education is not the only aspect in Stassen’s book that highlights the global inequality and West/Africa juxtaposition. Unequal structures are addressed in the showing of the French sergeant who throughout the story perceives the Rwandans as uncivilised “savages” while still enjoying the tourist attractions Rwanda has to offer and exploits Rwandan women by paying them for sexual favours and company. As he attempts to show Deogratias pictures he took from gorillas, one of Rwanda’s most popular tourist attractions, he says: “I had them developed in Kigali – in just a day, like in Europe!”. This shows the reader that the French sergeant’s perception follows the Western centre/periphery pattern, where modernism is almost synonymous with Europe and Western culture. The opposite is the “unmodern” Africa. Additionally, Polak (2017) points out, that the pictures sergeant has taken of Rwanda show “a disingenuous representation” of the country (p. 50). The sergeant focuses on a partial representation of Rwanda from a Western perspective while failing to empathise with what exactly the PTSD-ridden Deogratias and other Rwandans have experienced.

The French soldier offers a perspective on the French involvement and non-involvement in the genocide. France’s role in the genocide has been highly debated as the French have been increasingly regarded as collaborators with the Hutu regime instead of bystanders. The Turquoise Zone shown in the comic book (2006, pp. 70-73) was a part of a French-led military operation called Operation Turquoise which was

³¹ At the time of writing, the Rwandan government has, for example, a £10million-per-year sponsorship agreement with the English Premier League football club Arsenal. The promotion campaign includes the advertising slogan “Visit Rwanda” being presented on players’ clothing and advertising boards during the club’s home matches. (Voets, 2021) This is a striking example of the country’s aim of branding itself as a desirable tourist destination in the eyes of the Western consumers.

established by the end of the genocide under the UN mandate. It was established to prevent further continuity of the genocide by creating “a humanitarian-protected zone” in the area consisting of Cyangugu, Kibuye, and Gikongoro in South-Western Rwanda. The zone ended up serving us a safe escape route for the génocidaires as they escaped the advancing RPF forces. Additionally, instead of taking action to stop the genocide despite having sufficient knowledge on changing the political situation in Rwanda, France did not act to stop the genocide. Instead, they continued delivering weapons to Rwanda and supported Habyarimana’s regime as well as training the army that later became one of the main operators responsible for the killings during the genocide (Grünfeld & Huijboom, 2007, pp. 233-235). The French soldier who implied to Rwandan women with derogatory terms is seen in the Turquoise Zone. His presence symbolises the controversial involvement of France in the Rwandan genocide. Moreover, Stassen’s decision to portray the French soldier as an unpleasant character in the story was a deliberate act of highlighting France’s involvement in the genocide.

Additionally, while in the Turquoise Zone, the French sergeant stops Julius from killing Deogratias after he refuses to carry on to Zaire with his Interahamwe group through the Turquoise Zone, instead of wanting to go back to the now RPF-occupied part of Rwanda. He grabs the Hutu aggressor Julius’ hand from behind before he has the chance to strike. While this could be interpreted as France having a role in disabling the violence during the genocide, the arrangement of character may have another meaning: France operates in the background, enabling and steering the Hutu aggression. His racist language shows the other extremity of attitudes toward Rwanda: “... Goddamn savages! Even when you’re among your own you’re at one another’s throats!” (2006, p. 72.) This language can be linked to the perception of seeing the war in Rwanda like many other violent conflicts fought in the African continent merely as tribal clashes instead of seeing it as a highly planned, government-orchestrated attempt to wipe out a group of people.

Indeed, in a report commissioned by the French President Emmanuel Macron in Spring 2021 states that France bore heavy responsibility for the Rwandan genocide. The Duclert Report, named after Vincent Duclert, established that France did not stop the foreseeable genocide, accusing the then-government and French President François Mitterrand of focusing on strengthening their influence in the Hutu-led Rwanda.³² While the commission found no evidence of any French officials directly participating in the killing, the report stated that not only did the French officials arm, train, and eventually through Operation Turquoise guard the Hutus, they also attempted to cover their complicity in the genocide. 21 years after the publication of Stassen’s *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda* there has been a diplomatic shift between the

³² La France, le Rwanda et le génocide des Tutsi (1990-1994). Commission de Recherche Sur les Archives Françaises Relatives au Rwanda et au Génocide des Tutsi. Rapport remis au Président de la République le 26 mars 2021. (<https://www.vie-publique.fr/sites/default/files/rapport/pdf/279186.pdf>)

strained relationship between Rwanda and France, as the latter has finally addressed their involvement in the genocide which was addressed in the comic book published in the year 2000.

Another French character, while not depicted as crude as the sergeant, also has a condescending attitude toward Rwanda and its citizens. Augustine works for the French vet, and on page 30 we can see him working in his yard. The French man accuses Augustine of dawdling, saying that “working for white people sure is a good deal”. Additionally, he asks Venetia, if it’s true that the short Twa have “huge dicks” despite their short figure. On page 32, he is seen explaining to Rwandan men the difference between a Rwandan and a European cow. Benina works as her interpreter as they stand next to a black and white European cow. “The white guy says a good cow is not a cow with big horns and small udders, but on the contrary a cow with small horns and big fat udders like this one here, that’s as graceful as a hog”, Benina tells her countrymen gathered around the vet and Benina who chuckle at the Frenchman in response to the girl’s snarly takeaway.

In Rwanda, cows are the most precious prize, a symbol of wealth and social status as well as a large part of the Rwandan national identity. Rwanda is the home of long-horned Watusi cattle, which were selected and bred to Inyambo, “the cattle of Kings”. Due to their long history and association with royal rulers, Inyambo cows are an integral part of the Rwandan national identity (Kugonza, 2018). In fact, in this scene, where Benina is positioned in front of the French vet and therefore closer to the viewer/reader, the struggle over what cow is the “better cow” stands for a postcolonial struggle over national identity through a nation’s heritage. By making fun of the French vet by interpreting what he is saying in a way that makes him a laughingstock in the eyes of her Rwandan peers, Benina can be interpreted to symbolise Rwanda’s struggles related to not only domestic policies and nation-building but international policies as well, where Rwanda and other African countries are engaged in a process of determining and redetermining their regional and international position and relationships.

The link between gender-based violence towards Tutsi women and postcolonialism

In the comic, book, different levels of gender-based violence (GBV) towards Tutsi women are shown to the viewer/reader. Gender-based violence, as numerous scholars within feminist and postcolonial theory have argued, is closely tied to colonialism and political economy which generates material scarcity, putting women in an especially vulnerable position. GBV was not uncommon in Rwanda before nor after the

genocide, but as Stassen's comic book reveals to its reader, the everyday gender dynamics exploded into the rape of Tutsi women – the same way people of any gender in Rwanda were killed because they were Tutsi, women got raped because they were Tutsi.

The French sergeant's position as an exploitative tourist who speaks of women in a degrading manner symbolises the exoticism and sexualisation attributed to black women from the point of view of the West. On page 2, Stassen expresses critique towards the Western actors, their hypocrisy, and their connection to the sexualization of female Tutsis. The Frenchman urges Deogratias to look at two Tutsi women walking down the street: "Holy shit! Deogratias, check out those two bitches!". In the next panel, as he and the less enthusiastic Deogratias are gazing at two Tutsi females walking by and talking to each other, the sergeant continues: "Man, are they hot, or what?" (Figure 2). This panel shows the sergeant and Deogratias in Hotel Umusambi's terrace. Two white cars are parked in front of the hotel. One of them has the logo of the Red Cross painted on it, while the other one is a UN vehicle. "Umusambi", the hotel's name is Kinyarwanda for "the saviour". These visual details bring forth a perverse contradiction. The UN and the Red Cross are generally seen as rescuers although they are not completely what they are willing to be perceived as.

The French sergeant proceeds to express his regret for all the dead Tutsi women: "...And it's such a shame when you think about it. All those beauties who won't be sharing their sweet thighs with anyone" anymore since they were killed during the genocide. (2006, p. 2-3). The body language of the sergeant shows indifference to the death of African women, instead, it seems the man is sorrier about the fact that he won't be able to sexually benefit from the women anymore.

In a flashback to the time before the genocide, a bus in which Deogratias and Benina are riding is being stopped by a roadblock by white soldiers. One of the soldiers is the Frenchman. When Benina angrily confronts him, Frenchman speaks to her in a derogatory way while grabbing his cheeks: "Shut it sweetie. You'll talk when we tell you to and everything will be alright". When Deogratias tells the Frenchman to let go of Benina, the Frenchman questions why Deogratias is concerned about how he treats the Tutsi girl: "Why the fuck do you care, anyway? You're Hutu, and she is Tutsi, no?" while continuing: "I can't blame you, buddy. Them Tutsi girls are pretty wild in the sack, right?" (2006, pp. 22-23).

As African post-independence states continued colonial practices such as nativist citizenship and institutional segregation, hostility towards women must be considered to be situated in the same colonially entrenched inheritance. Beyene, following Patricia Hill Collins and Anne McClintock, locates the discursive practices of Black womanhood and sexuality in (and of) Rwanda in the "porno-tropic" colonial tradition of sexual presentation, which enclose the ideas of black females as wild, dangerous, and alluring. (2014, pp.

71-71) This racialised sexual discourse lives in the contemporary popular culture and is thus transferred not only in the Hutu discourse on Tutsi women but also, and especially, in the foreigners' discourse on black females, as the comic book reveals. As Hill Collins argues in *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (2005):

“--- Historical context disappears, leaving seemingly free-floating images in its wake that the common new vocabulary that joins quite disparate entities. Terms such as “primitive,” “backward,” “jungle,” “wild,” and “freak” uncritically cycled through contemporary global culture, leaving undisturbed the pejorative historical meanings associated with this vocabulary. But history hides in the shadows of these terms, because these concepts are incomprehensible without a social context to give them meaning” (p. 42).

Using Hill Collin's notion on the colonial representations of Black sexuality helps us understand how these discursive practices have lingered in genocidal and pre-genocidal discourse in Rwanda and offer a perspective on considering GBV against African women in the context of such wars as the Rwandan civil war and the genocide that followed.

Chungee Sarah Soh (2008, p. 3) has argued that war-related sexual violence needs to be situated within the context of structural power in the political economy and everyday sexual violence. Jennie Bumet (2012) proposes that the pregenocide social context and political economy shaped how GBV materialised during the genocide. She situates the sexual violence of the genocide of 1994 in the context of everyday sexual violence preceding the genocide. Forms of sexual agency, such as prostitution, nonmarital sex, informal marriage, and sexual slavery exist in a continuum of colonialism, unfavourable government policy, and recourse scarcity within the political economy. Like Venetia's agency in the comic book shows, women still "exercise their agency to survive" regardless of the material limitations as she through her actions attempts to pursue education for her Tutsi and 'mixed-race' daughters. Venetia explains to her daughter Benina why she supports herself and her daughters with prostitution and transactional sex: “What do you think, Benina? That I chose the life I had? That I was glad to lose my mother and leave for another country? When the two of you were born, I had to feed you!... ---- When we came back here, of course, I'd have preferred to grow bananas and beans! But our plot of land had been stolen! --- All I did, I did for you! And all I do is still for you! How else do you think you were able to go to college, study your books, become somebody?” (2006, p. 42.)

An instance highlighting Venetia's agency is detected on page 19. In the scene, Venetia is seen dressing herself and putting on a bra to cover her breasts after a sexual act (Figure 4). She is standing with her back facing an obese Hutu male, still lying on a bed in the dark. In a nearby chair, the viewer/reader notices the

male's clothing. The clothing is the suit of a Hutu official, from which the viewer/reader concludes that the man laying on the bed is a high-ranking Hutu official. The arrangement in the picture gives an impression of the Hutu official buying sexual services from the Tutsi woman, highlighting the social positions both hold. Venetia's line "It's the last time I'm asking a favor of you" indicates that their relationship is based on exchange, be it material or immaterial. Historical context can be detected behind this practice: formerly Rwandan brides received bridewealth – a gift or gifts from the groom's family to the bride's family. For instance, a cow as a bridewealth gift symbolized a sacred bond between the bride and the groom in pre-colonial Rwanda (Bumet, 2012, p. 102). While the colonial and postcolonial society still enforces bridewealth, its meaning has changed, and the practice has diminished. Bridewealth can be also understood to consist of gifts that men give women in exchange for nonmarital sex. This is called "transactional sex" as it falls in between the Western as well as Rwandan understanding of prostitution. (Ibid: p. 103; Hunter, 2002). Venetia's position as an engaging actor supports Bumet's (2012) notion of women acting based on the resources given in an environment instead of complying with the narrative of an African woman as a passive victim.

While addressing the sexual perpetration against Tutsi women by the Hutu perpetrators, Stassen leaves out the gender-based sexual violence exercised by the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), the armed wing of the RPF. RPA engaged at least in two practices that can be constituted as rape, coercive sex, or militarized sex in both Rwandan and Western contexts: first, the RPA soldiers would engage in sexual acts with the Hutu women as a 'reward' for their work. While the women might have given their consent to the intercourse, it is most likely that they did not have a choice – which, in turn, makes the act a form of coercive sex. Secondly, the RPA soldiers pressured Tutsi women to leave their Hutu husbands, as the RPA saw those marriages to be a consequence of rape. The husbands were arrested and imprisoned if the women refused to leave them; given the prison conditions in Rwanda after 1994, this would mean an almost certain death sentence for the Hutu men (Bumet, 2012, 110). Additionally, as Stassen's comic book focuses on events in Rwanda, the story for the most part leaves out the conditions in the refugee camps of Zaire and Tanzania where GBV against women regardless of the ethnic group they belonged to was extremely common.

Aside from this, Stassen's narrative around Rwandan Tutsi females and their active agency in their social life combat the simplistic narrative portraying Tutsi females as mere victims of the civil war and the genocide that followed. The portrayal is not diminished into a victim narrative while not undermining the morbid violence women faced by depicting GBV and misogynistic, the racist discourse of rape, mutilation, and murder of women. Additionally, the comic book is rather careful with putting labels on different sexual acts portrayed in the story, as the author seems to be wary of detaching instances of sexual activity and GBV from the cultural and historical contexts of Rwanda.

The Frenchman's degrading attitude towards Tutsi women discussed previously is echoed in the rhetoric of the Hutu nationalist and Interahamwe member Julius. During the genocide, the leader of the Hutu group of which Deogratias was forced to join, continuously addresses Benina, Apollinaria, and Venetia as whores and mentions their genitalia ("pussies") multiple times, as well as eagerly describes the act of raping the Tutsi women (2006, pp. 71,74). Hate towards the Tutsi women was deeply rooted in the Hutu nationalist ideology, reflecting the colonial narratives of the past. Hutu Ten Commandments was an anti-Tutsi document published as a part of an article *Appel à la conscience des Bahutu*³³ in December of 1990 in Kigali by a Hutu nationalist newspaper *Kangura*, which spread anti-Tutsi propaganda after the RPF invasion of 1990. The very first three commandments directly concern females and their ethnicity:

1. Every Hutu should know that a Tutsi woman, whoever she is, works for the interest of her Tutsi ethnic group. As a result, we shall consider a traitor any Hutu who
 - marries a Tutsi woman
 - employs a Tutsi woman as a concubine
 - employs a Tutsi woman as a secretary or takes her under protection.
2. Every Hutu should know that our Hutu daughters are more suitable and conscientious in their role as woman, wife, and mother of the family. Are they not beautiful, good secretaries and more honest?
3. Hutu women, be vigilant and try to bring your husbands, brothers, and sons back to reason.

The 7th commandment additionally addresses Tutsi women: "7. The Rwandan Armed Forces should be exclusively Hutu. The experience of the October 1990 war has taught us a lesson. No member of the military shall marry a Tutsi."³⁴

In Stassen's comic book, the trauma of GBV is narrated and visualised in a multitude of ways as well as in a multitude of forms. The comic book visualises structural violence as well as rape and killing, although it does not visualise the act of rape and slaughter of women. Instead, visual metaphors and gutters are being employed to immerse the reader/viewer in the act of imagining and experiencing the trauma.

Active instances of war-time violence and killing are not shown, instead, the reader/viewer is invited to engage in imagining these instances through the use of panels and gutters. A panel is shown, where

³³ " Appealing to the conscience of the Bahutu".

³⁴ Appel à la conscience des bahutu. (Dec 1990) *Kangura*, No 6, p. 8

Venetia's lifeless, beheaded body is lying on the ground, surrounded by other unidentifiable bodies. Her skirt is up, and the area of her genitalia is covered in bright, red blood which contrasts with the striking blue colour of Venetia's clothing. We also see a bloody bottle between her legs – indicating that she was raped and defiled using a bottle in addition to Deogratias raping her, as becomes apparent from Julius' language (2006, p. 74). The perspective of the panel is slightly from above – a high angle camera shot, to borrow from film studies – creating an uneasy sense of as it were the reader/viewer who was gazing at Venetia's mutilated body. Moreover, this perspective creates an uncomfortable feeling of inferiority, making the character Venetia look vulnerable and powerless, as she has become a victim of rape and murder during the genocide. The previously discussed scene including the French sergeant, Deogratias, and a cockroach in the terrace of the Umusambi hotel echoes in the scene showing Venetia's dead body through the employment of perspective in the image. The narrative presented from the very first pages of the comic book onwards has materialised into direct violence and violation of Tutsi female bodies. Notable is the fact that it was indeed the white foreigner's discourse at the very beginning of the story which materialised into the rape and murder of women by the Hutu in the climax of the comic book.

Although killing the Tutsi was often the main goal for the *génocidaires*, other forms of persecution endured as well, as Stassen's visual story shows. Sexual violence against the Tutsi was an important dimension of the genocide. An estimated 250 000 women and girls were raped and subjected to various forms of GBV, as well as some men, like male members of the Twa which were seen as inferior in relation to both the Hutu and the Tutsi (Beyene, 2014, p. 49; Straus, 2013, p. 52). While the genocide was an attempt to cleanse the land of the Tutsi, the gender-based violence was an attempt to engender "a Hutu-nation". As a reflection of the colonial narratives, the Hutu-rhetoric saw Tutsi women as attractive prizes and emasculators of the Hutu as well as arrogant aristocrats deserving of rape (Baines, 2003, p. 479).

Deogratias, the main character of the novel, however, goes against the expected Hutu attitude towards Tutsi women. First, he desires to have sex with Venetia, who he attempts to buy sexual services from with money he took from the Catholic church he works at (2006, pp. 4-5). He is also in love with both of Venetia's daughters, Benina and Apollinaria. Before the genocide, he makes love to Benina after she initiates the sex. After the sexual intercourse, Deogratias is concerned about Benina's experience and well-being, asking if the act had hurt her, to which Benina answers: "It was good Deogratias, it was good. But now I have to go home" (2006, p. 57.) After he hides Benina in his house to protect her from the Hutu perpetrators and Benina tries to leave, Deogratias stops her, saying that they are "--- like husband and wife now... and wives obey husbands". While we can detect the patriarchal values that Deogratias holds, expecting his "wife" to do as he tells her, it also shows us that Deogratias thinks of Benina as his wife – although Hutus marrying Tutsi women are considered traitors according to the Ten Hutu Commandments.

Additionally, Deogratias' stance about Tutsi women reflects the reality during the genocide, where the "purity" of the Hutu by not engaging with Tutsi women was not a given, but many struggled against the guidelines of the commandments.

Furthermore, Baines (2003) reminds us that there were instances where men took Tutsi women as their "wives" to protect them from being raped and killed and expressed sincere regret when a law passed that each Hutu must kill their Tutsi "wives". Indeed, bodies act in complex and contradictory ways, as power relations are constantly negotiated, often through bodily resistance. In Rwanda, some killed their Tutsi peers happily out of ethnic hate or monetary gain while others were forced. Yesterday, somebody saved another person's life, today he takes another's. Some communities fought off génocidaires, hid the fleeing Tutsi, or looked away, as they saw their Tutsi neighbour hiding in a bush (p. 490).

In the climax of the comic book, Deogratias abnormally turns into a dog during daytime when it only usually happens during night. He dwells in his horrific memories of the genocide; "My head's spilling out into the day; the insides of bellies are blending into the inside of my head... and sharp, sharp blades plunge into women's genitals..." (2006, p. 53). The last panel of the page shows traumatised Deogratias gazing into emptiness, blood falling on his face. Behind him, the reader/viewer sees a scenery, which includes a hilly landscape typical to Rwanda and bodies of smoke disturbing the otherwise peaceful view – no people. The bodies of smoke make the landscape resemble a battleground; hence the reader/viewer is guided to interpret it as Deogratias reliving the trauma of the genocide in his mind, although, no battles are currently being fought.

Instead of visually showing the mutilation and violence Deogratias narrates, the artist draws the reader/viewer's focus in the sky. The daytime sky in Deogratias' vision starts to look like the night sky, although unlike in other panels of the story, the starry sky is blue, not purple. A deep purple night sky is shown multiple times in the comic book, including in the very last panel of the book. Not only does the colour illustrate the night sky as opposed to the blue sky of the daytime, but more importantly, purple is the colour of mourning and commemoration in Rwandan culture (Friedrich & Johnston, 2013). Therefore, the colour symbolises the remembrance of the people killed during the genocide – as countless lives lost as there are stars in the silent night sky. The colour blue, the colour of the sky during the day, can be found on the Rwandan flag alongside the colours green and yellow. In the flag, colour blue represents peace and happiness. The symbolic meaning of the colour blue clashes and contradicts Deogratias' state of mind and his reliving of the genocide through the vision of the stars in the sky. This highlights Mamdani's notion of Rwanda as a society of peace without justice. He asks: "Is a form of justice possible that is not at the same time victor's justice? Is a form of reconciliation possible that is not at the same time an absence of justice,

and thus an embrace of evil?” He proposes that political reconciliation is to be reached through political justice, not criminal or social justice, and this, in turn, requires a shift in focus towards institutions. The authoritarian rule has not turned to reform the root of political and social insecurity, and thus been unable to reach positive peace. (Mamdani, 2002.) Thus, although Rwanda is at peacetime on institutional terms, the killings, raping, and other genocidal acts may live through commemoration and insecurity which is caused by the institutional silencing of political dissent in the country. In the very last panel of the comic book, the night sky is purple again, concluding the narrative visual textual story with a symbol of commemoration of the genocide.

Deogratias’ actions, along with the ethical uncatharsis the sorrowful ending of the book provides, helps to blur the line between victims and perpetrators and brings forth the fact that the distinction between the two is not black and white, which has also brought challenges in conflict reconciliation practices commemoration, and issues of political memory in other conflicts than the one in Rwanda as well.

7. CONCLUSION

“There is a temptation, in writing about genocide, to tell a story of good and evil,” says René Lemarchand (2009, p. 90). Similarly, Möller, following Prunier, points out the Western tendency to search for clear dichotomies as “the citizens of postmodern times cannot accept the radical heterogeneity of the world”, instead of attempting to fit the Western thought patterns of good and evil, victim and perpetrator, Hutu and Tutsi (Möller, 2010, p. 126; Prunier, 2008, p. 357). As shown in my analysis, *Deogratias: Tale of Rwanda* does not give its viewer/reader the relief of such clear distinctions.

Comics, as a multimodal visual-verbal way of communication, have the potential to counter the tendency to erase the complexity of violent conflicts by challenging prevailing narratives around them. The genocide of Rwanda is often remembered through ethnic divisions and international politics, while Stassen turns the reader’s gaze to micro-level and everyday practices, this way going outside the obvious structures of power. Although both themes, international politics, and ethnic antagonism, are heavily present in the narrative, the story is not diminished into these themes. Moreover, while heavily criticizing the actions of the West and the influence of foreigners in his work, the spotlight stays on the trauma of the Rwandan

people, especially through the protagonist Deogratias. The comic book, while handling and criticizing international actors, keeps its focus on Rwanda and the local level, suggesting a connection between the private and the public, the micro, and the macro. Linking and contesting prevailing narratives on the genocide offers a new perspective on the genocide for the target audience of the bande dessinée.

Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda addresses colonialism in a multitude of ways. The colonialist presence is symbolised in the foreign characters as well as everyday inequality depicted in the comic book. Trauma is shown not only as physical violence and dead bodies, but the communication reveals the traumatic colonial memory of Rwanda in its everyday life through the utilisation of both visual and verbal tactics.

In my thesis, I have investigated how the visual-textual combination of comic book narrative form contributes to the perception of the Rwandan genocide in Western knowledge production tradition. I situated my analysis within the context of the Hamitic hypothesis, which set the conditions leading to mobilization of institutions as tools of dividing Rwandan groups into ethnicities for them to serve the colonial power. The Hamitic narrative additionally helps us more adequately comprehend the paternalistic and on times condescending, diminishing, and racist attitudes of the foreigners towards Rwandan people as well as the hateful attitude of the Hutu towards the Tutsi. Finally, I examined the attitudes towards Tutsi women and forms of gender-based violence in the comic book, situating these conditions within contemporary feminist and postcolonial scholarly work.

While reading a comic, one is involved in the act of reading/viewing physically and cognitively, as the reader/viewer is invited to make sense of the gutters and create connections between panels, this way taking part in the construction and production of meaning in the comic book. This in turn creates an effective form of communicating trauma to the audience in a multitude of ways, not merely through visualisation of full-blown violence which in excessive amounts could even dilute the message through the abundance of such atrocious content depicting the pain of others.

Comics, as discussed during this thesis, usually consist of drawn images, a relatively slow way of creating content for the distribution of visual information. In the wake of numerous different types of visual imagery, drawing remains an important one. In 2014, February, a report released by the United Nations about human rights issues in North Korea included hand-drawn images by Kwon Hyo Jin, depicting the experiences of Kim Kwang-Il, who was a political prisoner.³⁵ Kwang's drawings received a strong reaction, not only because the drawn images with the help of modern technology circulated efficiently and quickly,

³⁵ Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea -- [A/HRC/25/63]. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G14/108/71/PDF/G1410871.pdf?OpenElement>

therefore reaching a wide audience, but also precisely because they were drawn by hand. In other words, Kwang-Il's testimony was not powerful *despite* being drawn by hand but *because* it was drawn by hand. As a form of witness, drawing is capable of recording what no other modes of recording can.

Narratives play a significant part in how we view the world and how we view the world, in turn, play a significant part in how we operate in it. In the complex and increasingly visual age, we live in aesthetics such as graphic narratives as forms of presentation offer an alternative perspective in a world with still a rather unquestioned hegemony of liberal and western narratives and peacebuilding practices which rely on a realist understanding of the global world. Stassen's comic book is a fine example of how a cultural product confined in the realm of Western knowledge tradition can challenge prevailing narratives. According to my analysis, comic books can explore and communicate complex and serious topics in a nuanced way. Graphic narratives and an aesthetic form of knowledge production represent violent and traumatic events in a way that would otherwise remain unseen.

As Chute states, the comics medium as a form of documentation for disasters and conflict has evolved into an instrument for commenting on as well as revisioning experience and history (2016, p. 278). This notion requires a wider acceptance and recognition of comics as a distinct form of cultural expression, a form of representation that both transforms discussion and visualises or aestheticises the political events it depicts. Comics can be used to express ideas with images or a combination of different visual information, which makes them a highly malleable, rich narrative form. This allows endless possibilities and combinations of communicating the narrative to the reader/viewer.

I argue that it is indeed the intrinsic qualities of the comic book that allow it to be a powerful form of communication of trauma, disaster, and conflict. As Shine Choi states: "Comics animate our imagination by distortion, exaggeration, simplification, and deception without apology. Stories come to life when texts gain visual dimensions when action is stopped and exaggerated when ideas gain a façade, an exterior. Perhaps part of how comics animate is through entanglement with the establishments that they reject, ideas that they oppose, and seductions of acceptance they heroically denounce" (2018, p. 57). Indeed, while depicting a story in a historically accurate context, Stassen's *Deogratias* is not married to historical nor realistic accuracy – the ongoing trauma and distortion of memory and reality in *Deogratias*' mind materialises into him turning into a dog. *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda* does not merely report the genocide of 1994 – it *remembers* it. It reconciles with the memory of the genocide simultaneously with acting as a form of documentation of the atrocity. Comic books, then, transfer the cultural memory of war into documentation, testimony, communication of alternative histories, and detections of undercurrents of political and social processes.

Viljoen (2020) reminds us that in a Foucauldian sense, ethics are tied to self-reflexive presentation, as presentation is a relational activity in which one engages in a web of shared constructions and constructing. Increasingly autobiographical, factual, and self-reflexive drawing and writing of comics and graphic narratives are in line with this statement in the sense that 'ethical search' allows us to invent new modes of relationships based on the activity of sharing experiences through comic books. The sense of involvement that comics offer may increase the feeling of responsibility of the consumer of the comic book, as it turns the viewer/reader into a spectator. The viewer/reader of a comic book contributes to "the visual-discursive construction of political space" (Möller, 2010, p. 118).

In a Habermasian sense, as Möller points out leaning on Robert Hariman and John L. Lucates, the contemporary political space is built upon the stream of images. From this point, one can build that to represent human suffering, it must be visually represented. This, in turn, creates a dilemma. Would the victims be excluded from the political space and be given no response without the common spectatorship offered by images? In the torture scandal of Abu Ghraib in 2004, public outcry was mobilized only after images of the victims of torture were released. Is photography on human suffering and victims of conflict, atrocity, and disaster a necessary evil, as it prolongs the suffering of the subject of the image? Does ethical photography on human suffering exist at all? Comic books are a form of testimony and documentation created by the drawn images. Moreover, the argument of drawing being a less reliable form of testimony than photography is invalid today, as photographs can be easily manipulated even without great resources.

As mentioned earlier, the current state of Rwanda has been oftentimes described as "reconciliation without justice". In the case of the Rwandan mass atrocity, human loss and the participation of the common folk in genocidal activity on such a large scale have led to a challenging path to recovery and justice in the country. To erase the notion of different ethnicities and create a cohesive nation of Rwanda, the nation has embarked on a road of societal transformation and reconciliation mobilized from the top-down, which includes distribution and implementation of a historical 'truth' on the genocide (Bentrovato, 2017).

Interpersonal relationships are particularly crucial for a society's ability to make amends with a tumultuous legacy, as violence brings about "an infinite series of individual fires that need to be extinguished one by one". (Rosoux, 2018, p. 199) A key component of interpersonal reconciliation is the humanization of the adversary: since comics evoke feelings and offer insights into the inner life and experience of other people, they can be utilised as a tool for this goal. While *Deogratias: Tale of Rwanda* included clear cut, superficial actors ("good guys" and "bad guys"), such as the Interahamwe members illustrated as looting, evil,

hooligans, and the French sergeant described as a mean prude, the work shows that a more multi-faceted approach can be achieved with the communicational forms of the artform. Take, for instance, the protagonist Deogratias, who cannot be placed in either the category of a “good guy” or a “bad guy”. Comics offer a way to connect with the reader on an individual level because it enables retelling and accounting of memory and trauma in a way that can be both multifaceted and personal.

Furthermore, comics may offer a pathway for realising the voices of minority groups. *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda* has a teenage boy as a protagonist. Images and tragic stories of children have been widely used while depicting a conflict or a disaster. Take, for instance, Anne Frank, the picture of Phan Thi Kim Puc running naked after tossing away her clothes soaked in napalm during the Vietnam war (1945-1975), or the picture of a starving child and a vulture taken in 1993 by a South African photojournalist Kevin Carter, not to mention the countless other pictures of malnourished, often brown children circulating the internet (I advise you to google “African child starving” to see for yourself). Presenting images and stories from distant (in Western perspective) events in other countries do have the potential to make the suffering of the people more salient to a viewer who does not have a personal connection to the tragedy. These pictures, then, may trigger the kind of sentimental feelings and emotions towards the subject of the image that would commonly be evoked through more local events and concerns, but certainly, rarely do they offer agency for young people and young adults.³⁶

The UN Security Council Resolution 2250 highlights the inadequate framework for analysing and responding to issues of youth, peace, and security, despite that more young people exist in the world than ever before and 600 million of them live in conflict zones. The UNSC Resolution 2250 marks the first time the Security Council has highlighted specific needs of the youth in relation to peace and security while recognising their ability to bring about positive change by supporting and promoting peace and conflict transformation. Moreover, the youth are recognised not merely as victims or perpetrators, but as important actors in preventing violence, which in turn highlights the need for the voices of the youth to be heard (Ortiz Quintilla, 2016).

To support critical reflection in the public sphere, civil society may raise challenging questions, for instance, the moral status of bystanders – take for instance, in the case of the Rwandan genocide, the actions of the West (Verdeja, 2013b, p. 188). Legal operations such as trials and truth commission investigations do not offer the same level of openness and reflexivity as noninstitutional means of communication. This way

³⁶ For reflections on the purpose of images portraying the pain of others and on considering the linkage between images of suffering and one’s own privilege, see Sontag, Susan. (2003.) *Regarding the Pain of Others*.

artistic intervention becomes an essential tool for expressing complex normative issues of trauma, memory, and accountability.

Further research on the possibilities of comics as well as other visual and artistic modes of communication, in general, is required to analyse different genocide narratives and to rethink means of thinking about the genocide. To conclude my work, I propose two perspectives for approaching the exploration of the role (and roles) of comics in the field of peace research. Firstly, as I have discussed throughout the thesis, comics offer new perspectives and bring forth narratives that seldom get acknowledged as compared to more mainstream, often nationally endorsed narratives. Secondly, in the increasingly complex world we now live in, the distribution of media – especially visual media and narratives becomes increasingly certain in the contest of peaceful, just societies. Technological innovations enable the distribution and redistribution of different media and narratives in ways and efficiency that are unprecedented.

One must not only have to understand how visual material operates in the contemporary global world, but from the perspective of any inquiry aiming for a more just, peaceful society, one must understand how to employ different ways of communication to produce informative, nuanced ways to communicate and narrate political and social issues and events within and across groups and communities. Inquiries on the communicative and narrative capabilities of such visual material are one way to proceed with this work.

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